IMPORTANT

Every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this transcript, however no transcript is an exact translation of the spoken word, and this document is intended to be a guide to the original recording, not replace it.

F1898 Side A

[Interview with Carel Weight, January the 22nd 1991.]

.....begin absolutely at the beginning, can you tell me when you were born and where?

I was born in 1908, as far as I know in Paddington, I was always told so. And my parents had a small Edwardian flat, and I believe it was called, the name of the flats I believe was called the Oxford and Cambridge Mansions, but I'm not even quite sure about that. And I have only...I think I remembered a few odd things when I was very young; I remembered being taken along on a Sunday in a pram along the Regent's Canal, which I thought was beautiful, and I believe it was then that I saw my first aeroplane, and you know, they were rather like those aeroplanes, you know, they made a terrible lot of noise, frightening to anybody really, and frightening to a child, and I was terrified, I was so terrified that it remained in my mind.

Right. I mean do you remember if you screamed and somebody comforted you, or you just remember the terror?

I can only remember the horror of the aeroplane, really. I'm sure they were very nice to me and said, `Oh, my dear...' you know, that sort of thing, but I...no, I was quite... And I remembered about a year or so later I was wheeled again in a pram, and again in a park - well, in Battersea Park, and the same thing happened to me there. I was very allergic to those. But you've got to remember that the planes in those days, they were very low and they made a terrible noise.

And propellers presumably.

Yes, and the engine.

And they were rare of course, they weren't like they are today.

They were...yes, it was a great event, everybody would stop and look up in amazement. It was, you see, 1910 was when all the...1909, was when all the great pioneers were flying, were still very much about. And another thing I remember was being bathed, and there was me,

absolutely naked in a bath, looking up, and the family were looking down and saying things, `Oh isn't he pretty,' and, `Oh isn't it a pretty little girl,' and I was horrified, and I wanted to say to them, if my vocabulary would allow me, `Not girl, boy!' But I can remember that very clearly. I didn't say it because I couldn't quite say it then.

So this would have been some distant member of the family presumably.

Yes, some friends came and...

And can you remember what the bath was like, what the bathroom was like?

It wasn't a bathroom, I was being bathed in a tub. Baths were rather things for the extreme elite in those days.

So was this a tin tub?

Pardon?

This was a tin bath, or what?

What bath?

Tin, metal?

I think it was a tin bath, yes.

And where would you have been being bathed, do you remember?

Well, you see at that time, after I was old enough and that only meant a few, I suppose a year or so, my parents farmed me out to live in a friend's house, a poor friend who my mother thought would do her a lot of good to have some little extra money coming in, and she wanted somebody to look after me while she and my father were both out at business. So they got an arrangement by which I would be looked after during the week, and I would return perhaps on, be brought back by my father on perhaps Saturday evening and stay over the Sunday. And so I had the best of both worlds; I lived with these very very poor people in Fulham - no, I'm sorry, first of all in Chelsea, and it was then a very slummy neighbourhood really, and I loved it, I got to love my foster parents more than I loved my actual parents.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....were sent away.

I can't tell you the exact age, but I must have been very very young, about two perhaps, something like that.

And have you any memories of the beginning? Did you feel very displaced at the beginning, or you don't recall that?

I was hardly...I found...I thought everybody lived in tiny little houses, and everybody, even in those days I saw that there was a vast difference in sort of class... My parents, because they both went to work, neither worked...neither of them had marvellous jobs, but between the two of them they had quite a, they would be considered rather well-off, and when you realise that my mother gave, and she thought she was being rather generous, ten shillings a week to look after me, you can see that that was the sort of scale that... But they were, although very poor, they were very sensible, and I was never, I always had enough to eat, and we had sort of stews and all sorts of things which were the most economical to have. But what I, I think I loved them because they were real people, and I could understand them, whereas my parents were always putting on a slight act, do you know what I mean? They were always saying, well we're a cut above all those people, and were rather snobbish somehow.

Do you know anything about their own histories that would account for that?

Yes. My father, his father was a rather successful person who ran a wine and spirit shop, and he made so much money that about the age of 28 he retired, and I think he was an old rogue probably, I don't know, but any rate, he never did any more work, and he bought a little house in Streatham, and there he lived, and from what I could see a very affluent sort of life. [INAUDIBLE] he looked like a rich man to me, because I had no experience of rich people, but...

So what's the image of him that you've got?

He was a terrible man; I hated him really, because as I grew up he sort of bullied me, and said, `Little boys should be seen and not heard, get under the table,' and that sort of thing you see.

Was that supposed to be a rather black joke, or did he mean it?

He meant it. He was really, he brought up his family, my father and the rest of the family, they were all cowed by his dominance. I think one has very little idea of how awful Edwardian parents were very often to their children, and particularly to their wives. The poor wife, who I think was a very good woman, my father's mother, hardly dared say anything to him.

Can you remember what they looked like?

Yes. My grandfather was a very fat, red-faced man with a beard, very white. He lived so well really that he died comparatively young. I think he over-ate, he over-drank, he seduced the servants - because they had a servant or two - and he did everything that he wanted to do. I hope I'm not giving too black a picture of him, but that's the sort... My mother attacked him, and she couldn't bear this overbearing person, and that caused a great deal of friction, because she kindled a great deal of fighting spirit into my father, who, nobody ever thought he had any, but he always used to say to me, `Oh your mother has made my life for me,' and I think it was probably true. Although they weren't entirely a perfectly married couple, but she certainly took his part very much in fighting this tyrant of a father.

Verbally fighting you mean?

Yes, I don't think...I believe my father's sister kicked him on one occasion, but I think that's as near fights as it got.

Right. And when you say he was very self-indulgent, would you say he was actually alcoholic or anything, or he just was a good liver?

No, I wouldn't say he was alcoholic, although he drank a fair amount really, and he ate a great deal, he was rather fat and that sort of thing. No, I wouldn't say he was at all. That's about one of the very few vices he didn't have.

And what was your grandmother like physically?

I can hardly remember her because she died. I think she had a very sad life really, being continually bullied all her life, but she was gentle and very good, and she went every Sunday to church, which would give him time to seduce the servant, the current servant.

And do you think the servants enjoyed it?

I've no idea, I didn't know them.

Right. And did your father have many brothers and sisters?

He had one brother and one sister. The sister was a swimming instructress, and she was a beefy person, not very sympathetic I didn't feel, but she was a lesbian, and one of the pioneers I should think.

When did you become aware of that?

What, who?

That she was a lesbian. I mean when did you...?

Oh my mother told me years afterwards that she was a... She was a very male sort of person, and not very, I don't think she was a very great intellect or anything like that, but she used to be a swimming mistress, and I know I didn't warm to her when I heard that she used a boat hook to pull them out if they got into difficulties. But anyway...

So you never ever got close to her?

Pardon?

You were never close to her presumably.

Not really, no. I met her on family reunions really.

And what about your father's brother?

Well, he was...he left home as soon as he could and became a tax inspector, Inland Revenue, and he was all right, he was a very quiet man, he had had all the sort of guts knocked out of him by his father, but he was rather nice, and a perfectly pleasant man. Never had anything to say very much.

So he can't have been much of an influence either by the sound of it.

No, I don't think they were. But on the other hand my foster parents, I had a lovely godmother; she worked in service all her life, but she was much more human really, and she used to sit and read to me, sometimes Shakespeare, sometimes, oh, Baroness Orczy, or sometimes...all sorts of people. And she sort of loved me, and I loved her.

Was this Rose, or was this...?

This was Rose.

She was the foster mother, and your godmother, or you just used the...?

I called her, yes I called her my foster mother, she was my godmother too.

Oh right.

Yes. And I've got a little painting of her, but it's not here, it's at home. But she had a terrible life herself really, because she worked with a lot of absolutely heartless people, but she was such a marvellous person. After all that she wanted to...she gave me love and all those things that are so essential to a young person really.

Do you think if you had stayed with your parents you would never have got that?

I think...yes I think that is true. I don't know. I think my mother would have...she would eventually...well I'm sure she...well both my parents I don't think were lacking in love for me, but they didn't have much time really.

And did you mind that?

No. I got so attached to my godparents and their family that I never looked forward to going home on Saturdays and Sundays very much. They were a little bit, they felt that I was outrageously spoilt, and so they were very critical of me, and they always used to say, `Oh you didn't wash your neck today,' or you didn't do this, or you didn't do that, and they were, I always found, rather difficult really from my point of view.

So, were you hurt by that?

I think they could...they did occasionally hurt me, but generally, I dare say I deserved all these things really, I dare say I wasn't very good in their way of thinking really.

And, can we just go back to your father's parents. Can you describe what going there would have been like? Did you go there rarely, or quite often, or...?

Well, going home, the first thing I had to do was to have a bath, because there was no baths in this little place in Chelsea, called Racey[ph] Street, because it was just tiny really, it was just the upper floor of one of these awful little, miserable sort of working people's homes.

This is Rose's house?

Yes. It was just off the World's End, and now they've got all these great big tower blocks and things all round, but in those days it was just tiny, tiny little houses in streets very close together, and they lived in a street called Racey[ph] Street which has long since disappeared. No, first I would go home and I would have a bath, and then I would come down. And my mother was a good cook, because on my mother's side, her father was...he came over here from Germany, he was born in Hamburg, and he loved the good things of life, and he taught my mother to cook, particularly German foods. But she was a very very good cook, and we always got a wonderful meal on a Sunday.

What sort of thing?

Well, it could be a joint, or...it generally was a joint of some sort. But she would always go to enormous trouble, and we would have things like sauerkraut and red cabbage, which was unheard of in those days in England.

And did you like that as a child?

Yes I did. And then she made German cakes and all sorts of things like that. She was an extraordinarily good cook.

And what were the meals like? Were they quite formal on a Sunday?

Well we all sat at table, yes. My parents had a servant, a Mrs Simey[ph] who was an elderly lady who had been in service all her life, and she was very nice. My father was a bit sort of, wanted everything to be done in the way that he would like, but my mother was extremely[??] dominant to have quite a say in everything really. And I enjoyed the day, Sunday, and my father would bring me back on a bus to Fulham in the evening. I quite enjoyed that, and we would listen to...they had in those days a thing that, before television, the...if you had a

telephone, for a few pounds you could have a thing fixed up to the telephone called an electrophone, and it was the first beginning of a sort of television in the home, but it was done through the telephone. And there was a chart which you could have, you could get through to a number of theatres, and you could listen to performances on the theatre, and also you could listen to concerts. My mother had a great love for music, and I think I got it from her very much. We could listen to the Albert Hall, or the Queen's Hall concerts very often, or you could have a lighter vein and listen to the reviews and things at the theatre.

Can you remember any of those?

I can greatly remember hearing all the great singers of the time, and the orchestral concerts, all that sort of thing, and I remember hearing reviews by Greene[ph], people like George Robey and all those sort of people. They were very good, and they were probably superior in many ways to the average thing that you listen to on the television really.

So, you and your parents would sit down together and listen to this, would you?

My mother would sit down, and I would sit down with her, because...that was very nice to...in the afternoon she would ring up and ask to be put through to the Palladium or to this or that. But mostly on a Sunday afternoon it was nearly always music. My mother was a chiropodist and a manicurist, and she used to go to all sorts of people and make a little money, and she did quite well really, and she had a lot of very famous clients. And, my grandfather came over here from Hamburg and was the first real chiropodist there had ever been in England, and I think he even was a chiropodist to Edward VII, at any rate to a whole lot of very grand people, including a lot of musicians. I mean you've heard of Kreizler the violinist, he was a customer at the time, and so was I believe Caruso, and she got to know a lot of these people. And I think, she never could play a note of music herself, but she got a wonderful sort of worship of music; in particular she thought that, because she liked all these people and they were amusing and that sort of thing, quite apart from...and so she, when I got older she was most interested in my voice, because she wanted me to become a singer. And in a way, I've always had a very powerful voice really, and I could sing when I was in school, choirs and that sort of thing, and she thought how wonderful if I became an opera singer you see. When my voice broke it became a base baritone, and so, she knew of a person that she thought could give me singing lessons. Well there were various things against that, and one of them was that I had no natural gift for music. My father curiously enough had, it was the only thing he had, at that time, it was the only thing I knew he had, was this...he could sit down on the piano without ever having a lesson, and could play tunes without very much...and he could pick up a violin and he could play it, and he could look at a score and he would sing it straight

from the score. I couldn't do any of that, and I was quite stupid about that you see. And I did realise that that was a great handicap, even when I was young. Well as soon as my voice broke my mother almost insisted that I should go and have lessons from a woman who had a very beautiful voice, and she had sung at Covent Garden, but she had so...she was so highly strung that she...it was absolute hell to go on stage, and apart from being one of the Valkyries in Tannhäuser...in `The Ring', she never appeared again, although everybody said she had a superb voice, and I think she did. So she took to teaching, and she said to me when she had heard my voice, she said, `I'll teach you to sing in half the time that it took me.' But her methods were a bit drastic, and she used to make me lie on the floor and put heavy books on my tummy, and then make me sing notes, and she kept saying, `No no no no, it musn't come from anywhere up here, it's got to come from the diaphragm,' and she would give me a great punch, you know, and I felt, by the end of the time I felt like a boxer after being beaten by a champion or something, that I had no guts left in me really, and I hated it, I got to hate this thing, and I knew that it wasn't the right thing for me to do.

End of F1898 Side A

F1898 Side B

.....on your stomach, or is that untrue?

Yes, yes.

She did?

She did that. And it was most drastic, her methods. And so I went back to my mother and I said, `Look Mother, I can't do this, I really don't feel...' And my parents took it very well and they said, `Oh well if you can't, you can't, so that's the end of it.'

Do you think if you had had a gentler teacher you might have become a singer?

Well I don't think you would have got over the fact, and I never believed that I had any very great musical gift.

And how do you think you would have felt about going on stage? Is that something you can imagine?

Pardon?

How do you think you would have felt about going on stage?

I think I would have been nervous, mm. But whether I could have put up with it I don't know. I would have rather said...well I couldn't, because I was a very nervous child. I think the business of two parents and two lives that I was leading tended to make me very nervous.

Did you actually have a room in your parents' house, a bedroom?

No. No, but...I was put up in the spare room.

So you would stay overnight, but you would...

Very rarely stayed overnight. Occasionally I stayed overnight, yes; perhaps for Christmas they would make up a bed for me in the top room or something like that.

So you felt very much a visitor?

I did really, yes, yes I did, mm.

And did the maid live in, was she a part of the household?

The maid lived, yes she lived downstairs.

And there was nobody else who was part of the household?

No. No, no.

And does any of the music that you heard with your mother, has any of that stayed important to you?

Oh yes, yes, a great deal. And my mother also had, you know what a pianola is? A mechanical, that you put rolls of music in and it plays. Well she had one of those, and she played me Schubert and Chopin and all those sort of things, and I got to love them, and I still do.

And were you taken to concerts and to the theatre?

Yes, my mother took me, and she occasionally took me to the opera, and we sat in the gods. And my father, in spite of...my father was an extraordinary man really, he, nobody really got to the bottom of him at all; because I suppose he had had this frightful upbringing, he never committed himself in any way, and people used to say he was mean and all sorts of things, which, and then long afterwards we discovered that there was various flower sellers and people that he had got to know, and he gave them a great deal of money when they were needing money, but he did it all very surreptitiously and never, people never knew. In the same way, a very extraordinary thing, he would always say that a great time in his life was the First World War, because he had always longed to get away from the office that he had to go to go to every day in the Tube and come back every evening, and he loved to be in the fresh air and see nature and all the rest of it you see, and those were the things that were burning inside him. He would never admit it mind you. And there was a moment at the end of the First World War when, he was in the Artillery, and in those days they didn't do everything with maps, they made people go out and draw the countryside, and he went out, and he did two or three absolutely lovely drawings, and I wish I had them because they were quite beautiful, pencil drawings that he did as exercise.

So he was a good draughtsman?

Absolutely, a very gifted draughtsman who had never had a lesson in his life.

And did he draw anything else?

No. And the astonishing thing, when he came back from the Army and he showed us these drawings, and I loved them, I thought they were wonderful, and my mother praised them, and everybody praised them. You would think he would go on, go and have some classes, or if he didn't want to do that, just go out and paint. He never did, he never did another drawing; he went back to the office and went on doing his routine, horrible life.

And did he talk to you about his Army experiences?

Yes, he was very amusing. If you could get him in a good mood, he was quite amusing about his Army experiences. But, really it couldn't have been too bad, because he was an officer, but he never...he never saw active service; he was a little bit old, and although they were sending people out at his age, somehow he missed it. He had no desire to fight.

He was in France?

No, he was always in England. The highest thing that he ever...there is a little island in the middle of Plymouth Harbour called Drake's Island, a tiny little place, and he commanded a battery of guns there. God knows what would have happened if...he would probably be shooting all the wrong way or something. But any rate, there was something...I got to know my father when I was grown-up, and I found he wasn't a tyrant or anything like that, although he was quite strict with me when I was young, and I got to be very fond of him. He wasn't at all, he had no intellectual interests, he had no, he never wanted, I never saw him reading a book even. And he would bully me occasionally when he thought I was wasting my money, and that sort of thing.

Again, would this be verbal, or...?

Yes. And he would be furious with me because I couldn't do my income tax when I started doing income tax; he would do it for me, but with great disdain and, `Ah, wasting all my time,' and I think he was rather liking doing it to show how, what a dominant character he was.

But that painting of yours called I think `The Fury' of the little boy being hit, that's not a personal memory, that didn't happen to you?

No. No it didn't, but it did...although it was personal in a sort of way, because I felt I was being bullied in a way.

By him?

Yes, yes. But I was very fond of him in many ways, and I felt that he had wasted his life because his father had knocked all the guts out of him, and he never got it back.

Did he talk about his own childhood, do you know what actually happened to him?

No, he was very reticent about him, he wouldn't talk about him really.

And was he close to his own brother at all?

Not really, no, he didn't get on with...well, his brother was rather a non-man really, he never said anything. My mother always said, `Oh, Leslie never utters,' and that became a sort of, you know, everybody thought of that, because it was absolutely true. But he wasn't a bad chap really.

And your father worked in a bank?

He worked in a bank as a cashier, and he never got a rise - well I suppose he did in a way, but he never got any more than just being cashier.

And did you ever go to his bank and see where he worked?

Yes, yes I used to have to meet him there, and, he seemed to be quite popular with the other people. It was almost sort of like visiting a prison, because in those days they seemed to be working by very little light, and the whole place was dismal, and great big tall rooms, and rather horrid really.

Whereabouts did he work?

He worked right up in the City, a stone's throw from Liverpool Street Station.

And did those particular buildings have any impact on you? Because it's a very...

Pardon?

Did those particular buildings have any impact on you? Because it's a very distinct part of London, isn't it.

Well they did, yes. I loved them in a terrible sort of gruesome way, I thought they were wonderful really, although I must say they were pretty grim when you were inside them. But, I used to meet him and he used to take me sometimes to supper. Because in those days there were very nice places for, they were rather humble in a way, but you could get lovely food, which most of the working people, there were masses of them up there, got their meals, when they could afford them.

But as a little boy you weren't taken to the bank? It sounds as though you were quite grown-up when you used to meet him.

I wasn't...yes, I suppose I went up there when I was about 12, that was about the age really.

And at the stage when he used to come back with you on the bus to your foster mother, were those journeys quite uncomfortable, suddenly being thrown together, or was it easy?

Yes, it was...I got on... Unless he was aggressive to me, and then I would shut up rather, but normally it was all right really. But I did some terrible things; we had got a new carpet which I'm sure they must have paid a lot of money for, in those days, comparatively a lot of money, and the first thing I did was to upset a bottle of black ink all over it. I thought he would never forgive me.

What was your punishment?

What?

Did you get punished?

Oh, only in a bullying sort of way, I mean you know, that I was...he had worked so hard and got this carpet, and it was the joy of his life and now it was ruined and nobody could ever do anything... I was quite true really.

And were you a child that felt very guilty, or did you just think, that's happened and that's all there is to it?

Oh I felt terrible really about it. But then, I must say I had a friend who was a bit of a wit, he said, `Do you know what I would have said to your father?' And I said, `No.' He said, `Well, "Father, I'm very sorry that I have spoiled your beautiful carpet with my horrible black ink, but I'll buy you another bottle of ink".'

Your father doesn't sound as though he was the kind of man who would have appreciated it.

He wouldn't, no, I don't think he would at that moment, no.

And did you have, when you were very small, when you went home to your parents, were there particular toys you had there?

Yes, I had, and my...I was rather spoilt with toys and things of that sort, because my mother brought home a whole mass of things from all her rich clients, and I had so many beautiful presents. One of the most terrible things was to have to write to them all and thank them all.

Were there any toys that particularly mattered to you?

No, they were just things that every boy might have, but rather better than most, because they were very good quality, expensive things you see.

And did you have particular books there?

Some books too, yes, yes; I got Shakespeare given to me with beautiful illustrations, and all sorts of things like that.

Can you remember who the illustrations were by?

Yes. Well, now, they were nearly all the very best, Edmund Dulac, and...they were all very good.

And did you have Rackham?

Rackham, yes, yes. I didn't care for Rackham curiously enough so much as some of the others, but...

And do you remember spending a lot of time looking at the illustrations?

Yes, all the time, more than reading very often.

And do any of those images still live with you?

I think Edmund Dulac, of course he did...I had the `Arabian Nights' which I thought was very marvellous, beautiful, and I still rather like them really, although I think that they were a terrible hotch-potch of Chinese art, but they were very well done.

And what was on the walls of your parents' house? Did they have paintings?

Nothing very much, reproductions of odd and ends. But curiously enough, in my foster parents' house they had some very beautiful watercolours, and that of course was because... Because a distant relative of theirs was a man named Warren, who was still remembered as one of our better water-colourists at the beginning of the 19th century; he was a landscape painter, and there was several of these pictures on the walls, and they were very good.

Can you remember any details about them?

I can remember them very clearly. They were pictures of the Wye Valley, and pictures of Wales, and beautifully done, and I've got a very clear picture of them. And you can see some of them in the Victoria & Albert, they may not be on show but they have them in there. There were two or three brothers I think, and I don't know which were which really, but these were...they were awfully good really. And they did have a sort of influence on me I think really.

Can you pin-point it at all, or is it just very general?

They were marvellous landscapes of the country, and to me at this moment I think of them as superb really. Perhaps if I saw them again I would think that they were not so good, but...

When did you last see them?

Oh, thirty or forty years ago. Because the family, I mean Rose died, she had the most terrible death really.

What happened to her?

She lost the sight of an eye, and evidently there's a disease that attacks the back of your eyes; in those days there was nothing you could do about it. And she also had a terrible thing happen to her legs, she had to have both her legs amputated, and both her eyes. And it was so awful that, she had such spirit that in the nursing home where she was, everybody used to come round her, and see her, and she would joke and laugh with them. She was a most amazing person really.

Did that happen to her when she was comparatively young?

No. No, she was working, when I was a little boy she was working for a rather tyrannical lady, she used to come home at night absolutely dead tired, but...

What would she have been doing, do you know?

Oh just clearing up and keeping the house clean and that sort, rather menial things. But the lady of the house recognised she was an unusual person and used to confide all her troubles to her, I don't know whether that helped her very much. She was paid a preposterously small sum for doing all these things. She was I think as near a saint as I've ever known in the way she put up with this frightful illness which gradually sort of killed her, but it was a long and lingering thing really.

And did you stay very closely in touch with her?

Well I couldn't awfully in many ways. When she was at her worst it was towards the end of the war; I was in the Army away, and I used to visit her in her nursing home, and my mother went too, because she was very fond of her too. But she, in a terrible sort of way she made the best of it really.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....her husband, you don't mention him very much.

No, well there was a husband, and she had a son, but the husband had died before I came on the scene, and the son was about ten years older than me, and so it was too big a gap really to have much...but he was all right really, but he was a chap who was...the only thing...only

engines and motor cars were the things that interested him, and he eventually got a job as a mechanic. I was never very close to him; he was all right, we got on reasonably, but...

So you didn't really feel he was a brother, he was...?

Not a bit, no, not a bit.

And would you have liked brothers and sisters?

I had lots of friends at school and that sort of thing, and I never felt that I was terribly alone. It might have been a good thing, I don't know.

Have you got memories of what you would have done in your free time when you were quite young, when you were in that household, how you would have spent your time?

What, in...?

At your foster home.

In my proper home?

Your foster home.

My foster...oh yes, I had a lot of friends who, we used to play in the streets, and we used to play cricket in the quieter streets, and all sorts of things like that. And I had a particular friend who was, his father ran a butcher's shop next-door, and another Jewish boy whose father kept a linen draper's shop, and we were quite a merry little gang of people really.

And were you a leader, or was nobody a leader, or...?

No, I don't think anybody was a particular leader really. They all had their little things. I mean the Jewish boy was very clever at getting things out of us, and we didn't really blame him for that at all, because we thought it was his sort of nature, and I felt that the Jewish boy was the cleverest of us all really. I don't know what happened to him really, but... No, we were...I wasn't by any means a solitary character at all.

And as a group of children, were you fairly law-abiding?

Fairly I would say. It was a wonderful place to be to see what life was all about really. When I went to school for instance, the first thing I noticed was that all the, some of the children weren't even wearing boots or shoes, but that was in the summer more, most of them did have something on their feet, but they were very very poor, and I went into some of their houses and they were very sort of smelly and not at all... Even my...my foster mother's house was always well-kept and that sort of thing, but I had a shock when I visited some of these other children really.

Can you remember what effect it had on you?

I was just shocked really, and also of course when one saw children going out without shoes on, that sort of thing really, one realised how poor some people were. And you see it was just at the end of World War I, and you saw some of the, there was a chap who was shell-shocked, and he lived near, and he thought he was an engine, and he used to go along the streets saying, `Choo-choo-choo-choo choo-choo-choo-choo,' and he sort of pulled the imaginary thing to stop the engine and that sort of thing. And, you know, there were rather terrible things around.

That must have been very frightening if you were young.

It was rather...yes it was frightening in a way. But it stayed in my mind, I can see him now. `Engine Joe' I think they called him.

And, I mean do you have vivid visual memories of the First World War from your point of view?

Well I saw a Zeppelin raid in London.

What was it like?

Well I suppose it wouldn't be quite as bad as raids that we knew in the Second World War, but it was rather...we saw these great things passing over, and bombs dropping. I wasn't near the worst of it in those days, but there were daylight raids, and, rather horrific. Although when I was young I looked out of the window to see as much as I could see, but...no, it wasn't as bad as the Second World War.

So you were intrigued rather than frightened?

I was intrigued, because I wanted to see everything that was going on.

And you weren't concerned about your father or anybody?

I was a bit concerned about him, but he wasn't at the front, and I would have been more I suppose if he had have been really.

And were you brought up to be very patriotic?

Not particularly, although my mother was...it's strange really, because being partly German made her, I think she was quite patriotic in a way, she wanted England to win, but at the same time she was very critical and she said, `Well, we'll never win really if we go on like we are,' the same sort of thing as we have in the present war really, but... On the other hand, she was quite patriotic really.

End of F1898 Side B

F1899 Side A

And were in fact your mother's...was your mother's mother German, or was she English?

My mother's mother, curiously enough, I believe was Swedish, but she died long before I came on the scene, she died young.

Right. And did you know your maternal grandfather?

Only very slightly. He was a rather, I suppose rather a great man in his curious way; I mean he rose very high in his sort of profession as a chiropodist, and as I said he was amongst the very earliest people who came over here, and he set up a business which he might have made a considerable fortune at. It was a popular thing to get...he called himself Williams, his original name was Sissenbach[ph], and he changed his name because it was too difficult for them. But he decided to come over here, and he would have been a comparatively wealthy man had it not have been that he had a great feeling for gambling, and he gambled his money away as quickly as he made it, and he died with very little eventually.

And was there any of that in your mother?

No money.

No, but any gambling instinct.

Yes, she rather liked gambling herself, but she never did it more than in a very humble sort of way.

But it's something I would have thought would horrify your father.

Well she kept it rather quiet from him, yes, yes, yes.

But do you have any memories of your maternal grandfather treating you in any particular way? I mean he sounds very different from the other one.

No, he was very...I can hardly remember him because he died very early, but he seemed to be much more sympathetic, and he seemed to like having a grandson. But he also was a very dominant character, and my mother said, `You would never have been painter if he had had

his way; he wanted you to become a chiropodist...' No, I'm, sorry, `He wanted you to become a dentist,' he wanted me to become a dentist.

Why?

He looked at my hands, and he said, `You've got beautiful hands, sensitive hands that would be very good as a dentist.' That's what he said. So, in a way it was lucky he died when he did really. But I think he was a much more interesting man really, and he certainly had a great feeling of living well; as I said, he made my mother be a good cook, and woe betide her if it fell below a standard you see. And he also knew all the best restaurants which were not expensive but very good in London, and my mother was always taken out, she was always taken...he took her out to all these restaurants.

So it sounds as though your parents were living very separate lives really.

Not so... Well that you see was when my grandfather was alive; they were a bit more separate than they were...but then my grandfather died, and then, my mother had got a lot of knowledge about cooking, as I said, and going to restaurants, and took my father out, and he I think enjoyed his food.

And when were you first taken to any galleries, do you remember?

My mother was always rather keen to take me to museums and galleries on a Sunday, and we used to go off from time to time, and my mother took me once to the Academy, which I remember, for the first time.

Can you describe that visit?

Not very well, but I remember seeing a portrait of King George V in all his garter, robes and God knows what. I thought it was the most wonderful picture I had ever seen. But, it's no use telling you the story about that one, because it doesn't bear on me, but...no, I loved going to the Academy, that was wonderful, and I got my mother to take me every year.

To the Summer Show you mean?

Yes, yes.

And can you remember what the pictures were like?

Yes, I can in a way. You see they were very different to what it's like now. It was dominated to a great extent by portraits of royalty, of rich ladies with tiaras, and all that sort of thing; rather stuffy landscapes and things. But I thought they were all wonderful at the time.

Anything in particular stay in your mind?

I remember some very...well of course that portrait more than anything else I think, because I suppose it was a very big portrait, and there was a lot of gold and red in it. I can't say that there was any great picture. But my mother also took me to the National Gallery, and I do remember a whole lot of pictures that stayed in my mind from there very often. And I was just the other day asked to write about any picture that I have a particular feeling for, for the National Gallery pamphlet thing they get up, and I wrote about the Arnolfini `Marriage', you know the one, don't you, of the interium[ph], and that I remember had a great effect on me, because it was so real, and it's remained ever since a great favourite of mine.

And would you at that stage have tried to copy pictures, or would you just have looked?

I don't remember copying anything really, although I very often saw a thing in a picture and I made a sort of, my version of it a bit, but I never actually copied any.

And did you have particular art books at home at all, was there any of those that were important?

No, not at that time, when I was really young. But a thing that, curiously enough there wasn't art books at all, and when I went to see my grandfather, my wicked grandfather, he bought the first three volumes of the history of the war, which was illustrated with photographs, and that had a great effect on me, and my grandfather knew that he could keep me out of mischief by just letting me have one of those books to look at, and I used to look at all the pictures. And that did affect me in a lot of drawings that I did, I did lots of drawings of soldiers and ships and all that sort of thing, more than I think any really famous picture I ever did.

And were they photographs of ships and soldiers setting out hopefully, or were they pictures of destruction? What were they?

They were all about the war; they didn't have any particular...I didn't have any particular favourite. I did battles, bloody battles, or blown-up houses, and all that sort of thing. It was a sort of world that was not known to me in those days, and so... It had quite an effect on me

for quite a long time, and I used to do them in pastels and all sorts of colours, and I would sit down all the time that they were talking and just draw all the time.

And you were encouraged, or nobody took much notice?

I wouldn't say...they gave me some encouragement, yes, yes. My mother was rather more enthusiastic than my father, but... Of course a great thing was, `Oh, you must never be an artist because you'll starve to death.' And the whole idea was really from, she[ph] looked like a scene from `La Boheme' or something with me sort of starving in a garret with the rain coming in the ceiling and that sort of thing, and that's what they would really think. And curiously enough it's one of the most popular ideas of people; I've known hundreds of artists in my time and I've never known anybody to starve in a garret really, but still, there it is.

I mean when you were beginning to think of being an artist, did you think you would starve in a garret?

No, I didn't, although I didn't quite know what I would do. But my life as an artist was a very easy one, because I've always been able to find bread for the day, and live with a certain amount of comfort.

Can you remember when you first started to draw, have you any idea?

I can't remember, no, because I was always drawing, even as a very young child.

And do you remember if your early drawings had much narrative content?

They always did, yes, they always...I never started doing abstracts, I wish I had, I would have made a fortune.

And, you don't remember if there were themes you went back to? Apart from the war ones which were based on photographs, there weren't particular themes that you...?

I made up things, I made up things, not only...I made up also things, I was influenced by those very early things I told you about, the books of fairy stories and that sort of thing.

And did you ever draw your family?

No, I didn't ever draw people from life in those days, no.

And I remember reading that Michael Rothenstein also did drawings of soldiers that he had seen.

Yes.

He would introduce things like a Red Indian as well; would there be any element of that in you?

Yes, very occasionally, but not very much, you know, I didn't...no, I didn't... A fair number of ships. And occasionally, when I went to school and I had history lessons I painted sort of things like King Canute, or the Ring of the Waterback[ph] and Seaback[ph], and things like that that rather...

And would those be humorous at all, or would they be as literal as you could make them?

As a rule they were not humorous, no. At a later date I did some things that I would have thought were funny at the time, but...

What were those?

I once did a ridiculous picture of King John signing Magna Carta with a fountain pen, because I had seen advertisements of the sort, and King John saying, `Oh it's much easier to do with a good pen'. (laughs) But, no, I think...I don't remember any particular influences, they were just things that came into my mind.

And were you taken into the countryside as a child at all?

Yes, we went away every...my parents took me away for a fortnight I think every year. I think my father only got three weeks' holiday and he liked to keep an extra week for doing anything else. But we went for a fortnight, somewhere in the country as a rule, and sometimes my...we would go to, never north, but sometimes down to Cornwall or to Devonshire, or to Sussex. But, my parents didn't much like going to very noisy seaside places like Brighton or that sort of thing, but liked the country rather better, and so on the whole that's where we went.

And have you got any particular memories of any of those places?

Well I remember very much going to Folkestone in the First World War, and my father was I think in the Army, and my mother took me to Folkestone. And it was very austere. We had hardly anything to eat in the boarding house we stayed in, and I think that there was a feeling there, it was all very grim, and it was very bad weather, and I think that the Germans had bombarded a town, I think it was Scarborough on the east coast, and it was rather suspected that they might come...and so the whole place was rather tense when I was there, and we had hardly any food. It was a very grim holiday that I have ever had I think.

And when you were describing your first memory of an aeroplane you said that you were a timid child; did that continue?

What?

That you were rather a fearful child.

I was very fearful, yes. In fact I was slightly frightened for quite a long time, and possibly, even right up to the war. When one was a soldier one didn't feel so very frightened, but leading up to that time one was constantly frightened of things really.

Frightened in a rather general way, or frightened of something specific?

Frightened that you wouldn't quite come up to the expectations of what was expected of you.

And that was from a very early age?

That was, yes rather, mm. But, I think going to an art school was a good thing for one, because one found oneself very much an individual and having to cope and make decisions, and I think that was...

And as a young child did you have nightmares, were you having that sort of fear?

Yes, I got...you know, if I were taken away for a holiday, as I was, once I went to the Isle of Wight with my mother to visit my father who was stationed in the Army down there, and there was a very boisterous sea, there was a great storm, and one heard all the waves breaking very close to one's window. I was rather terrified, and... But I have been quite frightened, you know, odd times been... I think when one is alone in some place, I've been in a house in France quite alone, and somehow one felt there was something very uncanny and

extraordinary, and that I couldn't account for. I have felt that, and I suppose I could still, though I haven't for a long time.

When did you have this feeling about the house in France?

Just after the war. And people...but curiously enough, people, I wasn't the only person because I was staying with various people there, and it was our...we took it in turns to go down to the village and bring back a lot of provisions, it was half-way up a mountain, and I was there, and I really felt frightened, but then I found that everybody else that, they thought there was something very uncanny about the place, and I felt it very strongly. And we did hear all sorts of stories that the people were hiding from the Germans up there, and one day the Germans came along and shot everybody, and so one began to believe in ghosts or something.

Had ghosts played a part in your early life before that?

I think every sensitive child is quite susceptible to stories of ghosts and things, and I think I was rather.

Do you remember any particular stories?

Not particularly, but people very often have their own sort of stories that they tell, and I found them very often very unnerving really.

And did you have any contact with spiritualism or anything like that?

Not really, no, no, no. I never quite believed in those sort of things, but on the other hand when, like the episode in the house, one was forced to feel that there was some sort of unusual kind of thing.

And as a child, was religion part of your life?

It was more than it is now I'm afraid, because I went to...every school in those days, even the, what was then, what is now the secondary modern, which then was called the board school, you started the day with a few hymns, and then after that you were read a passage from the Bible. I rather liked that really, because the stories were often so good. And so, I think it...I was rather influenced by religious things earlier on, and then gradually one lost it all. But I still use biblical subjects in my pictures very often, and I did these illustrations for the Oxford

University Old Testament, and I did about forty or fifty drawings for that, and I enjoyed doing it very much. I hated some of the stories, which I suppose, like what the Israelites did to the unfortunate people who were on...they drove out of their land, that, it left vivid memories and inspiration really.

And is that when you went back to the Bible, or had you absorbed quite a lot of it and never lost it in terms of the stories?

I had almost forgotten it really, but, no, all my life as a painter I've done occasionally a biblical subject, very often bringing them in to, giving them a contemporary...like this one here. Sorry, I won't go away, I'm only just bringing this up.

Can we describe this for the tape recorder?

Yes. You see...

We're looking at `The Return of the Prodigal Son'.

Well of course I always like to make these actual stories as real as I can, and to do that one chooses a contemporary setting, and the setting I've chosen here was once, I say once because it's no longer like this at all now, the towing path going up from Hammersmith Bridge towards Barnes. And if you look very carefully you will see somewhere over here a bit of the actual Barnes Bridge, but that's the only thing that remains; now there's a...no, it's somewhere down here, can you see, that's it, here. That's the only thing that is actually left, and there's a big motor road running right the way through it, but in those days it was very picturesque, and there were a lot of little cottages all the way along here with gardens that led down towards the towing path.

When you say in those days, which days are we talking about?

I'm talking about, this I did at the end of the war, it was one of my first pictures coming out of the Army, and it was about...about 1947 or 8. And so, I deliberately chose this scene, because in those days of course, I wanted it to be a really convincing story, and I wanted it to be absolutely as contemporary as I could get it, and so, here's the prodigal son returning all in disarray and so forth, and mother and father coming out to greet him. And that is the sort of thing, the sort of way that I would approach my biblical story. It's entirely, to make it as real as I can, I put it in the sort of surroundings which I was most familiar with.

But you've got the combination of familiar surroundings, but drama as well.

And drama, yes, yes. And as I went on, of course, this is a very early, really just...but everything in the picture must relate; it's not just padding at all, it must relate to the picture and the incident.

Can you talk about that a bit more specifically?

Well this is not particularly a good example, because as I say it was one of the first, but I think that you...one feels in a way that that tree has something to do with the figures, a sort of coming across, the movement of the trees.

The tree on the left-hand side.

Yes. And the placing of the figures too has a great deal to do with the story-telling element. A lot of people think that when you paint pictures which have a narrative content, that would be better to leave to an illustrator, and they rather tend to make little of illustration. But I've always felt that the greatest artists, people, shall we say like Giotto, or even Rembrandt, there is quite often a very strong narrative element in their pictures, in fact almost all people that did religious pictures of this sort.

<u>End of F1899 Side A</u>

F1899 Side B

.....the composition of this picture was built up?

It's such a long time ago, except that what I did of course was to come down on the...I was looking for a suitable way of depicting this picture, and it did offer a great deal of scope to me, and I started from that, the fact that there's these railings which seem to go right the way round the picture and bring, this seems to me, a perfect sort of setting for the incident leading towards the house and the mother coming out of the house, and father has just gone up, seen him coming and is embracing him. And then, I made a great deal of use of the actual setting here, even the position of this tree...

The right-hand tree.

Was there, rather like - yes, the right-hand tree - is rather like, it has something definitely to do with the figures in the front.

Can you say what?

Well, the movement of the figure continues the movement from the tree, can you see? But anyway, it is a picture which I think, I wouldn't have done it in this way. Although I like the picture and I think it's got a lot of dramatic content, I think there's rather too much in it, but then, it is also an absolutely clear picture of this scene that I used as a setting.

You very often have a lot of landscape with the figures in just one part of it, don't you.

Very often, yes, I do, yes, yes.

Do you know why that's happened?

Well, it's very difficult to explain, particularly in this picture which I still think is...I said I liked it, but I don't think it's one of my best really. It's difficult to...perhaps we can find another picture which I could describe it better really.

Would there be any symbolism for instance in the fact that the masts are cruciform, or is that...?

I accepted so much which was there, and tried to bring them into the picture, and I can't...so much is purely subconscious which, it's a very...I think in a way I put the masts of the boat there in a way to steady if you like, or be a contrast to the rather sort of movement of the trees.

And would you have had a memory of this place, and it would have been linked then when you were thinking of where you might set the scene, or would you actually have gone out to find the scene? How would it have worked?

Well, I think it worked inasmuch as I had a vague idea that I would like to do `The Return of the Prodigal Son', but at the same time I think, as far as I can remember, I found this place, and I thought well, this might be a good setting for it, you see, I was uncertain. And I accepted it to a great extent really when I saw it; I liked very much the feeling of the pathway curving right round the picture and coming to the, drawing the figures in a way together, although one side of the picture, the other, the main thing is under the tree and the mother is coming out supporting the thing.

It's one of your few pictures where people are running towards one another.

Maybe, that's quite probably true. Of course...I suppose you're right, I don't know.

And would the railings actually have been there, or is this something you've introduced?

No everything was there, and if you would have been there at that time you would at once have recognised every tree, every... I may have taken liberties, and I think I did, I mean I'm sure I did, but in the main it looked very very like that.

And would you have worked there, or would you have...?

No, I did a rough drawing, I may have taken a photograph, which always helps in a way. A photograph is never quite satisfactory I've found, but it's a very good reminder of all the things that are on the spot.

Do you have a very strong visual memory?

Sometimes I surprise myself and sometimes, both ways; sometimes I forget some dominant feature, but in the main, yes I think I've got really quite a good memory.

And when you visited a place like this, would it be, could it be something in the light, or something in the atmosphere that would capture you, or would you be quite clinically looking for a composition, and looking for the props in a way?

Well, I think on the whole, I never go out entirely looking for a thing, but sometimes I think, oh, that has possibilities for a thing that I've got in the back of my mind. This is interesting in a way in relation to...this is a much later picture.

What's this called?

What's it called? Well, it's either called `The Quarrel' or it's called `The Way to the Sea'. This is the sea here, it's difficult because it's black and white, but...

The black mass here?

That of course is bushes of, sort of hedges. But I said this in a way because it's a simpler idea, two people that passed each other. I've also called it `The Quarrel', and there are two versions, one is called `The Way to the Sea', I think this is called `The Way to the Sea', the other one is called `The Quarrel'. They are just two people who have parted. But it's one idea, and you can see in a way that it's more economical than that one; there is less in it, but it's... I've always rather...you know, it's a silly thing in a way to say, isn't it, but to pass a person is a rather dramatic thing; you see these people coming towards you and towards you, and you wonder, is it a man or a woman, and you find it's a man or something like that, and then you come closer, and then they...and then they just walk past, and then they're gone, but it's a dramatic moment, and it was sufficient anyway for me to paint two pictures on this scene you see.

And who are these figures? Are they purely imaginary?

They're purely imaginary. All my figures are imaginary, all these figures are entirely made up. Very rare do I ever use actual people, although sometimes, just almost by accident, I say, that reminds me of somebody or other, and I'll make it like somebody or other, you see. But as a rule, one makes these characters, as I said, did I not say about Dickens just now? No, perhaps I didn't. I was saying it to somebody else today. There's a lovely saying in, I think in one...he said that he created characters, and they ran away with him, and it's exactly what happens to my painting.

And the landscapes tend to be based on real landscape, more than the people.

It's a real landscape, and I liked it very much. I liked the idea of this little pathway going right down to the sea.

Where is this?

It's in Dorset. And I did this picture last year.

Is it near the place in Dorset where you began to have the idea for the shipwreck picture?

No, no.

It's entirely different.

Well it is quite different, it's a different sort of landscape, although I think these hills, and it's the Golden Cap, and it might have been somewhere just behind here somewhere.

So how would this picture work? That would have seen this gate and the landscape?

I saw the landscape. I accepted that, much as I accepted that one, I accepted it here, but the fact that this complex thing is the sort of thing I would go for now rather more.

And at what point would you introduce the figures? There would always be going to be figures presumably?

Yes, I think so. It was only after some time that I...I had a likely idea of two people passing, and I thought this is a perfect example; it's a pity it's not in colour because it would...all these grey tones don't function as they would you see.

Can you describe the colour?

Yes, well it's...one feels that there's a fair amount of sun, although not sun, the sun has gone behind one of those clouds, and it's greeny fields there, and brown horses, and the sort of greens there are very similar to the green in there, perhaps a little darker. It's difficult to describe, but it's...you would get a feeling of a pleasant landscape on a summer's day.

And what about the textures?

They're all there. Because I mean the textures are just the natural way of painting, and I don't think much about textures, I just think, you know, I just paint it in the most natural way. And you can see the way that this is painted, all the brush marks are fairly thinly painted, and textures here contrast to this rather flat thing in a suit.

And were they always going to be two men?

No. They could have been a man and a woman parting.

It would be a different story.

It might just be a sort of sexual thing in a way; they may be homosexuals and they had a quarrel, but I don't know, it just worked out that way.

And when you're working on a painting like this, do you have...are you telling yourself the story as you go along, or are you actually thinking about purely compositional things?

I'm thinking all the time of compositional things, and this balancing that, and that sort of thing. The titles of the things I don't mind, in fact very often I find people call them different things, I don't mind what they call them really. But it's quite useful to have a title, because you never know what you're talking about if you don't.

But do the characters live with you when you've gone home and turned out the light of the studio?

A bit, a bit, yes, yes a bit.

In what way?

Well I just think of them as people really, and I wonder...I set myself problems there, because I say, just as you said, I wonder what it's all about, and if they are homosexuals then I say, but I'm not sure, I don't know; I wasn't there when it actually happened, I'm only recording it. No, the thing that I thought of as a dominant thing when I saw this picture, two people passing each other, and you can call it the Lord Mayor and Mr Churchill if you like, or something like that, but, there it is.

And what would have been the problems, when you were talking about balance and...what would have been the things you were trying to solve as you worked on this painting?

Well, you said something about, that, I don't know, the picture, the people are all in one place. Well, here's an example of the people stretching from one side of the canvas to the other, and that seemed to me a very satisfactory problem to try and solve. And it is in fact, because it leads down to the sea it's an absolutely natural thing that would happen. Not many people pass there, in fact only about two passed the whole afternoon, but behind me there was a lot of small houses, a little village, and people walk down to the sea there.

But what you've achieved in that picture...

What?

What you've achieved in that picture is a sense of vast landscape with nothing. I mean one would have no idea that there might be a little village or whatever.

No, and it doesn't matter, except that it gives some sort of a reason for people using this little pathway.

But there's more drama if there isn't any sense of anyone else, isn't there.

That's perfectly true, as a rule. Just leave that one there. Would you like to...have you said enough about.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

At what age did you start school?

I suppose...I was a little late in starting school because I had had measles, and that put me back a bit, and I didn't recover too quickly, and I always found myself in a class where people were a bit younger than I was. And I went to, I mentioned, a board school, which was, well of course it was a free school, and it...when I first went I was in the baby's class or something, or whatever you call it, and I was reasonably happy there, but when I was moved up to the boys' school, because we were very much segregated, the teachers were rather harsh, much harsher than... I'm so sorry, I'm not quite...no that's not quite true. I think I was in the, first of all in a mixed class of girls and boys who were quite young. It's rather vague, I can't quite remember. I suppose I was about, till I was about eleven or something like that, then I moved up. But some of the teachers were very nice, and kind, and civil, but we had a headmaster of the whole school who was an absolute disciplinarian, who was a very short man I can

remember with a white moustache and very red face, could have been rather like a lobster really, and he made us parade almost like convicts in the playground, and we had to, every morning, have shiny boots, and we had to be there at a quarter to 9 in the morning. It was rather difficult really to get me there at a quarter to 9 because the family had to go out to go to school - no, they had to go to work and I had to go to school, and sometimes I was late and I was dreading it, because this terrible man would bully you and say, `Can't get up in the morning?' and, `If you do it again...' And he looked at one's boots and if there was a spot of mud or not shining he would bring out a cane and make people bend over, and it was really rather awful. And he also wandered through the school, and when I was learning to read, I was up reading a passage of something or other, and when he came in I was so disturbed that he yelled at me, `If you use the word "um" again, I shall thrash you'. And of course that was the first word I said after. He didn't thrash me, but he came up to me and he gave me such a smack across the face you see, I felt so, not only the pain but the humiliation of it all. And, he was really a bit of a horror, and I think that that had a great effect on me really; I became very frightened of all sorts of people, and it took a long long time to really break myself of it. But, he was an absolute tyrant really, and he dominated my life in a way, although I never had much to do with him; whenever I saw him I really felt frightened.

And did you confide that fear in anyone?

What?

Did you confide in anyone, did you go to anyone for help?

No, he was god almighty there, there was nobody you could, nobody was higher than him, so what could one do? He went for lots of children, in fact he was an absolute sort of martinet. Well, after that I moved up into the upper school where the boys and the girls were segregated, and there were a few... Nearly all the men at that time had come out of the Army, it was the end of the First World War, and my first teacher was a Mr French who had come back with an enormous feeling of how fruitless the war had been and how awful. He was a sort of very strong, I think a very strong socialist, or could have been a communist for all I know. But he spoke freely, and I rather admired him really, but it was all contrary entirely to the things I had been told before, and when I had occasionally been to a Sunday School and that sort of thing, he was all against the sort of pattern, which was quite opposite to what my father would have thought. And so...but I rather liked him, I admired him, and he told us terrible stories of the trenches and the terrible life they had had, the mud and all the rest of it. It was fascinating in a way. But I didn't do very well at school at all, and...

Were you interested, or not?

I was quite good at certain things. I was quite good at writing essays, and... Oh before that I would say that, when I was still in the sort of infants' school, one of the teachers who took a liking to me, I think, she got me to come out in front of the class and tell, if she wanted to do something, and didn't want to be teaching herself, she would get me to come out in front of the class and tell the class a story, and I used to make up stories as I went along, and that seemed to be very popular; it was popular with the children, and she thought it was rather...and in fact she said to another teacher, pointed me out and said that she thought I would do something in life you see, which, anyway, so...

Can you remember what any of the stories were?

No, no I just made them up. It wasn't very difficult really, it was just fairy stories about... And so, that was a good moment in one's life, but there were... When I moved up into the upper class I had to go to do woodwork, and that was difficult because I found I was terribly clumsy with the tools and things, and the chap was a particular horror who came up and just again put the fear of death into me, and consequently I made a terrible mess of the various things, and I can still smell the horrible glue and things from there. So, I endured this until I was about thirteen or something like that, and then my father suddenly thought, oh I must go to a better school; he had seen some of the children that looked very awful to him. And so they sent me to a sort of grammar school place.

End of F1899 Side Br

F1900 Side A

What was the name of the grammar school?

It was called Sloane School. And having started reading books like `The Magnet' and `The Gem', and all those about boys' schools, it lived up to some of that, because the teachers there actually wore gowns, and there was one teacher who was a doctor, a doctor of chemistry, and we all thought them very wonderful chaps and that sort of thing. But curiously enough, I mean I was plonked down in this school, a lot of the others had been learning French and all sorts of things, and I again found myself a very inferior character. But it was there that I met the art master who wasn't very friendly at first but when he saw that I was interested in art, and I drew pictures and he liked them, he became a friend, and it was him really that paved the way for me going to an art school later on.

What was his name?

Mr Radcliffe. And he was a rather remote chap, I was never very...he was never particularly friendly but he said, you know, he liked my pictures and he thought I ought to go on; he thought I might become a commercial artist or something like that you see.

What were you painting at that time, can you remember?

Oh anything that he would bring up. Sometimes I would be drawing a bit of a cast. Occasionally he used to give one a reproduction of a biblical illustration or something like that, an early print or something, and we would copy them, and then he would say, `Well all right, now you've done that, you can colour it in your own way,' and I coloured these things, and I think I did quite well with them because he was very pleased. And when I left school he said, `Oh come back and see...I would like to see what you're doing,' and it was at the time when they wanted me to become a singer and that sort of thing you see, and he put in a good word for me when I said I wanted to be an artist, and so he was quite helpful in that way.

Did he teach you any history of art?

Not very consciously. I mean he would say, `Oh that's a 15th century wood- cut,' and he would say enough to one to make one want to find out a little bit more. He didn't actually teach me very much. But I then went to the local library, and I got out all the various books about art, and there weren't a lot of them in those days, but I looked at all the pictures in these

books, and saw early history of European art and that sort of thing. I got very interested, and I read every history book about art that I could find.

And by that stage you presumably had been going to the National Gallery on your own.

That's right, I was doing all that sort of thing, and sometimes I could drag a friend to these places. But I got to know a lot about pictures, and I read, perhaps rather elementary sort of books about painters and that sort of thing.

Any of them that you remember as being really exciting, or was it just a general acquiring of information?

I can't remember any special ones, no, but I got more and more fascinated. I think I knew more about art history than lots of people in art schools now know really, because I think, because I really took it very seriously.

And were there particular painters you were excited about?

Oh I liked, first of all I liked the rather romantic people like Rosetti, Burne-Jones, and those sort of people.

Had you seen their pictures in the flesh, or only in reproduction?

Well when I saw them in reproductions I liked them rather more than when I saw them in the flesh, but they were interesting to me, and you know, it led one into a fanciful, romantic world really. But then I got to know people like Whistler, and mostly English school because there were more books about them than the others really.

I mean would you go out of London in order to see Pre-Raphaelite paintings, or not?

Pardon?

Would you have gone on expeditions, say to Manchester or Leeds, to look at pictures?

No, no I never went, I never went north or anything like that, no, no.

And when you were painting at school, were there other boys who were equally keen, or were you rather isolated?

I was rather isolated really, there weren't many people, because they were more or less bullied out of it very often. I dare say there were a few people that drew and painted. When I went to the secondary school there were one or two; there was one chap that did, I don't think they were particularly good, sort of illustrations, funny drawings, and he was considered amongst the other boys and some of the teachers as being the great genius. He did, I suppose, rather fluent drawings of teachers and that sort of thing. But no, there weren't any others. But I did meet a chap who was a very quiet fellow, whose name was Anderson, and although he...he said to me one day that his father was an artist, and he said, `Would you like to come home and meet Dad?' you see. And his father came from the, I don't know quite where he did come from really, but anyway he was a very famous, he was an RA and a very famous print-maker, he did line engravings and that sort of thing, and he was...it was very nice to meet him, because I had never met an artist before. And he wasn't a very attractive man. But he showed me his work, and I was really tremendously impressed. I met him years afterwards when I started teaching at Goldsmiths' College, and he was teaching there too - no, I'm sorry, when I was a student at Goldsmiths' College and he was teaching there. And I don't know whether I like his work very much now, but it was very brilliantly clever.

What was it?

Well they were always line engravings, and they were always of country scenes, harvesting and that sort of thing. They were extremely cleverly done, but somehow one didn't feel there was much life in them really. He had a great reputation.

And did he encourage you to become an artist?

Not particularly, no, no. I only saw him a few times actually.

And at this stage were you drawing in a lot of your free time?

Yes, yes I was. But then they started talking about, you've got to matriculate and all that sort of thing; I thought I would never pass an examination.

So did you take the exams?

No. I said to my father I can't go on, and so he let me go, and so, at that time either I should become a great singer or a great artist you see, and so...

What sort of a boy were you at this stage?

I was still very conscious, because all through my thing I was the oldest boy in the class and I felt that I was the silliest chap, I think really entirely, because I had made a slow start. Had I been brilliant I probably would have caught up but I never did.

And did that worry you, or did you just...?

Yes, I got rather worried.

So it sounds as though you were very lacking in confidence.

I was very lacking in confidence, I was, yes. And I still have these dreams, nightmarish dreams, of never being adequate, and they're not very nice, and I still get them from time to time.

And did you have any close friends at this stage?

Yes. I think I mentioned two sort of, two or three people that I used to play with. Never been lacking in friends really.

As an adolescent, what sort of things would you all have done together?

Pardon?

As an adolescent, what kind of social life would you be having with your friends, what would you be doing?

Well, one particular chap I used to go to museums with, particularly the British Museum and that sort of thing really. We all went to the cinema a hell of a lot; whenever we could get sixpence we used to go to the local bug-pit you see.

Can you remember what you saw?

Oh yes, Charlie Chaplin, a lot of westerns, a lot of Harold Lloyd, all those people really, and Douglas Fairbanks who was all our gods really.

And did you have quite a sort of rich fantasy life about being one of those people or anything like that?

Pardon?

Did you have quite a rich fantasy life about not being this shy self-conscious person but being a film star or a cowboy or whatever?

No, I would rather have been a footballer or a cricketer or something; I was never very good at sport, but I greatly admired... I used to go with some of my friends to the football match either at Fulham or Chelsea, and I used to enjoy those very much and used to get very excited about them.

And had girls come into your life?

Not until I went to art school I think.

And did anybody tell you about sex?

No, not really. It was very comic really. My father felt it was his duty to tell me something about sex you see, but it didn't add up to very much, he just said, `You will have certain desires,' he said, `but you must put them all aside, or it may lead you to a lot of trouble.' And, I'll tell you a rather funny story which is perfectly true. Having said these rather unsatisfactory remarks about it...

Did you have the slightest idea what he was talking about?

I had not the slightest idea. He said, `Oh one thing,' he said, `if a strange man comes up to you and says, "I'll give you some sweets" or something like that you see, beware.' And so one day, quite shortly after that, I went to the V & A to look at the various things, but I went to the loo, and when I went in there was a man relieving his feelings, but he was in torment it seemed, it seemed that he...I thought, good God! it's one of these terrible men. He came up to me and he put his face very close to me, about, like this, he said, `Sssssssss...son, c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c...' and I was backed against the wall, and he, `C-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c-c...' And he went on like this. And it turned out that all he wanted, he wanted a penny to go into the loo, and he stuttered very badly. (laughs)

So that was your introduction to sex really.

That was my introduction to sex, yes, yes, yes.

And was there any homosexuality in the school? Did it affect you at all?

There was, yes, yes, I think, but I didn't take any part in it really, but I saw on one or two occasions a whole group of boys, chaps going off together. And of course, there was a lot of passing round of photographs of themselves and so forth, in the nude, and it was all, it seemed pretty harmless stuff to me, but it was...that did exist of course.

But I mean having had such a totally inadequate discussion with your father, were you troubled about sex and girls?

I was very worried, because I didn't really know a great deal about it really. And then they used to talk about girls from the girls' school which was quite close by, and all the rest of it, and...oh yes, there was... I was, again, rather frightened of it all really.

Did you fall in love with anybody?

I fell in love in a sort of homosexual way with certain chaps, you know, who looked rather like gods and that sort of thing, but I didn't really fall for anybody until I went to art school I think really. Then one sort of found oneself in the midst of galaxies of beautiful girls and quite... I think that in a way, I've always felt that going to an art school is the most wonderful way of starting life really. You find yourself an individual, and find what you want to do and all the rest of it really, and...

And you think that's still true today?

I think it is, yes. I don't approve of a lot of the art schools, what they're teaching particularly, but I think that it's a wonderful place to get to know people, and to get to know a lot of people that are wanting to do the same sort of things that you are wanting to do, I think it's wonderful really from that point of view, and whenever I hear that the art schools are being treated badly I get very annoyed about it, in spite of the fact that I think that lots of them are very bad now.

What do you think is particularly bad about them?

I think a certain amount of discipline is a thing that one ought to have really in art, but when I feel that the students, at least when the staff seem to be frightened of the students I think that's rather bad, and I think it does happen a lot now.

But how was your own art school chosen?

What?

How was your own art school chosen?

Well you just went...in those days you enrolled, and so long as they weren't absolutely filled up you would get a place there, and you would enrol, and it would cost you very very little, I suppose you paid about two or three pounds for a term or something like that, it was very little.

But did you go to Hammersmith because it was local?

Yes, I did, and I had heard that it was a rather, it was supposed to be rather a good school really, and it was a smallish one. And when I went there I made a lot of friends, and I met amongst the students coming along Ruskin Spear who became one of my great friends all my life.

What was he like then when you first met him?

Well, you know what he was like when he died, don't you?

Well I would like to hear you tell me.

Well, he was very handsome, dark hair, tall. He had a tubercular hip, which meant that one leg was longer than the other, and he walked about always with a limp. And then, he was by no means a genius in those days, but he was a good artist. And there were a whole lot of other people too. There was a commercial artist named Jimmy de Holden-Stone who was a particular friend of mine who had a very good brain and eventually became the editor of `Vogue', and, he has now disappeared, I don't know where he is.

Did he lead you to new interests?

Pardon?

Did he lead you to new interests?

Oh yes, yes, and that's always one of the great things, I think, about going to an art school, you suddenly were plonked down with a whole lot of people who had all sorts of interests which were, if they weren't quite your own interests you became interested in them.

What were some of the new things you were introduced to?

Well, I was introduced to commercial art, and to all sorts of literature; some of the girls had been to very good schools and had got large horizons, much bigger than one's own.

Like what?

Oh dear! Well, generally the thing that appealed to me was all...there were so many books to read, so many theatres to go to, and things that one had hardly realised existed really.

Can you remember what theatre?

Oh, any theatre. I went...we very often went to the ballet, you know, and the ballet was a thing that had completely passed me by you see, and I liked that, and we became interested in all sorts of politics even, and various people there were Communists, and...well, it seemed to open up a whole new range of things really.

Right. Can I just pick up on the theatre aspect for a minute.

Yes.

You went to the theatre as a child did you, you went to pantomime and things like that?

Yes, first of all I went to pantomimes, and then, my mother was a keen theatre-goer, and we generally, if I used to go over and stay for the weekend it wasn't at all uncommon for me to go to a theatre on Saturday evening. Sometimes we would stand outside the pit or the gallery entrance and get a seat, and so I saw a lot of the acting, of the actors, and my mother liked, was very catholic in her tastes, and she would be perfectly happy to see Shakespeare, or she would be happy to see a farce or something.

And was that true of you as well?

Pardon?

You liked those as well, did you?

Yes I did. I roared with laughter at certain things.

Can you remember what?

Oh dear, I can't remember all the names of the things that I saw, but we liked...I can't remember their names now, but, well, Leslie Henson and, you don't know anything about him but he was a great comedian. And...what was the name of the greatest of all comedians? But also, my father was very keen, and my mother too, in going to variety theatres, and they of course played a much more dominant role in London in those days. Every little part of London had its Shepherd's Bush Empire, or Hammersmith Palace, or that sort of thing, and you got a stall for about a shilling, the best seats in the house which generally was about sixpence or something like that. I used to love them. Billy Bennett I remember was a tremendous...people went for miles to see him. But you see, it wasn't in just one direction, it was in all sorts of directions that opened, was open; it was a very human university in a way.

Yes. Did any of the theatre designs have any impact on you particularly?

Oh yes, I loved them. I once saw a production when I was quite a child of `Othello', and the sets were done...oh dear, isn't it awful, forget names. [BREAK IN RECORDING] The `Othello' was Paul Robeson, and...oh dear, I just can't remember them all, I'm sorry.

[END OF SESSION]

End of F1900 Side A

F1900 Side B

[Second interview with Carel Weight, February the 6th 1991.]

One thing I realised when I listened to the tapes last time, it's not very clear, is, how did your mother get to know Rose?

That I can't answer. All I know is that they were friends over a long period before I was born. It's rather curious. My mother was very fond of Rose, but somehow or other they seemed quite different sort of characters really. My mother you see was partly German, and the other half was also Continental in that she was partly Swedish, but she had lived, was born here, and was very English in her, not only in her speech but in her whole approach to life really, although she was...during the war I always remember her sort of praising the amazing...the qualities of the Germans, of thoroughness and all that sort of thing, although she was very much against the Germans in a way, but she had great...she said, `Oh we'll never beat them because they're so much better than we are at everything,' which was perfectly true, but somehow or other the Americans swayed the balance I think on that.

But, did your mother and Rose ever meet socially, or was...?

Yes, rather. Well my mother loved her, and had a great...she wouldn't have sent me to be there if she hadn't got this great love for her. Quite how, what the reason for that was I don't know. My mother was a very human sort of person, but it took me all my life, all her life at any rate, for me to discover that, because she seemed to be always rather fussy and telling me that I was doing things wrong and that sort of thing.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

I wondered, do you know where your Christian name came from? Was it a family name?

There again it's slightly clothed with mystery. My mother, I told you, was, well she was partly a chiropodist and partly a manicurist, and one of her clients heard that she was carrying me, and he said, `Well, I'll make it well worth his while when he grows up if he bears my name'. And so she thought, well this is a rather good idea, and so she named me Carel. He was a Dutchman evidently, and from what my mother tells me he went off to Africa somewhere about 1910, and she never heard of him again, nor did any money come my way, so that was rather a dead loss.

Extraordinary. I wonder if there are children all over the world called Carel for the same reason.

Ah, I don't know, perhaps he was collecting them in a big way, I don't know. But you see, it's a perfectly common name, in fact it's Charles in Dutch, and it could be Charles in German but it would be spelt with a K, but in Dutch it's spelt with a C.

Right. And have you liked the name, is it a name you feel comfortable with?

Well, it was dropped by the family, and they call me Victor which is my second name, and I hated Victor, I don't know why, it made me shiver every time I heard it. And there was a certain, `Victor do this', `Victor do that', `Victor you're dressed inaccurately', `You haven't brushed your hair'. Victor was always used... And it was a certain belligerent name to me, and so as soon as I could I dropped it and took Carel instead.

What sort of age were you when you were able to do that?

When I left school. I was called Victor right up to then. And when I became interested in the arts I thought, well Carel Weight sounds more musical or something, I don't know.

And, was Victor a family name?

No, it was just a whim of my parents I think really.

And Rose also knew you as Victor, did she?

Yes, I was called Vic, which I didn't like much either. I liked it slightly better than Victor.

And, I read somewhere I think that stories of your mother's childhood sometimes resurface in your paintings, is that right?

Well it is perfectly right, and there's a famous anecdote, at least so she told me, not very famous because only I knew about it, or perhaps Rose too, I'll show you, somewhere or other. Ah. This was the second picture that I painted when I was at Goldsmiths', and it's called `An Episode in the Childhood of a Genius', but it's a creation that came in my mind from a story that she told me. When she was a little girl she saw some beautiful...she was visiting with somebody or other, an aunt or somebody, she was visiting a friend's house and they were upstairs, somewhere or other, and as my mother was about four, or perhaps even younger, she

saw some very pretty flowers in the next window, and so she got out of the window while nobody was looking and she climbed around...

This is a first-floor window, isn't it?

Yes, well, it may not have been a first-floor, this is only what I...I have no idea what it was. But she climbed out to pick the flowers. And it was a fairly busy street; everybody sort of looked up and saw this tiny little girl creeping up on a narrow piece of gutter to...and they were absolutely horrified. And so that was the germ of the idea that I painted that picture you see. It's a very very early one, it's the second picture I painted of that sort at Goldsmiths'.

This was the first picture you ever showed at the Academy wasn't it?

It wasn't the first actually but it was the first...there were about three others before that, but that was, I don't know, it was rather a bit of a hotch-potch of things, but it was quite an ambitious picture and was quite large and it had got a few press notices which I think I hadn't ever had at the Academy before.

And can you remember whether you thought that they were sympathetic, sensitive notices or...?

Yes, well they were non-committal.

And how did you come to choose the Lord Nelson pub as the...and how did the flowers become a pub sign?

Well, the pub opposite to where my parents were living in Shepherd's Bush was called the Lord Nelson, and it was rather like that; in fact I did a drawing of it, it's condensed a bit, it was a bit bigger than that, but that was a sort of model for it really, and of course I invented a fantastic sort of setting for it really.

This setting was completely made up then?

All made up, yes, yes, yes. I've got a feeling that that little road going up there is somewhere in Hammersmith, but it's only rather vaguely...

This road to the right.

Yes.

Right. And what about the figures, how did this group come about?

Well I invented those figures. They're all figments of my imagination. I wanted an animated group of people. I suppose very vaguely I had got to know a bit about Stanley Spencer, and there's slightly a Stanley Spencerish thing about it I think really. And I got various people to pose for the various people, and that woman right at the end praying is Rose.

On the right-hand side?

Yes, that's right.

Aha!

But many of them are just made-up people you see.

And where would you have seen Stanley Spencer at this stage?

Well, you see I had got fascinated with art, and I went to public libraries, and there weren't many art books in public libraries in those days but there were a few, and I knew a hell of a lot more about the history of art and contemporary art than most art students do now because I was interested, and I got hold of every book that there was on those sort of subjects.

And when, say, Rose was posing for you, she would have posed for you in your studio? Where were you working at this stage?

I did a drawing of her, I must have done a drawing of her at home, where I was still living, in her house, and I think I got her to pray, to look as if she was praying you see. But no, it was perfectly natural. I used her from time to time in pictures really; I used my mother too.

And would you draw her separately as a sketch and then work it into the picture?

Yes. In fact I was going to...I had thought of going in for the Prix de Rome, and one of the subjects was to do a full-size, a full life-size drawing for a decoration of a single figure, and I did that as a possibility. It was rather a good drawing, God knows where it ever went.

Just Rose on her own praying?

On her own, quite, yes, yes.

And would you have actually done drawings of children, or were these entirely imaginary figures? Would you have used...?

No. One of the things I did, and I don't know whether it was a good thing or a bad thing, but I...I think...did I tell you before that I had a sort of gift of being able to draw people out of my head, and so that they did look fairly authentic, and it was the sort of thing that I could always do, and so it wasn't terribly difficult to invent figures. But then you also had to have a sort of psychological thing, even of creating a crowd so that it looked a possible crowd, and that was one of the very earliest exercises that I did of that sort of thing.

And what about the clothes? I mean they are rather beautiful period clothes aren't they, the little sailor suit and this lady in her stripes.

Well, I always hated boys in sailor suits, and that gave me a good reason for emphasising that you see. Yes, one of my teachers was very...a man named James Bateman, was always keen that things should be authentic and one should go to a lot of trouble of seeing that they were as natural as possible, and he would often criticise my things and would say, `Oh, you know, if you saw that chap coming down the street, you wouldn't believe it,' or something like that, or that girl you see. And so, he dinned on to me they ought to look authentic, natural people.

And did you agree with that, you accepted it?

I more or less accepted it. I always...he was...you might have said he was rather limited, but at the same time it was all on a sort of basis of reason that he pushed these things forward, and he drove me up the wall sometimes because he...but I learned a lot from him really.

Do you know what his background was?

He came from the north. He was a very vital little man. He fought in the First World War, was badly gassed, and then he went to the Slade and must have been very good at the Slade, he drew in a true Slade tradition you see. And what I think he really lacked was a good sense of, a really good sense of imagination; he had to...he was always tortured by whether the thing was authentic-looking.

So had he been taught by Tonks?

I think...yes I should think he might have been, or any rate the influence that was still in existence after Tonks. I should think he probably was taught by Tonks, yes.

I mean did you feel any of Tonks' teaching directly came to you, or would it always have been muted through somebody else?

It would be several removes. And I felt rebellious about the Tonks tradition really. I didn't like...it seemed to interfere with imagination, and I always felt that one ought to be able to try and produce things out of one's mind. You see when I saw Bateman's work it was full of very good things in a way, but he would start questioning himself, and he might do a rough drawing of a picture which might look very promising, and then he would water it down because he must make everything authentic, and if it was a lot of cattle they would have to come into the field correctly, and they were of a certain size so they would be able to get through a gate, and all that sort of thing. And consequently his rather nice ideas that he had were rather thwarted and spoiled. But...I don't know, I shouldn't go into all this, but...

No, absolutely you should.

I should, should I?

It's absolutely what we're after. Please.

I see.

And, going back to the costumes though, I mean would you just be particularly observant in daily life, or would you have the idea that you wanted to do a little boy in a sailor suit and you would go and have a look at a sailor suit, or neither? I mean how would it all develop?

Well, I very often, I don't know about sailor suits but I would go and have a look at a pub, and I would go and look at....well as much as I could really. But it didn't mean to say that I would just copy them into a picture, it had to go through my own process, and somehow...I don't know, sometimes it came out. I think that picture, looking at it after all this time, is a very very student work, that, although it's got good things in it, it's a bit, for me a bit too art school.

Can you be precise about why, why you say that?

Well it's not natural enough really. I mean I was told to look at all sorts of artists, like Piero della Francesca and all those sort of people, and the whole picture is designed on a sort of basis which Piero always used of all the perspective at right-angles with the picture plane. And that, and two or three other pictures that I painted at this time, all follow that. It's a very good idea when you're dealing with mural paintings which, the picture exists with the real architecture of its setting you see.

And you would have been doing that on your own initiative, or you would have been specifically asked to take...?

I think people like Bateman were very keen on Piero della Francesca, and he drew my attention to him. It was a sort of static art really, and the figures, although occasionally he painted battle pictures, they are all devoid of movement, they're frozen in time, and it suited him so well, because he was painting architectural settings you see. But it was a phase that one goes through, and...

Somebody said that you hadn't liked people like Cedric Morris because they were very static; is that right?

I don't think so, no, I had always rather an admiration for Cedric Morris.

Oh right.

Yes, I think he was a rather lovely artist. I knew him well and we were very good friends.

When did you come to know him?

Oh, let me see. I would have thought when I went to the College, when I was teaching at the College, because he was on the fringe and he was... I got to know him well when I knew, when I got to know John Nash. I instantly became very friendly with John Nash; he was a lovely man and we laughed at the same jokes, and we...

Like what?

What?

Like what?

I'm not going to tell you! (laughs) No they were all very decent jokes I can assure you. But no, he was...he had a very good sense of the ridiculous which I quite like, and he was also, he reminded me, curiously enough, of my father, but a sort of idealised version of my father. He was clever, amusing. My father was only amusing at times; he was nearly always amusing. I think he was a rather marvellous artist too, in a very quiet way. I think that he was overshadowed by Paul, because Paul was an ambitious chap and was painting very much in the school of Paris, whereas John was perfectly content to paint his pictures which had a very authentic sort of native quality about them. And he was lovely to go into the country with, because he would know every plant in the hedgerow. And he also played the piano very well, and he played duets with, oh, what's the name of the chap who died, a very well-known composer.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] .....have such a good technique as a composer, but they played Haydn and that sort of thing beautifully.

Was this in the house near Cheltenham, would you have gone to?

That's right, yes. John asked me to go down, he said...of course he was interested in the...no, no I'm sorry, Cheltenham, no it wasn't, it was at, oh what's the name of the...it's a bit like Cheltenham but it's in the other direction. It's...Essex, what's.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] It starts with a C.

Colchester.

Colchester. You see that's what happens to you when you get to my age, you forget these things and they have to be prompted. But, yes, he was interested in the Colchester Art School, and he did a little teaching there sometimes, and he said the drawing was outrageously bad and would I come down and teach there. So I went down and I rather liked the place. It was a silly thing to do to go right out to Colchester and teach when I could have got plenty of jobs in London, but I did go down there.

What sort of period was this?

Oh this was after the war, after the war had finished, I should think in the early Fifties. And...sorry, sorry... I shall lose all my qualities of...oh come on, let's get on with the thing. (laughs)

So did you teach at Colchester just for a term or so, or...?

I went to teach there for, I said I would go there for a year, but I liked everybody there very much and I stayed for about three or four years there. And, of course there were a whole lot of very interesting students, and I rather enjoyed doing it as a break from London, and...

And you would commute from London, you didn't go to live in...?

Oh no, no no, I just went down for one day a week, and I used to go down on an early train from Liverpool Street, which was so awful; the trains were icy cold in the winter, and it took an hour and a half to go there in those days; I think you can do it under the hour now. But in spite of all that it was rather nice, and I used to go to concerts and things at, you know, Peter Pears and, what's the name...?

Britten?

Britten, yes. I used to enjoy those.

End of F1905 Side B

F1901 Side A

.....that John Nash would actually have developed in a different way if he hadn't happened to have been Paul Nash's brother?

I think he might really. He was very very gifted. You know, he did wonderfully funny, some wonderful funny drawings, and a few people used to say that he was the best comic draughtsman of his time. He never thought anything of them, and he just did them, you know, just to amuse people, but I think they were really rather wonderful. But he says that he owes a great deal to his brother, in spite of the fact that his brother took all the glory, but he...you see he was pretty well self-taught; he didn't go the to Slade or anywhere like that, and just found his own feet in his own way really.

And briefly going back, when he was playing the piano you wouldn't sing, you had given up singing by this stage, had you?

Oh I sometimes made a bellow, yes, but... But he was married to...his wife was of German extraction, and they were keenly musical, and it was rather nice, they had a lovely cottage a little outside Colchester, and... There was a very nice film made of him really just very simple in a way, about his life, not very much on his art but...

And, going back to the picture of `The Childhood of a Genius', presumably one of the problems was painting the interior of the pub, such as you could see it; that's quite a difficult thing to tackle isn't it, [INAUDIBLE]?

Oh I used to go into pubs I can assure you.

No, but the fact that it's seen from the outside I mean.

Oh yes, yes, well I looked at things a good deal, and... This is what I looked like.

Ah, that's...I saw one self-portrait of you at an easel with fabric behind you.

That's right, that was one which was bought and it's in the Melbourne art gallery.

Would this have been done before that?

Before, yes.

So when would you have done this?

That was the first picture that I had in the Academy, at least, I had two in that year, a flower painting and that one.

So this is the early 1930s is it?

Well it was exhibited in 1931.

It's very difficult to tell from the black and white photograph; what kind of colours are in that picture?

They were rather intense, and I was wearing a red jersey and the colours were dark and sort of, I hate using the word vibrant but I would hope that they were, for that's what I was aiming for. But this is an even earlier one, I should think the earliest picture that I painted when I was given a box of paint, and that curiously enough, it isn't often that a person with a first picture is represented in the National Portrait Gallery, but it's the only picture I've ever had in there.

So when is this? 1930. Do you know why you were doing self-portraits, can you remember what led to them?

Oh, I don't know. You know when one is young one likes to discover things about oneself if you can, and find out the depths of feeling and passion and all those lovely things, and I suppose that's what got me on to it.

And do you remember how you went about it?

No, well I remember very little, but all I do remember is that my parents had gone away and I went, crept back into the house when I knew that they wouldn't be there, and I painted the picture as a surprise to them.

And would you have painted it quite quickly then?

Not very quickly. I suppose they went away for a fortnight, and I suppose I went in each evening for a little, an hour or so, in the evening. I suppose, I don't know how long it took to paint but not long.

And what is it that you have in your hand?

I don't know why, but I felt that I...even in those days I liked to sort of elaborate on just a painting of a head; I never much liked the idea of face-painters alone you see, and if you look at Orovida or, all my portraits, they nearly always introduce a figure in a setting, or a figure doing something, or something like that you see; it's never quite a simple head against a piece of background, I hate that sort of thing really. I like to approach it almost like a piece of still life you see.

Have your portraits nearly always been commissioned, or do you sometimes decide that...?

No, I only...I have a limited number of commissions, and I suppose, I'm spending a bit of time now trying to avoid doing too many commissions. I could do a lot if I wanted to, but I do three or four a year, something like that, but, I've just done one actually of a boyfriend of Denton Welsh. Do you know Denton Welsh's writings in his book...in his [INAUDIBLE]?

A little. He was a fellow student at Goldsmiths' wasn't he?

That's right, yes, he was a great friend, I loved him. He had this frightful accident while he was there, he was run over riding a bicycle by a woman whose car got out of control and ran over his, I don't know quite what but, over his stomach I suppose, and he was for a long long time in hospital unable to move, and then he more or less felt that he had got to give up painting and he took to writing. But in fact, as he got a little better he did paint a bit too. And he was a wonderful character, full of...he was very amusing and...rather precious, but very original, and I enjoyed his company very much. And then, someone is just writing a book about him; he died, I suppose only a year or so after the war, and somebody wrote a book. Of course he made a great reputation when he was quite young, his book called `Maiden Voyage' was greatly praised by, oh, Edith Sitwell, and that was sufficient really to get...it was a great success, `Maiden Voyage' was an enormous success, and he followed that up with two other books, and there were a number of unfinished works when he died which have all been published now.

Did you feel he was someone that would have gone on and on having more and more to say?

I think so, yes. He had a great feeling for life, and I used to remember going round in London during the Blitz with him, and he had written a story, a short story about me, and, it wasn't quite authentic but his stuff isn't authentic although it seems to be.

What was the story called?

I can't remember.

You can't remember.

It's one of his short stories in his `Collected Short Stories'.

But are you recognisably...?

What?

Is it recognisably you?

Not particularly I don't think.

Tell me something that would identify it.

What?

Give me something to identify it with.

It describes a night in a flat which I shared with various people during the Blitz, and he... One of the people who was staying there temporarily for the night was a chap who was a bit cuckoo, but went to his old school, and they had a quite ridiculous conversation with the bombs dropping all the time and one thing and another, and in the morning we all went out and walked in the park afterwards, and that's all there is to the story I think, but you would recognise it from that.

And did you ever paint him?

I never painted him, no, no, no. But...no, he was a person that remains very clearly in one's mind, and more recent times there's been a chap wrote a book about him and has revived the interest. I found that if I lend one of his books to, particularly a young person, they get absolutely thrilled with it; they say, well he thinks just as we feel, we felt, and at once they become enormously impressed with him and his writing.

Is he someone you re-read a lot, or not?

I don't re-read him, no, not really I don't think. I know the books pretty well.

And do you think he had any practical effect on your work one way or the other?

No, no, I don't think so. But, it was an interesting sort of time at Goldsmiths'. I don't know, I may have talked about it, have I?

No we haven't got there yet. Actually, if we could perhaps talk a bit more about the first art school.

Hammersmith.

Yes. Can you actually describe what the premises were like and what it was physically like?

Well, it was a rather curious building, a tall building, and rather narrow. It all revolved round a staircase which took you right up to the top. It must have been about four storeys or even more. I suppose built in early Edwardian times; it wasn't beautiful or anything like that. About two classrooms on each floor, and the top floor was life rooms and then various crafts as you came down, and there was a floor at the bottom I think for sculpture. And it was run by a headmaster whose name was Mr Williams, who, I suppose he was Welsh, wasn't very popular with us all; he was rather strict, and one of the things that he was particularly strict about was, firstly that there should be no mixed classes, even in portrait classes it should be for girls and for men, and never the twain should meet. And that was rather a pity, because the girls were very pretty and often very interesting, but we had to...well of course we met them, but we weren't supposed to, and a great friend of mine who was keen on girls, and he chatted up one of the models, and he stayed talking to her perfectly harmlessly, even...but it was just unfortunate that this chap was seen by the Head coming down the stairs about an hour after the class you see. And the Head was almost boiling with rage, which seemed a bit excessive I thought. And then my friend sort of replied, and he was expelled on the spot. So that was that.

And did he stop being a painter, or did he carry on and have a career?

Well, he...I think he did more or less stop being a painter, but he was interested in, he became interested in commercial art and became a very successful commercial artist.

What was his name?

His name was James de Holden-Stone, and he eventually ended up by being, I think, was he the editor of `Vogue'? At any rate he did a lot of work for `Vogue'. And he was an impossible chap in many ways but he was highly intelligent, and certainly he was quite successful. I don't know what happened to him after that. He married a model, and he went off eventually to Australia and I've not heard of him since. But there also I met Ruskin Spear, who was by no means the most brilliant student there at the time. There was another man named William Evans who came from a very poor family, like Ruskin did, and he was rather a star turn. In fact a little group of painters, of young people, they were surprising, and when I think of the sort of people who are in art schools now, I think it was quite extraordinary that such a group of rather very promising people were all there at the same time.

Having been rather isolated at school, did you feel that you had suddenly reached home in some sense?

In a way. I always feel really in the...I don't know about art schools now. It sounds that...it's one of the great signs of old age when you say, `Oh it's not as good as when I was there'. Well, you see I think it isn't really, because it was mixed with a sort of discipline, and I think that art schools do lack any sort of discipline, and you see masses of rather indigestible paintings I think, that's why I don't go to many of these... I'm sure there must be a lot of talent, but... I always remember talking to Hockney when he was at the College, and he said to me that when he was in his art school in Yorkshire...I forget, Bradford wasn't it?

Bradford, mm.

He said he was made, against his will, to put in an hour's life drawing every night for a week, and he said now he was very very pleased that he had had to do that. But it was...I think a certain amount of discipline like that is good for a painter, and I think that after all there's discipline in music, and of course there's got to be because you've got to be able to play an instrument. But when I left the College one of the first things that was done was to drop the life classes, and that seemed to me a bit futile, but the other schools, the more elementary schools, they seem to have so little discipline of any sort.

They've just reintroduced life classes at the Royal College, haven't they.

What?

They've just reintroduced life classes at the Royal College I think.

I think they have, and I hope that that's a good sign, I don't know. But what generally happens is that they start them and then they find that only two or three students turn up, and nobody... I think, although I wasn't a great one for discipline, particularly if you're running a school, I think, later when I went to Goldsmiths' it was done ideally by the Head there who was a brilliant man really, who in some very subtle way he could make people do what he wanted them to do, and by telling them that, they said that they wanted to do it. But, I don't know.

So, can you tell me what the course was like when you started at Hammersmith, what was a typical sort of working day?

Well, it's difficult to remember very much about it, it's a long time ago. I think we had, not a lot of life. You see I went in as an elementary student, and you would have a, I think a day, or two half days only in the life room, but then you would spend an even longer period working from antique figures, and then you might have a day of perspective and various things of that sort really, which were mostly the things I've forgotten now. They were divided up into periods of a day or half a day. I always remember the first day I ever went into a life room, and of course one was embarrassed when you saw the nude, but it was really a very curious thing, because the Head said to me, `Have you got any talent?' And so, I rather nervously said, `No.' And so, he said, `Well, you'll have to work very hard, won't you!' (laughs) And he was a funny old chap, with snow white hair, and he said, `Well I'm going to give you all a treat, I'm going to get you to draw the nude today in a position which I'm sure you've never done before.' And so, with a certain amount of ladders and things he posed her on the top of a cupboard, and we all sat round in a circle. You know you had...you had things called donkeys, which were things which were stuck up and you rested your easel against the wooden support, and you drew. A rather good thing in a way, because it's rather a pleasant way of drawing, except that your arm gets awfully tired if you... But there we were in a great circle, perhaps twenty of us, all sitting round looking up at her you see. And we hadn't been there very long when we felt that the model was swaying a bit, and so, I thought well, is it my imagination, or perhaps it doesn't matter, perhaps she's supposed to sway a little bit to make it more difficult for you. (laughs) But anyway, suddenly, we suddenly saw her coming towards us, and what actually, it was a most remarkable thing, the chap who I found afterwards was the dullest chap in the class, suddenly got up with a wonderful sort of, like a western, jumped up and caught the model as she fell. She would probably have been maimed for life or killed even, because you see there were all these things projecting at her, and he just got up and

caught her just at the right moment. And I thought, oh heavens, I am living a life of excitement, you see. But that never happened again.

And you wouldn't have tried to paint that?

Oh I might have done, but it was...I suppose I was a bit too bewildered with all this sort of thing. It might be a thing that one might try and paint; it wasn't quite my kettle of fish. But any rate, that's what happened on my first...

And were the models always women in the life classes? Did you have male models as well?

Oh yes, yes, yes. But, as I said it was all a male thing, or entire female thing; it wasn't until much later when I went to Goldsmiths' when that was much more liberal and they allowed mixed classes.

But there must be, if you have a room of twenty young men and a naked woman, there must be a sexual element to it, musn't there.

Oh yes.

And presumably that's completely played down as though it didn't exist.

Yes, that's right. I know we...we listened to funny conversations, and I remember Bateman, the chap I was talking to you about, used to go round and pick on one particular aspect, and nearly everybody got it wrong you see, and I remember sitting next to another person, I can't remember if it was a man or a girl, but any rate, the person said, `If you listen to what he's saying, and I notice that he said to some of them, "Now the most important part in drawing the torso is the umbilicus." And then he would go to the next one and he would say, "Now the most important thing that you must never neglect is the umbilicus."' [DIFFERENT PRONUNCIATION] And so we had little bets of who would say umbilicus and who would say umbilicus. (laughs)

<u>End of F1901 Side A</u>

F1901 Side B

Presumably at that stage though there wouldn't have been any other context where you would have seen a woman with no clothes on.

I think so, yes, I think that's quite right. One had lived a very sort of... I told you about the one time that my parents told me about the ordeal that some children were put to by curious people that would accost you in the streets and that sort of thing. But, yes, that was about as much as one... Well of course if one, when we went to school there was a great deal of sex talks, but one wasn't very active in these things.

But did it remain embarrassing, the fact that you were drawing a naked woman, did that element...?

No, no it didn't at all to me; in fact the very first day it seemed to me to be a perfectly natural thing to do.

And what about drawing from the casts, can you talk a bit more about that? What do you think you learnt from doing that?

I think it taught one a bit...well one learnt a fair amount about several things; one of the things was the infinite pains of taking...carrying out a thing. And of course, various of the teachers, I suppose it was...they didn't just...they taught sometimes from a purely structural point of view of the body underneath the surface, but many of them taught you to draw so accurately, and one man in particular used to come round and greatly praise a picture, my study, because I used a pen quite nicely in those days: I couldn't do it now, but... And he would say, `Well the texture isn't so good in this, it's not so subtle,' and so forth, and he would point out all these things and you would try and do it more or less to his instructions. It was purely a sort of technical thing I think, and in that, I didn't find it difficult, and these technical exercises they gave you had a certain use I think, and certainly they made you take infinite pains. Some people found them awfully boring to do; I never found it quite boring, I found it rather sort of satisfying to do in a way.

And were you encouraged at all for instance to go and look in the street and do a quick sketch or anything like that?

Yes. Yes they didn't mind you doing that. But the things that...I had got certain ideas when I looked at...because I told you I had looked at a lot of drawings and paintings in books mostly,

and I became rather unexcited by people like Michelangelo and Leonardo; I mean I greatly admired them in a way, but sometimes I felt that they were a lot of collected plaster casts, and they were probably not...probably I was being unjust about them, but that's how they seemed to me as a young person. And when I saw a Rembrandt and, oh, even Sickert or, a whole lot of people which were not on the walls of the studio of the art school, but they always rather preferred to have rather academic drawings there, and that, I felt I was not absolutely in sympathy with everything that one was shown.

I wanted to ask you about Sickert. Was Sickert very important to you, or not?

Yes, I think he was. I liked...first of all I thought, well these paintings are a bit dingy, but as I began painting myself I began to see that they had a great deal in them which the more obvious likeable pictures hadn't got; one had to look into them and to... I think, I've always liked Sickert very much, I like them very much.

Are there any particular ones that were important to you?

I think the things that really got me was how authentic these paintings were, particularly ones of London's interiors, and I began to, when one talks about sex and that sort of thing.....[INTERRUPTION] Well one began to think of dingy old rooms with ladies sort of reclining on the beds, and looking anything but glamorous. And he really I think painted London, those early things I think were rather marvellous, and because I knew London and I was a native of London they appealed to me very much. I don't always like his paintings, sometimes I don't think they came off or something I think they're rather dull, but at his best I think that they're rather wonderful really.

And do you like the theatre ones?

Yes, I do. There again, my parents used to take me to, I think I mentioned that before, to music halls and that sort of thing, which brought me in the region of, within...I'm sorry, the reach of Sickert really.

Did you know much about him as a person and as an influence in that way?

I never met him, no. I heard odd stories about him, and he was very whimsical, and he got a great wit from his master, Whistler, you see. But, I find certain of his paintings really are very close to the things I wanted to do in those days. Would you like a light on? [BREAK IN RECORDING] And these classical pictures which I told you about, of which the

`Childhood of a Genius' was one. I followed that up by doing a much more romantic picture. I sort of turned against the idea of the parallel perspective and the Piero della Francesca classical sort of thing, and I went in for a much more romantic thing. Can you see sufficiently well? Look that light could be put on. [BREAK IN RECORDING] I went for a holiday to Dorset, and I ran into some rather stormy weather and I thought I would paint a picture of a shipwreck, and when I came back I found that I could only paint a picture, because I was working in a small room, of a...I wanted to do a rather big one, and I could only do about a third of the picture in the studio, so I thought, well either I'll do it and perhaps join them together, but I never did. And so this is the original picture; it's difficult to see it from black and white, but that is...you see I've gone quite, much more romantic.

So that this is `Symphonie Tragique'.

That's right.

This was the one you later used again in a much bigger picture, didn't you?

That's right, yes. Because you see, for that reason, I always wanted to finish the whole picture, and unfortunately it took many years before I ever was in a position, because the war came along, and then eventually I did the larger version which I'm not very satisfied with at all, and it's in one of the, I think it's in the Oldham Art Gallery or one of those, is it? I don't know. Yes, or is it...?

I think so, yes.

One of those galleries. Anyway,...no it isn't Oldham, it's one of the northern ones anyway. I did...the sketch for it is better than the finished picture I think really.

Why do you think that?

Well, simply that I feel it is better, but I think that it...the larger version, having done first of all that one and a whole lot of smaller studies, I think I was getting a bit bored with it, and I don't think... But one of the studies is rather good, it's better than that one, and it's at a dealer, his name's Brandler, John Brandler, and he lives, I can give you his address but you don't want to go right down there to see it; he's a funny man, he's quite amusing to see, but it's too much to do.

Whereabouts is he?

It's not more than about half an hour's journey by train going towards Colchester. I can give you the address.

Thank you. When you were in Dorset, presumably it was simply the landscape that struck you, and you then added the human element after that.

It was not quite that, because I saw it...it was the idea that I had, it's a very corny idea I know, but I thought it was rather... It's the battle of people against the elements, and I don't know whether it...

And the people lose.

What?

The people lose.

That's right, mm.

And can you talk about the way you incorporated it into the later picture; how did you actually structure that bigger picture?

Well I did a sketch of the whole thing, in fact I did several sketches. Where they are now I have no idea; I think probably one or two were blown up in my house. And then, the only one that I could paint to the size that I had envisaged it was just to do a portion of it, and that's how that existed, and that's in the Birmingham Art Gallery.

Right. So that the larger one that you eventually did was more or less exactly what you would have liked to do at the time.

Exactly, yes.

Gosh.

But it hung in the back of my mind all that time, all through the war, and I think it was about 1951 that I eventually finished it and showed it in an Arts Council exhibition.

And does this link in any way with biblical stories, this particular one that [INAUDIBLE]?

In a sort of way. It led me on to painting about people, and I think that is one of the elements in most of my pictures really. You won't find many of my pictures, except some of the early ones, which wasn't to do with people. I mean you could say they were anecdotal, you could say all sorts of things, but it always, people seem to come in to my pictures.

You mainly seem to paint people outside as well, whether in London or in the country; there aren't very many interiors, like Sickert's for instance.

No, that's quite true. But I did do, I have done a lot, and, I don't generally do very... I painted people... Of course all my landscapes, all my portraits are inside.

Yes, apart from those.

Yes. No, I think that's true.

And where actually in Dorset were you when you saw this, the basis for it?

It's very near to Weymouth Bay, you know, which Constable painted. It's a lot of cliffs, which I enjoy really, it's very rugged. And I stayed with a rather wealthy woman who used to...well she was one of my mother's clients, and she was a Wertheimer who Sargent painted, and she said I could come down there. And I don't know whether I enjoyed it very much, she was a funny sort of lady, but...

What do you mean?

What?

What do you mean?

Well she was immensely wealthy, and she also liked rather shocking people, showing what a very modern-minded person she was. She read people like Galsworthy before her time and that sort of thing. But she was kind to me, and I don't know whether she ever...I can't remember whether she ever bought a picture of mine, I don't think she did. But the family, the Wertheimer family played quite a part in my life. Her brother, her younger brother, who was a - they were all immensely wealthy - Wertheimer was second I suppose only to Duveen, he was an antique dealer, and it was he that got Sargent to paint the whole family, you know those Sargent portraits, do you, in the Tate; they don't always show them but they... And he

presented them to the Tate because he wanted his family to be known forever. Well it was only half successful, because they began to put them into the cellars after a bit, but they were very good really, and there are very few people that can paint a portrait as well as Sargent.

And when you were staying with the family, do you remember what they had on their walls, was there anything that struck you? Did they have pictures...?

Nothing much, no, nothing much. But they lived in great luxury, which was rather an eye-opener to me really. But they...I think she had been educated in France and she and her brother both were very very Francophile, they were great Francophiles really, and they didn't think very much of English things, and particularly English painting and music, they felt it hardly existed really.

And did you rebel against that at all?

I couldn't really, I rather agreed with them in a way, and I think her brother said that he would send me to France to study if I would like, and I think I came down against going, I don't know why, it might have been slight nervousness at the time because I was quite young when she did say it, but I preferred to go to an art school here. I think perhaps I was wrong, I don't know. I don't know at all.

While you were at Hammersmith, weren't you warned off Roger Fry and vision and design and that whole influence?

Oh well I was only interested in painting really, and I didn't...I read some of their books, there was a man called Clive Bell, do you know Clive Bell? And I thought he was a bit potty, and he was particularly rude about some of my gods. He hadn't a good word to say for Turner, or any English artists except Gainsborough, I think he had a slight feeling about Gainsborough, but none of them were at all to be compared with any of the French even second-rate painters really.

Did you ever hear him speak, or was it just that you would read him?

No I read his articles. I think he wrote in the, was it the `New Statesman'? One of those, I don't know.

And would it be the sort of thing that you would discuss with your fellow students?

Yes, it would be, yes. And we were all quite...you see that's what I think is a bit lacking today. We read all the books about these things, and the periodicals really. Nowadays I think that the art, whatever you say about people like Roger Fry and all these other people, they wrote, although a lot of the things they said were daft, they wrote rather well, but nowadays, I think, I can't understand them even.

And would you, while you were at Hammersmith would you have been particularly aware of the London school and people connected with that?

What, the school...people like the London Group for instance?

Mm.

Yes, I went to every exhibition of the London Group of that time, and of course they did collect I suppose some of the really better painters there, I mean...any rate they had people like Duncan Grant and, I suppose most of the rather so-called avant-garde people, and they had for a time very impressive exhibitions.

Do you think when you were at art school you were learning as much from going to those sorts of exhibitions as you were in daily life in art school, or...?

I think it all...the same sort of thing. We went, on Saturdays we went off for a visit to the London galleries. In those days there weren't so many London galleries, and you would go to...you could get them all almost in Bond Street and just around Bond Street. The Lefevre, Tooths, and, oh the Leicester Galleries of course. And the Leicester Galleries had my particular interest really, and the younger Wertheimer that I just mentioned, who was painting and went to Heatherley's for lessons and things, he got to know Mr Brown of the Leicester Galleries and Brown said he was going to put on an exhibitions of little paintings, all of a certain size, about that size. And so this chap said, `Well I know of a young painter, would you include one of his pictures?' And he said, `Well if I think they're good enough.' So he told me to take down a little group of paintings, and I showed him a series which I think I called `Hammersmith Nights', and it was a little story of a young woman, she sees her husband's asleep and she gets up, she doesn't trouble to dress, she just walks out into the street, and she sees a taxi, a rather villainous-looking taxi driver, and she gets into it, and she has various adventures you see, and finally she ends up in the Thames. Well, it was...they all seemed to like it, and it was...I don't think it caused much of a sensation but it was... Any rate, they sold all of my pictures, which was amazing to me really.

End of F1901 Side B

F1902 Side A

When you say it was a series, you mean it was a series of separate little paintings?

Yes, they were all the same size, and they all had the same sort of characters. They weren't highly finished, but they were just, you could follow them perfectly well, you could see the same figures going through the thing really.

Was that influenced by some of the Pre-Raphaelite paintings that tell a story, like the `Fallen Wife' or whatever it's called, I can't remember, where she ends up under the bridge.

Yes, I know the one, yes. I don't know really. I think that my painting had a sort of literal content which I felt...Ruskin always said that I was a bit of a naughty boy; he meant by that that I was going against the grain of the current art trends who were... You see Cézanne said that he got as much aesthetic pleasure out of an apple on a dish, or just the apple, as he would get from the head of Christ you see, and that was his point of view. And I rebelled a bit against that because I thought in a way, we're all human beings and surely the head of the Christ could mean more to one than an apple, but that was just a point of view. And that's the sort of thing that I always rather felt; I wanted to slightly show some antagonism to the current trends, and I've never really had very much interest. But in a lot of the movements that came and went with such rapidity, many of them absolutely forgotten now, but they seem rather trivial to me really.

When did you first encounter the Futurists?

The Futurists? I think I was always fairly aware of them because there again I saw all the books and I used to buy...I don't know whether I bought all the books because I couldn't afford them, but there weren't so many, and I saw more or less what was going on. And, well the Futurists curiously enough had something for me really. I thought the idea, you know that little painting of the Pekinese with thousands of legs, that I enjoyed thoroughly, and there were other paintings which depicted movement and that. I was always rather interested in trying to create magic into a picture, to get sort of magical effect, and that did give me a feeling of magic you see. And there were other pictures of the Futurists which I found quite interesting. But the things of making sort of pretty patterns and things didn't so much interest me really.

And, I imagine you wouldn't have been particularly interested in the side of them that produced manifestos and that aspect?

Well, very curiously enough, that wasn't quite true, because I found myself during the war, or the beginning, or before the war, caught up with the artists at the A.I.A., Artists...what is it, I don't know, but anyway, they were interested in the fact that an artist shouldn't live in an ivory tower and that he should not only take stands, or take an active part, in the things going on around, because they were going to affect him as well as anybody else, and that came about during the Spanish Civil War. I didn't join until I think the war was pretty well on us, and so I became...I played a fairly prominent part in a way, and was on the central committee in London when I joined up in the Army.

What did being on the committee actually mean, what did it involve?

Well it was about, what should an artist do in war, or even in politics or, should he take an active role or not. And well, there were lots of things that one could do. For instance, the Artists International were the first body to say, well there are all these artists who have fled from persecution, either they are Communists or they are Jewish, and they are flying from Germany and the other Nazi countries, and they are flying also from Spain, and what's going to happen to them? Are we going to just sit there and... And it was decided that they would try and raise a lot of money to help them you see. And so we put on various exhibitions and sold pictures, and...

Pictures of theirs, or pictures of your own, or...?

No pictures of our own. And we started a fund to bring a lot of them over, and we did succeed, and we brought over quite a fair number of them, and then the business was to try and find them somewhere to live, and all that sort of thing, which was done by degrees. Some of them wanted to go on to America, but some of them wanted to stay here.

Did any of them become particularly friendly with you and important in your life?

Yes. Although, actually...Kokoschka came over here, but he wasn't helped by the artists because he was a man of some natural wealth, and I got to know him, and there was another very eminent German artist. I did meet quite a lot of them, and I met some Spanish artists, and one of them started an art school up in Hampstead. But they all had...we didn't have a lot of money to play with. People like Augustus John were, curiously enough was very helpful, and we had an exhibition and he put up some blank canvases and said, `I'll paint your portrait for...' so many hundred pounds. And so money came in, and there was never enough, but there was some. So I thought that was a well worthwhile thing to do. And eventually after...I

eventually had to go into the Army, and so all that came to an end, from my point of view, although the...but it led to all sorts of...once getting them over was all right, but then when England was so threatened with invasion, at once the Government said, well we can't have all these foreign people, they may be all spies. Well I think there was very little indication that they were, but any rate, then they were put in internment camps, and then it was our job to try and get them out as soon as we could find ways of doing it you see. And so, it was a major move, and actually it was a good example, because people like the theatrical profession, and the musical followed suit, and they did similar things.

And apart from the personal angle of the men or women themselves coming, did you feel that they brought anything that influenced your work and the work of other English painters?

They didn't particularly interest me. I was delighted to meet Kokoschka, who I always rather wished I had seen more of.

What was he like?

He was a tremendously, I think a very great artist, and I liked his work from the very start. He had a rough time in London, because he thought he would come over and be at once as famous as he was in the Continent, but he was unknown when he came here. The English dealers scarcely knew of him, and I do remember once going into Tooths and asking who had done a certain painting and they said, `Oh it's a German artist named Kokoschka, we thought we might try, see whether people like him.' They obviously didn't, because it was the only one I ever saw.

Can you remember which paintings of his you particularly responded to?

It was a portrait. I think it was probably a self-portrait. He did lots of self-portraits. I still think he was a very great painter, and you can see a very lovely one in the show now at the RA, this dealer show. Oh and there's one in the...they've got them also in the show of Viennese art in the same, you know, the exhibition with...Viennese painting mostly. Anyway, there one is.

And, Paul Hogarth was involved with the A.I.A. wasn't he?

Yes, I didn't know him very...he was in...yes, he was. And just after the war they organised an exhibition, another sort of, to send an exhibition to Moscow directly after the war, and I showed some of my pictures, but I didn't go, and I think Ruskin Spear went and so did Paul

Hogarth, and I don't know who else, I think a chap named Derek Greeves[ph] who was later a student at the College, they went, I didn't go.

Do you remember what paintings you sent?

Mm, I've got a catalogue somewhere downstairs.

Can you talk a bit about what your work was like at that stage?

Well, I don't know. I know more or less the pictures that I painted, and... It was particularly figurative, and they seemed to like my pictures, I was told, the ordinary people who visited the exhibition. Full of people and that sort of thing, you know. And very real, rather more real than some of my work.

And, Julian Trevelyan was also part of the A.I.A. wasn't he?

Yes he was, yes, yes, he was a very great friend of mine, we used to go away with Mary Fedden, his wife, in the summer, and we went for holidays. And then, after that, when I became Professor I thought the girls were getting rather a bad time really, because while the staff was almost entirely male staff, I felt we must have some women, and I wanted somebody who would not be only a good art teacher but also be able to talk to girls if they felt they wanted a bit of help. Because most of these people they came from obscure places in the north of England and all over the place really, and I felt it was highly necessary to have a very sympathetic person, so I asked Mary if she would come along, and she taught. And I got Sandra Blow to come at the same time, for a different reason.

What was the reason for Sandra?

Well, for one thing we had no abstract painter there, and she was a very friendly, pleasant person too, and so I thought we were a bit lop-sided really with so much abstract painting going on, at that moment we had only...I felt we must have her you see, or somebody like her anyway.

And what were Mary's qualities as a teacher?

Well she was...one thing, she would be able to talk to anybody, and she would not be frightened at all to say, well, what's it all about, how did you get there, and all the rest of it, which some people found, some staff felt, oh we ought to leave them to work their own

salvation out. But she would go head in to it really. And she was also a very warm-hearted person and she more or less threw her lovely house on the Thames open to the students, and they could...all that sort of thing was splendid really from her point of view. Very often students, when they came down to the College, felt terribly lost; I mean they were from some obscure little town or village in the north of England, and it took them a whole year to settle down really. Well anything that would help them over those sort of hurdles was very necessary to have really.

And I never knew Julian, I've only known Mary since he died, but I mean, what were they like as a couple, as a partnership together, painting?

Well, she was a most wonderful person really, because she absolutely kept...put herself in a very secondary position, and she sublimated her very natural talents to him. Because he was a very delicately-balanced man. He had had a nervous breakdown; his wife, his first wife couldn't live with him and just walked out more or less. And so she spent all her time sort of, well not all the time but a great effort, every effort, to get him comfortable and feel that he was wanted, and he was a fine artist, and all that sort of thing, and never, had never any qualms at putting herself in a back seat. And it is rather significant that since his death her work has become very much more esteemed than it was before.

Do you think her work has actually changed since his death, or it's just the way it's perceived?

Not fundamentally, but I think she does it with a great deal more conviction possibly, and the only thing I felt a little bit about some of her things, they were a little like toy town, and I still feel that a little bit, but she's got a wonderful natural sense of design and colour which is unusual, but there's a certain prettiness which I can't entirely take, that's strictly off the record, but, there it is, it's in your machine.

And, were you involved with Julian with the first Surrealist exhibition?

No I wasn't, but I was keenly interested. It was before I really knew, I just about knew him but I didn't know him well. I got to now Julian much better after the war.

Right. And did you go to the exhibition?

Yes, yes.

And what was your feeling?

Well I was at once much more interested, because it was about something to do with people, something to do with people. And of course, amongst some of my gods, I suppose De Chirico I've always loved really, the sort of lyrical quality about those. I don't like the later ones so much, but the earlier ones of deserted cities with, you know, mysterious atmospheres, I think are wonderful. I met him when he came over, and I was delighted to meet him, although I spoke very little Italian and he spoke no English, and so we were rather limited, but I do think he was rather a great figure. I don't think he ever wanted really to be thought of as a modern artist, and I think he said so very often in his later years, but...and I don't think they are particularly; I think that they are about atmosphere, and, I don't know whether they are quite what the Surrealists thought, but, they didn't know quite what to do with him I think really.

I have an idea what he might mean when he says he didn't want to be thought of as a modern artist, but what do you think he meant?

Well, I think that you could pick out some pictures, even, or portions of pictures, from Piero della Francesca, or, who would take very similar subjects and would paint them almost exactly as he did, except that his are more painterly and the... I think they too have a certain sort of mysterious quality about them, sometimes slightly spoiled from that point of view, although not from his own, by a sort of religious story-telling, but the story is left open there for you to take up where you want to.

But he brought different elements forward in his pictures, didn't he.

Yes he did, yes.

Different emphasis.

Yes. I think in a way, where you could say he was modern is his use of vibrant colour and dramatic colour, which play a very important part and perhaps more than Piero's did really.

And did you meet Miró?

Never met Miró. I would have liked to have met him, I like his work immensely. And, I don't know, there was a show just recently of some rich gentleman who had quite a lot of them in the RA, I don't know if you saw that show, and I thought they were smashing, the best group of Mirós ever seen. He's a magician really, he really is, and I've got a great... It

took me quite a long time to like them because I often saw rather frivolous things, and I think he can be a bit frivolous at times, but one didn't see the best of his work, and I think one does there really.

And were you interested in things like the magazine that Eileen Agar and Joseph Bard and Leon Underwood brought out, `The Island', would that have been of interest?

Not, I don't think...I think it was one of those things I rather missed really, although, of course I know Eileen Agar and I always liked her work, but I wasn't, I never thought it was quite resolved, to me. She was a brave lady painting alone here, more or less alone anyway, and they didn't mean a lot to me really. To me, De Chirico are vibrant with meaning, I mean that you...it may mean different things to everybody but they have a sort of very strong... Hers seem to me to be closer to decoration, they didn't seem to me to have... But I think that she had a nice sense of colour, and she designed...they were nice, but to me not in the same class really.

And did Leon Underwood enter your life at all, did he ever teach you?

Very much yes, yes. You see we had his son at the College, and his son was a charming chap, not enormously gifted I would say, although he painted reasonably well. But he was one of these chaps that could do other things, and he became a very very good photographer, and he used to photograph some of my pictures. And then he joined...he loved his father very much, and he went off...he had a secret plan, which he didn't tell anybody about, I only learnt about it afterwards. He felt that his father had been very badly treated by the art world and that he ought to occupy the place that Henry Moore had, and he may have got that partly from his father who was, he somehow, he must have known Moore very well, probably they were students, I don't know quite about that, but he always said that Moore had really ruined him. I don't know what that meant and I didn't want to particularly know, but the fact was that he told his...he told his son, and this played upon his son's mind, and he suddenly took a job to film, with a film company, to go to Africa. He was away for quite a long time, and, I expect he was awfully good at it. Any rate, he came back with a lot of money, and the first thing he did was to go to...what are the...the people that publish all the art books...?

Zwemmers.

What?

Zwemmers.

No, Thames and Hudson. And he said to them, would they do a book about his father, and so they said, `Well of course we would love to, we all admire him, but of course we haven't any money, we haven't got a penny to spend on all these things you see.' So he said, `Well if I produce the money.' `Oh yes, we would do it for you if you produce the money.' So they produced a book on his father, and it was quite a handsome book with colour plates and things. It seemed to have very little effect.

Underwood actually taught Moore, didn't he.

What?

Underwood taught Henry Moore, didn't he.

I think he did, yes, I think he did. Anyway, curiously enough, Underwood, who was rather a difficult character because he never stopped talking about himself: well of course, nor did Stanley Spencer and nor do lots of them, but anyway.....

End of F1902 Side A

F1902 Side B

Curiously enough he became in his old age very much more amenable, and I used to have long conversations with him. He was always on some huge, gigantic project, not always in sculpture, but he was writing books about art which I suppose were never finished. But his son I think was bitterly disappointed that the book didn't place him in the forefront, and the boy just one night, just walked into the Thames and drowned himself. It was a very sad story, because he was a lovely chap, and I was very sorry also for Underwood really because he must have been very very upset.

He was still alive when that happened?

What?

He was still alive when it happened?

He was still alive, yes.

And do you think maybe some of Underwood's own depression got passed on to his son? It sounds as though it did in a way.

I don't know, I never knew quite whether he was depressed. I mean he was fighting a great rearguard action, but he seemed to have a lot of fight in him, and was rather belligerent really.

Because there's a daughter as well, isn't there.

A daughter, yes. I don't know what's happened to the daughter really.

But Underwood never taught you when you were at Hammersmith, he didn't visit?

I used to talk to him at Hammersmith because we both used to do a, not as a student but later, much later when he used to teach in the evening, and he had one class and I had a class next-door and we used to talk in the rests and that sort of thing, and we used to go out and have a drink afterwards. He was a rather...he was quite a likable man, but somehow one felt that if one really went on listening he would go on talking and would not notice the time and one would never get home.

And do you feel he's underrated, or do you think it's just about at a reasonable level?

I think he was underrated, I do really. I think that some of those bronzes, which, he had a miraculous technical accomplishment of producing moulds which could produce the figures in movement, wasn't at all what Moore did in any way. Curiously enough I prefer Underwoods' because I think that they are more interesting to me personally.

What interests you?

What?

What about them is interesting?

Well it's all about movement really. And, I mean, I don't know, this is as I feel it really. And I think that in a way it may have been true to some extent; I think that Moore I've got rather bored with myself, but I suppose he was a very great artist, everybody says so. (laughs)

Somebody suggested the other day, I don't know on what basis, that there was a point I think in the late Fifties maybe where the British Council needed a British artist to promote.

That's quite true.

And it was a toss-up between Bacon and Moore, and they decided it would be too embarrassing to have Bacon because he was homosexual and anti-social, and therefore they opted for Moore. Is there any basis for that?

(laughs) Well, they couldn't have done better really. I always remember sitting on an Arts Council panel, and Moore often sat next to Epstein, and Epstein would make a statement about something that came up, and he would always put his foot in it, he would always be...he would always say something that would get everybody on the raw you see. Sometimes he was right actually. But then, Moore follows it, and he never puts a foot wrong; everybody said, `Oh Henry, you're so right, you're always right, you're marvellous,' and all the rest of it. And so, I mean he had that slightly irritating quality, irritating to me anyway. He was all right, and the last time I saw Moore was at a party at Lord Clark's, and he was very nice on that particular occasion. But, I wasn't terribly struck with all those Moores really; the one I liked was the one where there was a bit of humanity in, the `Mother and Child'.

But do you think it is possible that Bacon would have been played down because of elements not to do with his work?

Well they wouldn't have got him to do anything really, because he didn't, you know, he wouldn't have gone out to Rio de Janeiro and seen all his things properly placed in galleries and that sort of thing, he wouldn't have done that, no. I'm quite fond of Moore...of him really.

Bacon.

What?

Of Bacon.

Bacon, yes, I like Bacon, because, well he can talk about art, and, I suppose Moore can to, but I never understood what he was talking about.

Bacon's work you admire, don't you?

I do admire Bacon's work, yes, although, what I feel about Bacon is that he's got such conviction which is so impressive. I mean the way he puts down statements, so sure of himself, is rather wonderful really.

Going back to your days at Hammersmith, were you there just for one year?

Yes, only a year.

The sort of equivalent of a foundation year now?

About that, yes, yes, yes.

And were you encouraged to try your hand at engraving and sculpture and other things, or were you solely painting?

Yes, they wanted one to do a bit of everything. The thing...but they never seemed to teach one, or encourage one, to use one's imagination, that was one thing which they didn't do, and if you asked them about composition, most of the teachers would be just vague and say, `Oh well, design me two figures under a tree,' or something like that you see, and just left it there. But there was no real sort of enthusiasm that you should do this really. They thought in a way you might go off the deep end and do some awful modern trash or something.

And were you taught about colour?

Not really, no, not really.

I think I read somewhere that you felt at that stage you were encouraged to draw and then almost colour in, and that you hadn't learnt to think of colour as an integral part.

Yes, I don't know whether that came...I didn't ever...I don't think we ever got very far towards colour really, although we painted, I did some life painting, we did one session of life painting each week, I suppose, not at the very beginning but as the course went forward. And there we were lucky. We had a very bad teacher; bad I think is wrong, perhaps I shouldn't have said bad, but he was a man, a professional, and he was a portrait painter, and he started by being a sort of odd-job chap in a pot-boiler's, you know, a person that might have painted deer one day in a glen and, painted pictures that really he wanted to sell and would sell cheap, and he would fill in the odd bits that the master didn't want him to do. But he was extraordinarily clever, and of all the people I've ever met he knew more about the craft of painting than anybody. And he was a lovely man; we didn't like his paintings. When I look at some of those paintings when I see occasionally in sales, I begin to think they're not half bad, but...

What's his name?

Edgerton Cooper. And he was certainly the kindest man I've ever met, and he used to get Ruskin Spear to go round to his studio and do the same thing as he did for his teacher and get him to fill in the odd bits, and I think it helped Ruskin a lot, it gave him a lot of surety in his... And he had a studio in Chelsea, and to visit him on a Saturday afternoon was a great treat for us really, and he was so generous he would pick up old canvases and say, `Here you are, turn them the other way round and it will save you a lot of money'. And he was marvellous really, but he really, on top of all that he knew more about painting than anybody I've ever known, a traditional, he read about these things, and he took in a great deal.

Can you remember anything actually that he taught you particularly, or was it just a general...?

Well, every now and again he would...yes, he would...he used to come up to me one day, one time, and he would say, `That's very good,' looking at my painting. `Have you got a palette knife?' And I gave him a palette knife, and he scraped the whole of my masterpiece out. And I was fuming with fury, and he would say, `Well, I did that to give you a very simple lesson:

nothing happens in chance, and you've done it very well once, do it again, and you will do it even better.' And I did it, and I don't know whether it was better but I did it without any further ado, and it certainly turned out as well I think. And he said, `You've got to have courage when you're painting, not to leave the little bits that you like, and if it's got to have a wholesale operation, it must have one.'

And did you take that into later life, would you sometimes...?

I do, yes, I do, I still do that. And he...oh he was very remarkable. And then another thing, he would occasionally in the class, he would say, `Well I'll give you a little demonstration. You just come, sit here,' and he painted a head while we were sitting there, which was so brilliant, and yet in some ways it was bad but it was bad from the point of view of taste I think more than anything else, but it was absolutely brilliant. And there again, it gave one the confidence to paint really.

And did you try your hand at engraving and sculpture?

Very little, I didn't really, I was more interested in painting really. And sculpture I didn't take to very much. I suppose one of the things was colour, I missed colour in sculpture, and there again it was a very academic approach, but, I don't know.

While we're actually sitting in this room, in your home, it's the room where you painted and used as a setting for `The Friends'.

Mm.

And I wonder if we could just talk about the room and the things in it, and how it fed that picture.

Well there's not much changed really. I don't think you're sitting on the thing that...this is the nearest place where they would be sitting. I was cramped right against the wall there, because to take the whole thing in meant that I couldn't really quite do it in this room, but I had to sort of gradually work it up from a series of little scribbles and that sort of thing you see. And I thought of that picture as two lesbians in the days in a way when they were terribly isolated, and there they were in their room. Of course I played down any sort of grandeur of pictures and things, I don't think there are any pictures in it at all, and I did put that in, that thing, because I thought in a way it was a useful thing in the composition, but that was about all concessions I made.

What's the history of the little figure?

Oh the little figure I bought myself in a junk shop, and it's I think Austrian or something like that; it may have come out of a church for all I know, but I rather liked it. One day, when we have a little more time, when we can relax towards the end, I shall show you various other things, I've got other things of that sort, and this is only...all the whole house is full of pictures, but, I don't think I can get many more in really, I shall have to try.

The light is in the picture as well isn't it, in `The Friends'.

That's right, yes, yes, yes.

And, there's two...

You see I had to have a bit of light or I wouldn't have any light on the figures really, they're right in the middle of the room, in the daytime.

It's a very intriguing light that.

Yes.

And there are two sort of almost little cenotaphs in the picture aren't there, two little obelisks that aren't here I notice.

I can't tell you about those because I don't...what?

These two obelisks here. It's quite hard to see in this light isn't it.

I can't see really.

A bit like mini versions of the Cenotaph.

Oh I know what they are, yes, they were two candlesticks which are downstairs, I moved them downstairs.

But you brought them up here for the picture, or...?

I'm not sure whether they were there, and I've rearranged; I've changed things round a bit you see, I can't tell you actually why they're not here, but I think that, I thought that was rather a nice place where one could put a few Greek things and odd things that I picked up at odd times.

And, when you look through the window in the picture, the windows of the houses opposite are either black or the curtains are closed. I was interested...

No they're not. You can see those houses through there, and you can see the houses through there.

Yes, but your own windows have got the curtains open but when you see the houses on the opposite side of the road their windows are curtained.

They're all closed, yes.

It sort of seemed to add to the isolation of the two people.

Well that's what I wanted it to do you see, yes, I wanted them to be isolated and I didn't want any other people coming into it really, I wanted...they're lonely in a way, and neurotic and all the rest of it.

And what made you think of two lesbians?

I don't know. Well, I think, in those days they were...you know, it was rather a dreadful thing to set up with another person of one's own sex, male or female but particularly women who were having...that's all.

And you said they were completely imaginary people.

Pardon?

You said they were imaginary people, they weren't...

Yes. Yes completely imaginary, as most of my figures in these pictures. But in that one of course...

The `Allegro'.

My mother figures in the...and also in the lady running out of the picture.

Yes. And while we're in this room, could you perhaps just describe some of the pictures that you've got on the wall in here, as you were doing to me earlier?

Well some of them were just purely accidental. You see that miniature up there? And I think it's a 16th or 17th century. I showed it to Lord Clark, and I said, `Could it possibly be an El Greco?' And he said, `Oh perhaps it could.' Because he did do one or two, but nobody has ever decided what it is quite. But it's done on a piece of parchment, and I found it in a junk shop, and it's believed to be, the latest thing is that it might be by a Portuguese miniaturist. And, I don't know, but it's rather a lovely thing. You can look at it afterwards. And it's beautifully...it's not like a miniature, it's like a little tiny oil painting, and it's painted with a great deal of lively quality. And I am terribly ashamed, because I said to the man at the shop, in fact I wasn't quite sure whether it was a reproduction because it was under a thickly-coated, dirty glass, I could only make out the figure, and I thought, well I'll take a chance, and then I said, `How much is that?' `7s.6d. guv.' And I beat him down to five bob, and so, there it is. And nobody could decide about it, it was stuck to the glass, it was in an appalling state, and I took it to a restorer and he made a very good job of it. But that's all I know about it, but it's a thing that always gives me a lot of pleasure and it's a very good thing of it's kind, whoever did it.

It's lovely.

I'm talking about one or two of the...I think that Arthur Hughes painting up there, you know, the Pre-Raphaelite, he did the long...

The reclining lady.

Yes, and that I think is one that rather gives me pleasure. I do like Pre-Raphaelite paintings, I think there's a certain intensity in their work which I feel I, it's one of my goals to be able to paint in that way. I think they spoil themselves very often by painting rather sort of sickly subjects, but at times, he did several absolute masterpieces I think.

The wrist is absolute gorgeous in that.

Isn't it, yes, yes it is. And, you see the little painting of the little girl by the door there?

Ah yes.

That's one of the very earliest Ruskin Spears, and he did it when he was a student and I liked it so much we swapped paintings for it really.

What did you give him?

I can't remember. It was...I'm sure it wasn't very generous.

Do you know who it was, the little Ruskin Spear?

Yes it was a niece of his, and I really do love that picture very much.

So you've had that since your student days, is it as early as that?

Yes, yes I have, yes, yes. And, there are various of my friends. I mean that little John Nash painting over there.

One of his landscapes.

Just a little watercolour.

Do you know where that is?

No idea, I've no idea. I bought it after his death, and, I just don't know. That's an interesting picture just above it, that's by Lucien Pissarro, who was the eldest son of Camille, and he made friends with Seurat, and became obsessed with Pointillism, and if you look at that painting you could almost feel that, you could be mistaken that it would be by Seurat himself; it's painted in little dots of translucent colour.

Can you describe it a bit more for the tape, so that someone who has never seen it might get an idea?

Well, I think it's the village of...well, Irani[ph], and they both went out evidently painting side by side there, and both...and although Seurat went on and became almost fanatical with his building up a picture very very slowly, piece by piece, it became a bit irksome to Lucien, who eventually abandoned it. And of course, his father Camille also was influenced briefly by pointillist technique. It's a very interesting picture I think really from that point of view.

When did you acquire that?

It was a painting given to me by Orovida Pissarro. When I had painted her twice we became very good friends, and she was a most generous woman, and not only she gave me that one, and of course the other painting of Camille; in fact that was her parting gift, although I saw her many times afterwards of course, but she said, `Here you are, I think that my father...' Hello. This is Helen.

Can you actually describe the Camille Pissarro?

It's a picture of four peasants sitting in a field. There are lots of variations of that picture, some in oils, some just as drawings, and some as etchings. It was a subject that he loved painting. He was really at his happiest I think in the country. And of course in those days there were, it was just the same as in England, there were hundreds of girls and men working in the fields, and wonderful opportunity for finding compositions which were natural and which he loved really, there was nothing forced at all.

End of F1902 Side B

F1903 Side A

Well, I know you don't want to go on too long, so what I would just say, there is another artist who I'm particularly fond of, Edward Stott, who is not well-known here, and I thought that...Stott was a great benefactor to the Academy and left money for various scholarships and things for students, and I've always greatly admired his pictures. And he lived mostly in the south, although he came from the north he settled in Sussex, and he painted pictures of twilight and evening, just as the sun was going down, and that had a considerable effect on me really, I suppose, but not...but I do like those pictures of his, they're people in the shadows, and you must look at them more carefully because the light is not very good for them at this moment. But he very often painted just people walking home at night, or in the twilight, and a little like Clausen but I think much more poetic than Clausen, I think.

Is twilight a time of day that's very dear to you?

Very dear to me because in a way it kindles my imagination, and the picture that I mentioned that was in my neighbour's house is painted at that sort of time, when, you know, the trees take on fantastic shapes, and you think there are hopgoblins and all sorts of things like that really. And those sorts of things rather stimulate me, and I feel slightly excited by it all.

But also it's that kind of light in the one we were talking about earlier, the one about the greyhound racing that's in the Tate.

That's right, that's right.

The wonderful pink colours in that.

Very often I...and if you, when you come to the studio next you will see the one I've just finished, which is...you saw the beginning of it last time, but, a big picture, which is really about two slightly scared, uneasy women walking along with their two guardian angels flying over their heads.

I wanted to ask you what you felt about angels, because we talked about ghosts.

I don't know really. Sometimes I do it just as a slightly naughty way of cocking a snoop at God, but on the other hand I think at the same time one has things like that when one feels, will some strange body look after me.

And do you have a sense of an afterlife?

It's a very vague sense, because the more I think about it the more absurd it seems, but I suppose it's there.

I mean do you for instance still feel very linked to Ruskin Spear, do you feel...?

Pardon?

Do you still quite link still to Ruskin Spear, do you feel he's still around as far as you are concerned?

Well, his work certainly is around, and that's him I suppose.

Do you feel it's a great sense of loss that he's not alive, or do you still feel there's a continuity?

It's difficult to say really, I don't know really. You know, at the end of...have you ever seen Bernard Shaw's `St Joan'?

I've read it, I haven't seen it.

Well, anyway, the last scene of all, Joan reappears to all her executioners and all the various people who were her friends and that sort of thing, and she said, `Well, shall I come back?' And they all didn't want her. I don't feel that quite about Ruskin, I wouldn't mind seeing him again, it would give me pleasure.

But one thing that's interesting about many of the paintings in this room is that they're very tranquil.

I suppose they are, yes, that's one of the reasons possibly that I rather like them. But if somebody gave me a battle piece which was very good and I liked it, I would hang it. I think it's just happened more or less that they are. And it's very nice to have pictures that, even if they are rather insignificant little bits which are people that I admire, for instance that little Turner up there, I thought I would never have a scrap of paper with a Turner on it, but I have you see.

How did you come by that?

I bought it in a shop which was cheap.

Can you describe it?

It's one of the countless little sort of thumb-nail sketches of boats which appear so much in his rather earlier pictures. And I am quite certain it is by Turner, but it's not a great important work but it's one of his... He went off for his various trips, both in this country and elsewhere, and used to come back after perhaps two months with a thousand little drawings like that.

It's beautiful. One of the things that's particularly pleasing about the Camille Pissarro is the fact that it's square isn't it, it's quite unusual.

It's rather unusual with the...yes, it is rather unusual. I like painting square pictures, but it wasn't done very much in his day. They were a little bit more traditional, even the avant-garde painters, about shapes of pictures, although occasionally they painted circular pictures.

And could you say something about the Stanley Spencers that you've got?

Well, I think that some of his drawings and things are the most wonderful things he ever did. I don't know that mine are particularly marvellous. I've got four. I think the...I'm very pleased to have the one with the soldiers looking out of the tents, because that's part of the studies for the Burghclere Chapel which I think is one of the great masterpieces really of English art really, there's nothing like it, anywhere. But that is the most interesting of them for me. I've got a very fine drawing downstairs as you came in of a nurse who looked after his first wife when she was dying, a Swiss girl, which I think is a fine drawing, and, a portrait of a little girl, and then I've got a very early work, a tiny little thumb-nail drawing. But I rather wished I had...I had an opportunity of buying a small landscape which I would have liked to have had, but he that hesitates is lost actually.

And have you been to the exhibition at the Bernard Jacobson Gallery?

It's a marvellous exhibition. Have you been?

Briefly, yes, yesterday.

Lovely exhibition.

What did you like particularly?

Oh I don't know, I liked them all really. Not quite all, there are a few...sometimes he did bloody awful little drawings of people, soldiers that he met and that sort of thing, I can't stand those, but the rest of them are wonderful.

And I haven't been to it yet, but have you been to the Barbican exhibition?

No I haven't been. I never seem to get there really, but... I think I've seen enough of his work, I've seen most of the paintings really. But, I am, for some reason best known to other people, not to me, I'm the President of the Stanley Spencer Society, which, I have to go down to Cookham every now and again, which, I don't think I enjoy it very much. But still, they are rather good to keep it going, and they've got this little gallery which, there are some very nice pictures in it which they have been loaned, and one thing and another.

Actually, Judy Collins at the Tate suggested that Battersea and Wandsworth and Fulham were your equivalent of Cookham; do you think that's fair to say?

It isn't...it's nice to say...yes it's true in a way. I did find that London was very stimulating for me, and certainly Fulham and Putney, where my studio is, and here to a certain extent, has been the main source of interest. Now I go out to the country a lot, which I like too, and I always get slightly put off by a lot of people round, and so I try and either go out early, go down to the...or I take a camera or something like that you see. I can work from cameras, although I would prefer really to work from drawings.

Actually, would you have taken photographs of the scene in Dorset that we were talking about earlier, the...?

No.

No, that would have been sketches, or memory?

Mostly memory, yes, yes, and one or two little sketches, yes. There are a hell of a lot of things, they may have been destroyed in the war, I don't know.

And just before we finish tonight maybe we should talk a little about the Lowry.

The Lowry? Well, Lowry was a great friend as I said, and we...he said to me once, `I would like to have one of your pictures'. And so I said, `Well, what about doing a swap?' He said, `Mm, yes, I would like that,' he said. But he said, `You'll have to wait a long time because I would have to send you a very special one.' And, I did wait a long time, and I thought he had forgotten, and I didn't like to worry him, I sent mine along. And one day it arrived here, and I find it a very satisfying little picture. It was right at the end of a time when he was producing good pictures, because I think the last ones were just funny, very funny very often, but not particularly good really, but I think, that one gives me a lot of pleasure really.

Can you describe it?

It's Lowry you see; I mean only he can invent those sort of weird characters. But it's got a certain sort of wonderful beauty about it, to me; a lot of people can't see anything in Lowry at all. I think, it's a lovely picture to me.

It's lovely the way that there are two sets, pairs of people with slightly bent heads, there's a lovely curve about it.

That's right, yes, yes, yes. His world is a fairy world, and it's in a way, I don't think, it never existed like that really. I mean we know there were chimneys and that... If you go there, the place where he did all his things, it's very disappointing, there are no chimney pots or anything like that there.

Because they've been pulled down, or you think they were never there?

They've been pulled down, yes, yes. But even so I don't think it was ever quite like that. It was a strange sort of wonderful dream quality I think really.

And actually just before we finish, we must talk about the portrait over the mantelpiece.

Well, Orovida was a person that one got to like immensely, although...and it was her that asked me to paint these two portraits. And I had seen this picture that her father did of her, which is when she was much younger, I should think she was only about eighteen or so there. And, for me it's an interesting picture because he has made a very complex, interesting composition in which the reflection of the mirror gives the other side of the face as well, and it's...I think it's a very thoughtful work of his. And she is in a very, although I knew her much much older, that was the sort of way she would sit, and it's a very true record of her I think. I think, of course Camille was the dominant feature of the family, but she worshipped her

father, and she...Lucien could do no wrong, and she always thought he was as good a painter, if not better, than his father was you see.

Was she the only child?

She was the only child, yes, yes she was. She was obsessed with her father, who was very kind to her, and she had hardly any lessons at all; I think she went to one art school just briefly. But she is a very remarkable artist in her own right. She had this extraordinary gift for drawing animals, and it's fairly unique, because she went to the zoo I know and looked at them, but her great thing was to paint animals in motion and that sort of thing. And at her best they were terribly good, I don't know anybody that did it better really.

Was she a very lonely figure?

In a way I think she was. She had a rotten sort of life, because her mother, Camille's wife, was a very dominant character, and she looked on her daughter as a servant, and she made her do all sorts of irksome things, go and do the shopping before you think of painting, and all the rest of it you see. And it was when she actually died, the mother, for the first time in her life, and she must have been well in the middle of her fifties, she had a freedom, and she had some money too which, the family were broke really most of Lucien's life, and she told me that if they were hard up they would go and sell a picture of Camille's. And they would never get a thousand pounds or anything like for the pictures, but they would go to a dealer like Tooths or somewhere like that and get a few hundred you see, which would just carry them on. And so they were very very broke. But suddenly, at the death of her mother she came in to all these pictures, and they were beginning to fetch higher prices, and so although she was never wealthy she was at least fairly comfortable and was able to spend a bit of money. So she bought pictures very often, and she bought one or two of my things actually.

What did she buy?

Well, she bought Helen, a portrait of her that I painted, and then she had another picture. She owned her father's small cottage which he had half-way up a mountain in the south of France, just behind Toulon, and she could no longer cope with it because it was a very very steep climb up and she was very very fat, and so she let her friends have the place in the summer, she hadn't any particular use for it herself. And so I went there and I painted a lot of, I'll show you, next time you come I'll show you some of the pictures that I painted there. I've forgotten what I was talking about now.

We were saying what pictures of yours she had. Did she have some of those then?

Yes, she had those two at any rate. And, she didn't collect contemporary pictures very much. She had one of that lovely artist whose name I always forget, a Japanese artist who lived in Paris, painted cats.

Oh, I think I know who you mean.

Well, I'll think of it some time. And she had also a Seurat drawing. She didn't have a lot of things. And she had of course a number of Camille's paintings.

Did she give you this picture?

Yes, she gave it, yes, yes, yes. And, she was very generous, and I used to buy engravings, etchings, of Camille's, and she said, `Well, you pay the price whatever the price on the back of them,' and it was so cheap really, if I had been an eye for getting cheap bargains, but I bought a few, but I ought to have bought everything really, I would have had a wonderful collection now.

And I take it her mother wasn't a painter.

She wasn't actually a painter, but she helped with the press, you know, the Eragny Press. They're wonderful books really, which he did, coloured, he illustrated with coloured etchings and, not very often etchings, but engravings.

Right. So did the mother just...the mother presumably didn't resent her husband painting, it was just the daughter that she didn't like to paint.

I think that she rather looked on him as the painter of the family, but she certainly was very skilful at producing these rather beautiful books, I don't know if you've ever seen any, but you ought to see them. I haven't got one to show you, but you can see, I'll show you, what have we got here that I can show you? Well look, come over here.

[END OF SESSION]

[Third interview with Carel Weight at his studio on Monday March the 4th 1991.]

Just to recap a bit. Were you affected by the 1926 General Strike, have you got memories of that?

I can remember it, yes, but I was still quite young, and I remember all the civilians driving the buses, and you know, the English really adore doing things, you know, in that way, and keep the old flag flying, and keep the situation going. And I knew very little about the politics of it all really, although I ought to have known, and I suppose I was interested in other things, I don't know. But there were of course a tremendous lot of, there was a tremendous lot of very very strong feeling that people were being shockingly treated, particularly after the war, they were called heroes for about five minutes and then all that was forgotten and they were often fairly well starved. And the English are really very good at managing over frightful difficulties, they love it really. And schoolboys were driving the trams, and all sorts of things like that, which we all found rather interesting.

Do you remember Rose having an opinion about it?

Like lots of hard-working people, they were rather hard on the other workers. I mean she had only earned, I don't know, a couple of pounds a week or something like that, and she thought everybody else should be only earning something like that you see. They were, at heart, they were Conservative really, the large majority of these people that worked marvellously well, they were absolutely devoted to their jobs; they felt that they were sort of the underlings, but they didn't mind that because they felt they were looking after people and who else would do it if they didn't. It was a funny complex sort of thing really, but...

And again, linking in with that, was the 1929 Depression and the bad economic situation in the early Thirties, were you particularly affected by that in any way?

It existed very much, and people were very very poor. Did I not mention when I went to school that a lot of the children didn't have shoes or socks?

Yes, but that was way before 1929 wasn't it.

Yes it was, it was, that's perfectly true, but for all that there wasn't very much prosperity all through my life as a young student at school really.

So you didn't really...things stayed bad really from that point of view, there wasn't really a great dramatic...?

No, not really. I suppose I didn't come across a lot of people who were very politically minded.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....point I wanted to just go back over was, I believe you went to Germany with your parents when you were quite young.

I did, yes, yes.

And you came into contact with German art, and you had quite strong feelings about it.

I did, although I was really rather too young to fully appreciate the paintings which I would appreciate now. I wasn't used to seeing paintings which I suppose my parents would call modernistic and rather ridiculous you see, and they talked about the Parisian artists that harnessed a donkey to a wall, and as it swished his tail they put paint on its tail and it swished. That was all considered so outrageous and silly and all the rest of it, they could see nothing much in it. And I suppose in a way I was slightly influenced in those early days by them, and I saw paintings which were I thought very lurid colours and that sort of thing, which I found quite a long time before I could really appreciate. I didn't know anything really about painting except my own painting, and which was a very private thing really you see.

And, am I right in thinking you came across George Gros and didn't like him very much?

I did see George Grosz's pictures. No I liked him better than most really. I thought that he was, certainly had a feeling for drawing, which appealed to me really. I think...it was only much later that I really, we had no chance in England to see the best of central European art at all. I don't know, perhaps I haven't mentioned to you, but there were about, when I started going to see art exhibitions in London there were about a dozen galleries which showed Continental work, but all the Continental work was in fact from the school of Paris, there was hardly anything outside that, and on one occasion I went into, I think Tooths, and I saw a strange painting which I hadn't seen before, which I liked, although I thought it was very modern and...and it was by Kokoschka. But all the time I went I saw marvellous French Impressionist paintings there, the very finest which eventually got to all the homes of film stars and that sort of thing in Hollywood. But they passed through, and nobody in those days could afford to buy them really, although some of the cheaper ones sold a bit I think.

<u>End of F1903 Side A</u>

F1903 Side B

Any particular of those that you remember, do any of them stand out in your mind as having made an impression?

Oh well, I remembered almost all the French Impressionists, and Cézanne, and...they were backed by some of the avant-garde critics, like Fry and, oh, there were quite a lot of them really. But most of the people had been conditioned more or less by the Royal Academy, and that sort of thing you see.

And you saw the International Exhibition in 1920 didn't you, in Hamburg.

I saw, yes I did, and I was surprised at them and rather, I was quite interested, but I found a lot of them very hard to take.

Who was showing there, what were the paintings?

Well they were the...well, I suppose nearly all the people were showing there. I always forget all their names, but I was quite impressed with a lot of them.

And later on, did the Euston Road painters appeal to you?

That was a good deal later on, and I don't...I was much more impressed with the...I was already painting in the Euston Road, and I thought they were a little bit timid, and I somehow didn't enormously... I liked Victor Pasmore quite a lot, but the others seemed to me watered down Impressionism, that sort of thing, without the colour. But the...well what's the name of this group round Sickert?

The Camden Town.

Camden Town, I liked much better, I thought they were much more adventurous and much more... They had come more directly from Impressionism and that sort of thing really. I had a great respect for, well almost all of them I found they could give me something, a sort of scintillating colour which the Euston Road didn't seem to have to me. I found it rather dreary really.

And did you have any contact with them? I mean would you have talked to them?

Yes, yes I knew them mostly.

And would you have said, I find your work rather dreary, or wouldn't you have been that brave?

No I wouldn't have been so impolite, but I...I felt that a group of people around that I knew, I mean people like Ruskin Spear, I thought Ruskin Spear, although he had a certain sympathy with Euston Road, he was much more of a real painter than they were, I thought. I thought they were a bit too sort of polite in a way. And of course I really, a painter that I liked enormously - well I liked two or three people in that period, I began to see, Stanley Spencer I fell for completely, I thought he was smashing, and had really something very original to say, and I thought that Sickert had. Well he was a completely...he approached Impressionism from quite a different sort of way, but I adored Sickert and I thought that his painting of lower life in Camden Town and that sort of thing, really created quite a thing inside me which I liked enormously really. And there were others, I mean, I liked Matthew Smith, I liked his sort of rather daring colour and that sort of thing.

When did you start to like Bruegel and Bosch?

Oh I always liked them, as early as I, whenever I saw them really.

You would probably have seen them pretty early on in visits to museums.

Well I think...Bruegel I knew... You see what I did do, I looked at lots of books, art books, and if I couldn't afford them I would go the library. In those days we had not a large collection but they were quite well chosen, and there was Breugel and there was Bosch and there were all...which, we weren't getting them at all first-hand from the Continent, well I mean the equivalent of them, they weren't really putting them over very much to us.

Anyway, going back to you, when did you actually go to Goldsmiths', and what brought you there having been at Hammersmith?

I went to Goldsmiths', at least I went to Hammersmith directly I left school, because I think I told you that they wanted me to become a singer and i didn't want to become a singer, and my father had said, `I'll give you a year at an art school,' and I did a year more or less full-time, it was about the only full-time teaching I had at a school. And I met there two people. Have I talked about the two teachers, two or three teachers?

Was that James Bateman? You talked about the headmaster who was so furious with everybody all the time.

That's right. Well, James Bateman was a rather strong personality. He was rather, didn't mind sort of seeing his students be very upset with what he said, he really rather liked to make the girls cry: he didn't make us cry, but he certainly made a lot of the girls cry, and he said, `Oh you've got no idea about drawing'. He came from the Slade under Tonks, and he had worked out in his own way a great interest in a lot of painters. His chief god was Piero della Francesca, and he pointed out with great fervour all the qualities of picture making, and that was impressive to me. He was rather scientific about it all, and he talked about the mechanics of building up a picture and that was quite an interesting thing to me, it was something rather new. And then he told me he was leaving Hammersmith and was going to teach at Goldsmiths', and he said, `Why don't you come over,' because he knew that I was always rather interested in painting imaginary pictures and I was a little bit unable to do that at Hammersmith you see. So I went for two days a week there, and I wanted to learn about, as much as I could, about composition, and that's when I started painting those rather large pictures - well, they weren't very large really but they seemed large to me at the time, things like `Allegro Strepitoso' and the others really, `Episode in the Childhood of a Genius'. And I did about six of those pictures during the time I was at Goldsmiths'. I was very happy not only because of Bateman, but because there was a marvellous head of the school called Clive Gardiner, and he was a painter but he was an intellectual, he would analyse pictures and he was a person that really was more than anybody else devoted to Cézanne. And, he wasn't such a good painter, but he had a lot, he had a tremendous fervent interest in all the painting going on; particularly he liked, particularly the French school, but he liked almost everything, a lot of the old masters; he thought Poussin...he drew attention to all sorts of people that the average art teacher in those days wasn't particularly interested in. And I got a tremendous...I found I had got somebody at last that I could talk to, and he was very humble, and he was quite interested to hear what one had to say oneself besides telling you what he thought too. And the atmosphere at Goldsmiths' was much less provincial than it was at Hammersmith you see, and I made friends with all sorts of people. On the first day I was there I met, or at least I saw a man sitting waiting to see the Head, I arriving as a new boy and he taking his first teaching job, and that was Edward Bawden, and we were friends until he died actually, and it was, he was rather a prickly man in a way but I used to like him a lot. And, I didn't see much of Graham Sutherland in those days but he had been a student a little before me, but he came along from time to time. And there was much more feeling for what I began to see was really painting.

Did you see Sutherland's work at this time?

Yes, it wasn't at all like the Sutherland that you know. I mean he was primarily at that time doing line engravings, and they were very like...silly of me...

Very like...?

Samuel Palmer.

Right.

And all in all, there were other people who weren't painters that were there which... Betty Swanwick, you've heard of Betty Swanwick?

I've heard of her but I don't know anything about her.

No, well she was a fellow student, and she died just recently.

And what was her work like?

Highly fantastic and imaginative, but it wasn't...the thing I wanted was to have...I wanted the world to be very close to me, and hers was much more like comic strips in a way, it was rather beautiful really. And both Gardiner and...well, everybody thought she was a really very considerable artist, which she was in a way. And then, I was very friendly with a young chap who was homosexual, and he painted highly imaginative pictures, which I always found interesting, and then he was run over on his bicycle and he was a cripple for the rest of his life, Denton Welsh. And he was another person that I remained very close to. And all these people were springing up. I was there, just after I left Freud came along there, but I didn't have anything much to do with him.

Did Bawden actually teach you at all?

What?

Did Edward Bawden actually teach you?

Not really, because he was much more concerned with graphic design in those days.

Did you form any impression of what he was like as a teacher, did other people talk about him in that way at all?

I didn't quite get that.

Did you, through perhaps listening to other people, form any impression of what he was like as a teacher?

Oh yes. I think his personality wasn't very attractive to them, they were rather critical of him, and he was rather sharp and would make all sorts of rather cruel, or at least seemed to be cruel, remarks. I never, I thought they were just funny, but a lot of people didn't take to him, but on the other hand he did have quite a strong following really.

Did you meet Ravilious at all?

Pardon?

Did you meet Ravilious at all?

I met Ravilious but not there, and he was never really associated with Goldsmiths'. But, no I didn't meet him until the beginning of the war. I think Bawden was a very interesting artist really, an extraordinary one really.

What area of his work appealed to you the most?

I used to go off on holidays with him, and he used to always...on holidays he always took his watercolour box and painted, he painted very few oils, and they were very very skilful. And also I met...did I meet him? I don't know, he wasn't actually teaching there but I met John Nash, but I forget quite how I came in contact with him, but we became very fast friends, and we used to go off, Bawden, Ravilious and John Nash, painting in the summer together, which was very nice really, it was very stimulating.

Abroad or...?

What?

Abroad or in England?

No, mostly in England, although I went with Bawden several times to Ireland.

Which bits?

Well all over the south, we chose a different place each year, and for three consecutive years, once we went to Donegal, another time to the area around Dublin, and then once right down to the farest part of the south. And after I gave up going, Bawden went on going there for many years afterwards.

And presumably you did paintings as a result of those trips.

Yes, yes.

Can we talk about those a bit? When did you go, which years are we talking about?

God!

Roughly, which was the era?

I should think about '58, '59, '60, yes, somewhere about then. And, I was really quite amused how it all went. Edward Bawden and John Nash would both send their wives out on a little holiday with instructions that they had got to find places where they would like to paint, and woe betide them if their choosing wasn't absolutely to their liking. I was easier on it because I didn't mind very much what I painted, I always found things to paint, but...

What would they be looking for in the place?

Well they wanted to look for the sort of paintings that they liked painting.

You mean that they had already done in a sense.

In a way, yes, in a way. I was particularly fond of John Nash, and we got on tremendously well, and he was very easy. He was a marvellous man to go about with because he was such a wonderful studier of nature, and he knew every wild flower in the hedgerow and he could tell you everything about them. He was an absolute genius at that sort of thing. And he also played the piano, not perhaps first-class but well enough, and he loved Haydn and Mozart and that sort of thing and so we had lovely evenings.

When you were on the holidays in Ireland would you actually be painting there, or would you be doing studies which you then painted...?

Oh I painted direct on the spot, I nearly always do. On the other hand, Nash always did studies and painted his pictures when he went home.

So which of your paintings come from those trips?

Well they're all in private collections, it's difficult to say. I can't show you...well I can show you photographs perhaps next time you come, but...

Can you describe any of them?

They were very, fairly faithful pictures of the actual scene, but I nearly always introduced figures into them, and the figures took a very dominant part in the picture. I always liked painting human beings, or the work of human beings in pictures; I don't want to paint just pure landscape, I think that's the chief sort of characteristic really. I painted nearly all...you see that painting just there? Well that's a fairly typical picture of... And I can show you...that's about that period really.

What's that one called?

`Three Old Women of Norfolk'.

And how did it come about?

Very difficult to remember, but I went, I was in Norfolk and I found that. It's a sort of, it has a sort of, I think a geometry in it really, and it was dominated by that big telegraph pole, and, I don't know, I can't say much more about it than that really.

Was there actually a path like that?

More or less, but I like to take the bones of what is there, but I will emphasise various things you see.

And were the three old ladies there?

Pardon?

Were the three old ladies there, or are they invented?

No, they weren't there at all, but I walked, I saw similar ladies in villages all round, and in fact there seemed to be more old ladies than anything else there really.

But, so you don't feel that you had a particular response to Ireland?

I had a very big...yes, I loved Ireland, I thought it would be a wonderful place to live really. I was rather enchanted with the Irish people, and I thought, I've never seen such beautiful girls in my life, they were wonderful. They had wonderful fresh complexions, I suppose from the soft, damp atmosphere or something, I don't know why it was. And I liked the men, because they were amusing and talked such a lovely language. I thought there was a tremendous lot of sort of character that there was that you could only find in Ireland.

And, when you were all on holidays together would you actually look at each other's work every day, or would you all be working privately and then at the last, talk about it?

We didn't...sometimes I went up and saw John Nash or Edward painting. I don't think he...John Nash wouldn't mind but Edward was rather sort of, didn't want to show people, and I don't think we were...we didn't sort of compare notes very much. But I mean, if people came up and said, `What are you doing?' I would show them, but...

So you would be together in the evenings but you would probably go off separately in the days and paint?

Sometimes, sometimes not. And the last time I went on holiday to Wales with Bawden we both found an area which we liked and we painted there, we were not very often more than a few yards away from each other.

And what did that feel like?

You forget that they're there, because you're so absorbed with your own problems, you don't...I wouldn't have wanted to have painted the same subject as, because they might not like that, but so long as I was doing my own thing, that was fine.

It would have been interesting to have an exhibition of the different pictures you had done like that.

Well it would have been interesting. We went to a place called Ironbridge, do you know?

There's a museum there.

There's a museum, and it was...it's a great industrial sort of museum and all sorts of...and the iron bridge was the first iron bridge built in this country, and it's a very beautiful bridge really, without any ornateness or decoration, it's just a beautiful suspension bridge. And I think all three of us painted that from different... It's a very deep gorge and this very sort of small bridge, but it's so beautiful really. Whether they've tidied it up I don't know because I haven't been back.

And what were the differences between your three versions, can you remember?

Well they were different because we were three different people painting them, the sort of personalities were different I suppose. I would have thought that we were both trying to tell something truthful about what we saw, but with Bawden, he had a sort of rather, a form of making a design, and I suppose, in a different sort of way I suppose Nash tried to do the same thing. I tried to preserve all the design elements, but to get a more realistic thing about them. I don't know.

End of F1903 Side B

F1904 Side A

And you say the wives got sent out on sort of recces to find these places.

That's right, that's right.

Did the wives actually come along as well on the holiday, or it was just the men?

Yes, they did, but they made themselves fairly scarce. We didn't see much of them really, they may have been doing drawing or something like that, I don't quite know. But we all met in the evening and, particularly in Ireland, before the Americans spoiled everything there, there were wonderful inns that you stayed in which, where the food was simple but awfully good really. You used to get wonderful ham and Dublin Bay prawns and all sorts of, very lovely cheese. But then the Americans came along and they spoiled it by wanting to have the sort of thing that you would have in the Ritz down there, and of course they couldn't give it to them and everything got very expensive.

So would these evenings have been quite exuberant, or melancholic, or what?

Oh, they were sometimes...John Nash was pretty marvellous really, he entered into the whole thing. Either we might play bar billiards in the evenings, or something like that. But if the weather was bad then Edward would get in a frightful bad temper, `Why did I come to this awful place?' And we didn't really know why, we would have done better without him, but when he was in a good mood he was fine. And afterwards I went for holidays with Mary Fedden.

Mary and Julian.

Mm.

Those were mainly France weren't they, or not?

Mostly in France, yes.

Actually when I first came, hadn't you just got some pictures sent to you from that period when you went to France, that were being restored?

I have, yes, I have them here, you can see them.

Yes. I mean it would be interesting to talk about them for the tape.

Pardon?

It would be interesting to describe them for the tape if you could.

Yes. There's one lying there, and, I musn't move must I, because I'm all hitched up, but if you like you could get... And that one. If you put them both on the side of that divan you can see them, and if you wanted to, put them up against the wall then we can both see them.

Did you say it was some time in the Fifties, this happened?

Well these are not actually, those two are not done with Julian Trevelyan or Mary Fedden, these were earlier, and when I was staying just behind Toulon, and in a cottage, a little tiny house up the side of a mountain, which, that one in the larger picture with a little red-tiled roof there, was the house that I was staying in, and it belonged to the Pissarro family, and Lucien, the son of Camille, used to go there in the summer. And then he died at the end of the war and his daughter inherited this place and she didn't know quite what to do with it because she was so fat that she couldn't manipulate the mountains there you see, and so she let a group of us go off and use the place as we wished in the summer, and those two, that is a...it's a tremendously hilly, mountainous sort of country, and I thought very beautiful really, and these two places are comparatively close to each other.

What is the name of the paintings, do they have titles?

I think...they do, yes. That one with a little village on the hill there was `La Reveste', and, I can't remember the name of that one really now, off-hand. You do ask difficult questions!

It's interesting, I mean, is it partly to do with the quality of the landscape itself, or to do with the fact that you are abroad? Because you don't go and paint scenes like this in England do you, or...?

Well you can't find them in England.

But I mean for instance as far as I know you've never say been up to Cumberland and just painted landscapes there, have you?

I don't like Cumberland much, but I have been to, I've painted in north Wales a great deal, and very often the country is a little like that, mountainous and so forth, yes. I think that whatever you say about the paintings they are extremely like the places.

But they're quite different in quality for example from the one behind you, aren't they. I mean many people would be surprised they were by the same artist.

Well it's different you see, because this is a figment of my imagination based rather lightly on a place that I knew.

Could we perhaps talk about this one, because it's one of the key pictures isn't it.

I don't know. Yes, well, I can tell you all about that picture, and...

Is it called `The Day of Doom'?

It's called `The Day of Doom', yes, and it's, you know in the Fifties we were all getting very het up, you are much too young to know we were, but, about the atom bomb, and people were often so gloomy about the future of the world that they even, people stopped painting because they said it's not worthwhile going on. You would be surprised the enormous feeling of pessimism there was, particularly as it looked as though Russia was going to be our mortal enemy and it might happen at any moment sort of thing. And I thought, well I'll paint a picture - I wasn't quite so moved to despair as they were, but I thought, I'll paint a picture about the atom bomb, and I was really thinking of the terror more than anything else. And I thought, where was I most frightened in my life, and I remembered when I was a little, a very little boy, I might have been three or four, something like that, and I was staying in Fulham, and suddenly I knew that something was happening, and I went down to the door, and I looked out, and there I saw great tongues of flame going right up into the sky, and I was fascinated with the shapes they were making and that sort of thing, and until... There were one or two other people standing there looking up as I was, and a woman came running down the streets and said, `You silly people, I mean, don't you realise that if the wind suddenly changed, all your houses would be burnt?' And that did, that was enough to key me off, and feel a great feeling of terror. And, well that's all there was to it, it didn't change, and that was it, but that remained in my mind, and when I thought, where was I really terrified, I had to feel that, I went back to that moment. So, I don't know how many years had elapsed since then, I suppose it was in the Forties or something like that, I don't know. And so, I went back to the actual spot where I hadn't been to for years, and there it was, more or less as I left it, and it's like that almost to today.

Where exactly is it?

It's in Fulham, in a place called the Dawes Road where the number 11 buses go through, and I was at that time living over a boot shop. And then, I made that...I did a drawing, and I did various, I took a photograph or two and I did a few little sketchy drawings and that sort of thing. And that's how that picture evolved really.

But things like...

I took various liberties, but not big ones. For instance, this shop was full of objects in it really.

The red shop on the right.

Yes, and the red shop...yes. And I thought, well I'm going to make it into an empty shop, so you can see right up the street. But that is the main architectural change that I made.

But you've done things like, the green door is very elongated, almost like the way your face feels when you scream, [INAUDIBLE].

Well, somehow I felt I wanted that you see; I mean I can't absolutely say why that was, and one does distort things and one does very often find that, I suppose I wasn't the first person, because after all El Greco did that didn't he, he made all his...when he was inventing his slightly horrific religious pictures he used elongation of forms and that sort of thing. But in the main, if you went down there you would recognise the place at once.

And are the people purely imaginary or did you have...?

Oh yes, yes. I think I may have said to you before, I'm not quite sure whether I did, that I have a sort of gift, perhaps my only gift in a way, of being able to invent figures, and so in a way one's a bit like a novelist when one makes these figures, and they don't...I never think of any particular person but they seem to evolve.

But why sometimes would you use Rose or your mother as a model? What would make you not invent then?

Well it may be because I...they are rather particular people in my life, and sometimes I want to bring them in to it you see. And in a way there's something a little similar in Stanley Spencer you see, because he uses very often figures of people that he knew in Cookham and that sort of thing. But in a way he doesn't want them to be recognisable, only to himself, and I don't mind taking it a step further, sometimes, but not always.

But those pictures, the red and the blue are wonderful colours as well, aren't they.

Well, yes, yes. I'm always, I've always been, as I became studying painting, that sort of thing, I became obsessed with the great quality that one gets by using colour, and very often in Victorian times, although perhaps the Pre-Raphaelites had something of that sort of quality, it was somebody like Matisse who comes along and can make colour into a significant part of the design. I don't say that there weren't individuals that did that before him, but he perhaps did it best of modern artists I think.

Can you remember when you came across his work like that?

Matisse?

Mm.

Oh I knew, I used to buy shilling books of modern painters and that sort of thing, and he was one of the people that I saw; I suppose I was perhaps about 14 or so.

And did you come across his book, `Jazz' when he did that?

Which?

He did an artists' book called `Jazz'.

`Jazz'?

Mm.

I don't seem to know that one, but there was a book which I used to get which was about a shilling or something like that, and it was called `Drawing and Design', and from that I learnt a tremendous lot about what was going on, particularly in France and the Continent really.

But it was interesting looking at that red, because when we were in the other room looking at the picture you've done of the chapel that you were describing in Cornwall, I noticed that the gateposts were that red as well, and I thought perhaps it was a Weightism, and then I saw there's a photograph of it and they actually are that red.

Yes, yes that's right, that is right. But, no, colour plays a more important part in my pictures than in a lot of people that are trying to do the same sort of thing as I am.

And were you subject, I mean we've mentioned sort of the general despair in the Fifties...

Pardon?

We were talking about the general pessimism in the Fifties, I mean are you very subject to despair and depression?

I'm a fairly cheerful person in myself, but I think it's a wonderful subject, for me, to create things of great tension and that sort of thing, I like doing that tremendously. It all gets...I mean it doesn't mean to say that I'm always looking for those sort of things; I mean sometimes I go for things which are humorous, but then they're all rather tense in...I did say to...somewhere or other, I don't know, I wrote something about the fact that I wanted to create a world, very much like the visual world, that I wanted it to be a more exciting world.

Quite a lot of the characters in your paintings are wrong-footed in some way, I mean...

What?

There's a feeling of the people in your paintings wanting to run away sometimes and not quite knowing which way.

That's right, yes, yes, yes.

There's that sort of panic, hesitation, whether it's witches coming down or somebody behind.

Yes, yes, yes.

Is that how you tend to see us all, as being rather wrong-footed?

I don't see it like that, but I want to create it like that.

And do you feel sympathy for these people, or...?

Yes, I do. Do you know a picture which, this picture is going with another one to Russia, and I don't know why they've chosen these two.

`The Day of Doom'?

What?

`The Day of Doom'?

`The Day of Doom' and this other one which is about, `The World We Live In', do you know that picture of mine? If you can...can you open that top drawer, that's right, and get out the bottom one of those if you can, which is all those pictures, and I think it might be in there. I think the bottom one which is the biggest one of all, which the other thing is lying on. No? Well what's the big...that one, that's the one, I think that's the one, yes. Let's have a look at that one. I don't know whether it's in this one but it ought to be, one of those. No, it isn't there, isn't that sad. I can't tell you about that because I haven't got it.

Can you describe it?

Well, it's two people in a suburban garden, and they both have got terrible troubles, and it's really about the separateness of people. I mean you may say, well I can be very very close to my loved one and that sort of thing, but in fact you're not, that's what it's about. And it's I suppose a rather sad story to put over, perhaps it's a hopeless story, I don't know, but it's...I put it in a rather beautiful setting, so even if you can't communicate as you want to, you've at least got a beautiful world round you. I don't know, it's a lot of rubbish I expect! (laughs)

I mean do you feel despair at the fact that everyone's isolated?

I don't but I'm very conscious of it. I think, because I think it's wonderful to have your own very private thoughts too, you know, in a way. I don't know.

But most of the way our society trundles on, sort of denies that isolation, and also denies the fact that we're going to die; I mean those are two things that most people prefer not to think about.

I don't feel very very worried about death, it's inevitable and so it's no use worrying about it I think. But I'm very often concerned with the lonely figure. I mean that one up there, can you see that one? If you would like to switch the light on you might...

The deaf person and the music going by, that one?

It's the blind boy.

Oh right.

Can you manage?

Yes. So the person can hear but they can't see.

No, what has actually happened is, this blind boy is walking in a garden and he hears a noise and it gets closer and closer, and it's a pop festival, he has walked right into gardens where there's a pop festival going on, and he doesn't know what it's about. That's that one. Dreary artist really!

Actually before we go too far on, can we talk in more detail about the paintings you actually were doing at Goldsmiths' in the early Thirties?

Yes, but I haven't got any just at hand. If you had asked me I would have...

Well, we can talk about them without having them in front of us, because in a way that's easier if one's putting things on tape.

I look on...yes, I look on those early pictures as very important to me, but they were student works in a way, and I was feeling my way, and sometimes they were flops and sometimes they came off partially, or they any rate made it, I felt I was taking a step forward. But I look on them as sort of academic things which happen to turn out, a lot of people like them you see.

Can you actually be precise a bit more about the actual steps you felt you were making with the particular pictures? There's one called `The Red Gloves' isn't there?

`The Red Gloves' was just a straightforward portrait.

And why did that happen, why did you do that?

My mother, I was living at home, and, well, I was living part-time at home, and my mother came in and she said, `There's a dear little girl in the fish shop, and I asked her mother if she would come and pose for you, and her mother said, "I don't mind, if she likes"'. And so she brought this little girl round, and she was absolutely sweet, and she was so...and I said to her, `Well you know, you've got to keep very very still if you have your portrait painted'. And she sat, she hardly seemed to breathe, and she was so good, and she sat for two hours without hardly blinking an eyebrow, and I finished the painting in one go. And so I gave her a bag of sweets, and sixpence or something like that I suppose, and she went off, and when I came back into the studio, do you know what I found? I found a little pool under her seat.

Ah! I'm surprised you ever did any portraits again.

Pardon?

I'm surprised you ever did any portraits again.

(laughs) That's how...have you seen a reproduction of it somewhere?

Yes, I've seen it in a book. But when your mother did things like that were you pleased, or did you think, why couldn't she leave me alone?

She was always very helpful, and I had to discard certain things when she got over-enthusiastic about what I should do and what I shouldn't do, but, yes, I always liked people... Sometimes people come along with brilliant ideas, and they don't recognise the ideas for a time, I've picked it up, but, yes I'm quite happy that people should do that.

So, `Allegro...'

`Strepitoso'.

Is that one of the most key pictures of that period? It's a wonderful one.

I suppose it is really, yes I suppose it is. And, the other one I like greatly is that one, just below, the long one just below, the second row, which is the shipwreck picture.

This is the one that, based on your time in Dorset isn't it?

That's right, yes, that's right. But I didn't paint it. It's played a large part in my life really. I did a little sketch. I was staying, I suppose about 1936 or something like that, with a wealthy woman who was, she invited me to come down and paint at a place on the Dorset coast, almost overlooking Weymouth, and one day I was walking along by myself and I saw the cliffs, and a storm coming up, and I sat down and I did this little painting. I wish I had it now; I think it may have been lost in the, during the war when my place was bombed. But I just did that sketch. And then I did...I went home, and when I was...eventually when I went to Goldsmiths' I conceived to do a large painting more or less based on that picture that you see there. But I found it was impossible to do, because I didn't have a room large enough to do it in, and so all I did was to do a painting of the figures on the left-hand side there with, that part you see, which is almost, just over a third of the picture with the children and the dark figures and the cliffs behind, and just a little bit of the scene there. I did that painting separately at Goldsmiths' and that was one of those that I did, but I did it quite differently, I became much more interested in the rather romantic paintings of Delacroix and those sort of people, and I thought well, I've done all this sort of clear-cut Piero della Francesca sort of inspired work and I must do this different sort of composition. And I suppose I am more romantic than classical really in my painting.

What do you actually mean by romantic in that sense?

I suppose a certain clear-cut quality, and some of my things, like even this one behind, I think is, you can even say, well that picture is 60 per cent classical and 60 per cent romantic, or, you could almost assess pictures in that sort of way I suppose. But I think that that picture with its swirling sort of shapes and things happening is a more romantic work really, that's how I look at it really.

And this one in its later form had that extraordinarily long title that's a Whitman quote isn't it?

It was Whitman, because I had read the Whitman quote I thought, well it was something, it did describe something of what I wanted you see, and so... But I did, that is not...that's a very curious picture because that picture is the sketch that I did for a picture that I showed for an Arts Council exhibition many many years afterwards, and it's now in the Oldham Art Gallery, and I don't think myself that it's as good as that one which was a sketch one.

And where is the sketch now?

The sketch is with a dealer at the moment.

Ah, right.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....at Sotheby's not too long ago actually.

End of F1904 Side A

F1904 Side B

Can you just tell me how `Allegro Stepitoso' came about, because it's a wonderful picture; where did it spring from?

I think it came out of my own noddle. I don't know where else it could have come out of. I think in the back of my mind I've always wanted to slightly pull the leg of very serious art, and occasionally, occasionally I've done that. And in a way, I already said I was very much interested in Piero della Francesca; well you can't find anything much to make you laugh in Piero della Francesca, it's wonderful wonderful design, wonderful...noble figures, everything... And I think, I thought I would paint a picture which owed something to Piero della Francesca but not anything in the sentiment of it really. And I thought, there is a picture which didn't really influence me, although it might have done a little bit, by Carpaccio, do you know the picture? It's a series of small pictures about a saint who had a lion, and...I can't remember what it's about at all, but that might have influenced me, because that is sufficient in a way to start one off, because you never think of a saint walking along with a lion, very tame, which is...I think that may have started it. That's about the only thing I can remember.

Did you paint it actually at Goldsmiths'?

Yes, yes I did, although I did some of the sketches at home.

Because your mother did pose for that one, didn't she.

Mm, yes she did, yes. And she is both, two people in it really, but it was only, I didn't...they are nothing like her, either of the pictures really, but she was very good at...she was slightly plump and she was just the sort of person I wanted. Neither are particularly like her.

But what did you feel, I mean when you said that most of the paintings at this time you felt were steps, student steps taking you on to something else; what do you feel you learnt in that picture for instance?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Difficult to say. I think really, all I would say about it was that it was a step, as you say, and it was...everything was very clear-cut, and every little bit of it was part of a design. I found for instance, there are certain things I didn't...I was discovering all the time. For instance, one of the things, I became fascinated with, although I had invented this comic lion, I wanted to make him spring, and how was I going to do that? Well I experimented, and I found that the, you know there's a tree over the top of it, well if I found

that if I made the branches seem as though they're springing, and that is a thing that is very exciting I think about all trees, you get the feeling of something pushing out, pushing out all the time, and if I could imitate the pushing out of the lion and the pushing out of the tree, those two things would give greater impetus than if it didn't have it so. And then, at the same time I thought that there are two figures going into...you know the picture? Would it help if you got it out, because there's one...if you get it out, or would you like to put it up against one of those things? It might stand up, you never know. Yes, you see, well you can see the branches pushing out there, a sort of, getting extra sort of vitality in the figures. And you can also see, those two figures who are running into the ladies' lavatory at the back there, are running in a certain direction against the spring of the lion, do you see that?

Yes.

And I found that that was quite important to have it. I was discovering all these various things which were happening really.

The two figures also help in the sense that they block the other path, don't they.

Yes, that's right, yes, yes. And, it was all those sort of things were important to me, and...

Because also the branches, again, the branch to the right over the giraffe, there's that feeling of it being enclosed and concentrated on the leaping lion. So did you actually go and look at lions and giraffes, or not?

No I didn't because I wanted a comic lion and I thought I would be fraught with difficulties between realism and the lion, and I would rather have a teddy bear one really. In a way I wanted it to be a bit of a send-up you see.

And what about the costume of the woman on the right?

What, the lady, the nippy girl, the servant?

Mm.

Well she was one of those terrible women that you always find in places like the zoo, and... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I think, I wouldn't have... I contemplated not having a figure there for a long time, but eventually I decided to have one. It might have been in some ways better not to have had a figure there, I don't know.

So, are there things about this picture, I mean you say that you look back and you think of most of this period as student work, this one is a rather splendid one isn't it, is this one you're happy with?

Well it's rather come off I think. No it doesn't, I don't see why...sometimes one can hit off a thing early on, I'm not ashamed. My teacher said when I had done it, `You will never be ashamed of this picture'.

Was this Bateman?

Yes, Bateman said that, yes, yes. And so, I don't know really. I never wanted to do another one quite like it.

And are you glad that it's one of these, that this is one of the ones the Tate has, do you feel it's a good one?

I'm very pleased that they've got it; they haven't got any other early picture of mine. Yes, I am. One often feels...I think I've got about, at least half a dozen or so pictures in the Tate which they don't show very often, but on the whole I don't think...they're quite extraordinary. When a new director comes along, `I saw such a wonderful picture of yours, I was rummaging through,' they said, and then they describe it, and it's a picture that they bought years ago and have forgotten all about really. And, I say, `Well why don't you show it?' And so, `Oh we will, we must, we must show that picture,' but they haven't done so far; they may well do it, I don't know.

I gather this one actually was damaged in the auction house quite recently when they bought it.

I gather, but I gather that it was only very slightly damaged. It's not a very large picture, it's a bit bigger than that.

It's very depressing that it should have been damaged at all, it's extraordinary isn't it?

These things happen I'm afraid.

Are you quite philosophical about that sort of thing?

Well you've got to keep the restorers in business, poor things, and they are wonderful some of these people, they can make wonderful... That picture at the top of the...

`The Presence'?

What?

`The Presence'?

`The Presence' yes, that fell off a mantelpiece or something and was very badly damaged, but you can't see where, they've done a wonderful job. Nearly every old master and things have been knocked to pieces really.

And, another painting...oh just before we get off this one, the `Allegro Strepitoso', the title I understood was suggested to you by a musician friend.

That's right, yes, yes, and I said, `Well what shall I call it?' and he said, `Allegro Strepitoso', and I said, `Well what does that mean exactly?' So he said, `Well it's a musical term, and it means when the whole thing plays full out, and you know, they let their hair down completely, and everything is whizzing. So I thought, well that's not too bad, and I accepted that.

And we talked about music in your childhood. Has music been very much a part of all your life, or not?

Yes, although I've got no talent for music myself. My mother took me to concerts when I was very young, and I don't suppose you ever heard, well you might have done, of a contraption, a pianola, or a player-piano.

Yes, sure.

And, well we had one of those, and so my mother used to play as well as she could, pieces of Schubert and Mozart and all those things, and it was lovely, I got to love those things when I was young, and I think that started me off. And then my mother took me to concerts, and I loved music, I still do.

Do you have music playing while you paint, or do you like silence?

Sometimes. The trouble with that is that if you're really absorbed with your painting you don't hear the music, or if you do it rather puts you off really.

But who do you like listening to most now, are there particular people?

Well of course I always love Schubert and Mozart, and... I have various other people which I also like tremendously, which are sometimes not fashionable, sometimes they are, but I adore Elgar, because in a way it's something very close to England, and the rather sort of pastoral things that he...are wonderful to me really. And, oh, I like Bruckner very much. Curiously enough, I'm not so awfully keen on what's his name, the chap they're playing so much of now.

Britten?

Those endless symphonies. What?

You don't mean Britten?

No no, no I love Britten. Oh, silly of me.

Stravinsky?

No.

No?

No. Oh dear, isn't it awfully silly. Don't worry about it, I don't wish to...I'll tell you afterwards.

OK. And, another painting of this period is `The Amazing Aeronaut' isn't it?

What?

Did you do `The Amazing Aeronaut' at this time? Because I love that, can you tell me about that?

I was in Germany with my parents, quite young, and it was I suppose at a time when I saw those pictures in Hamburg. We went from Hamburg up to the Baltic coast, and it wasn't very nice really, there were all these huge great men all lying on the beach, and they all were

showing off their beautiful bronze bodies, which I didn't like too much. And we stayed at a place where everything seemed white, brilliant sunshine and dazzling light, and I went to bed one night and I had a funny dream, and I dreamt that I was looking out of my window and I heard a funny sort of voom-voom-voom-voom of a motor or something coming along, and to my astonishment I saw a very early flying machine, I suppose about 1904, and it wasn't very high and it was making a terrible din, voom-voom-voom, and it was just over the tops, or just under the tops of the houses and was just coming along the street. And it was terrifying a sort of grey donkey which was flying off, absolutely mad with horror. It might have been autobiographical because when I was very young I was terrified of aeroplanes; they made much more noise than they do now even really, and you felt they were going to fall on your head at any moment, they looked anything but safe. And that's how that happened really. And then I thought, sometime afterwards I must paint a picture of that, because it was very vivid; then I found that one's vivid, the vividness of one's dreams were not at all vivid when you came to put them down on a piece of paper. But that's how that happened.

And, how did it come to have lettering in it?

I think one was associated with lettering because there was a lot of lettering in early aeronautics by which, you know, the `Daily Mail' for instance was a great patron of the early aeroplanes and airships and things; they nearly all had things like `Daily Mail' printed right across them, and other sort of advertising. And I associated that with that sort of period really.

But it's not actually across the plane is it, it's across the bottom of the picture isn't it?

Ah, yes, oh the...yes, that's right, but...yes you're quite right. But that was just a title that I, I thought I would call it `The Amazing Aeronaut' [INAUDIBLE].

But it's very unusual to put the title in like that.

What?

It's very unusual to put the title in like that, particularly at that time.

I suppose it was really. I just thought it was...I didn't think about it very much, I just felt that I... I think, there again I think I did like the idea of lettering on a painting.

Because I was very intrigued because that sort of thing was picked up by Peter Blake or Tom Phillips or people like that so much later, wasn't it.

Well it was really, but it wasn't...I'm sure they didn't see that picture, it just worked round to it really I suppose.

And am I right in thinking it was owned by Rebecca West?

What?

Rebecca West owned that picture, didn't she?

She did, yes, yes she did. That was a little sketch for the big one. I don't know who's got the big one, we could find out. It went to, it was sold for quite a large sum of money in Christie's or Sotheby's.

Right. Was Rebecca West a friend, did you know her?

What?

Did you know Rebecca West, was she a friend?

She always liked my pictures, and I went round and saw her occasionally. I can't say I was an absolute friend. But, about the year before she died I was invited to a birthday dinner, and then she didn't turn up because she had got a cold. But, she was very nice. I knew her daughter-in-law who said she was an old demon; well she might have been but she was very nice to me.

Which daughter-in-law was that?

Peggy West, do you know her?

No.

She's a painter, rather a good one I think, but she's never really been very ambitious. Well I suppose she has been, but she hasn't materialised very much.

But Rebecca West wasn't a sort of major patron of yours, she just happened to have a couple of pictures?

Oh she had more than that, she had, I should think she had about 15 or 16 pictures of mine. She went to every one of my shows, and she bought something. She had a few nice pictures, she had a Bonnard and all sorts of things.

Oh right. And, is it called `The Dream of a Flower'?

`Dream About a Flower'.

Yes; that's this period too isn't it?

It was...that was in my first show, and so it was pretty early, and that was about 1933. And I had, two-thirds of my pictures in that show were flower paintings. Well I learnt a lot about colour from painting flowers, and, I haven't got any of them now, but some of them were rather nice. I rather like that one really.

Was that linked through talking to Nash about flowers, would there have been that...would you have painted flowers without Nash?

Oh well I painted my flowers long before I knew Nash.

Right. But why is it a dream about a flower as opposed to...?

Well if you look carefully at the picture you will see a harlequin in it, do you see?

Oh yes.

And, I was trying to create something which, I was never a Surrealist exactly, but those sorts of things interested me.

So is it the harlequin's dream, or your dream with a harlequin in?

I'll leave that to you! (laughs)

And the other one that I know of this period is `Uncle Percy'.

`Uncle Percy' was an uncle of mine, and when I was young he was absolutely enchanting to me, and I think it's Uncle Percy who is the navigator in `The Amazing Aeronaut'.

Haha!

He had a little waxed moustache, like that, and he was very thin, and he was always enchanting to a young person like myself. He would always pick out of his pocket some intriguing thing that he had found, and I always associated him with a certain, he was a certain sort of magician, and when I painted, I painted two pictures at considerable intervals, but they were both on the theme of my Uncle Percy who was then, who was transformed into a conjuror, standing outside one of those big theatres of, variety theatres. And he has been limited by his...he has been limited by his conjuring all his life because he never had a hall big enough, because he held his top hat out and all these wonderful things whirled up into the sky you see. And so he came outside the theatre, it was a perfectly deserted street, and he at last performed the trick, this wonderful thing, in a perfect setting, and you saw the horses and you saw the camels and you saw the beautiful girls with scanty clothes on, whirring away into the distance, into eternity. And I painted that twice. I don't know where either of those pictures are now. But, there it was.

Does it matter to you that the pictures go away and you don't know where they are?

I would rather like to know where those are, I would like to see it again really, whether they're any good or whether they weren't, I don't know. But he did play a large part in my youth, and my cousin, his daughter, has a portrait that I painted of him, which is quite a good portrait actually.

So he was an uncle on your mother's side, or which?

On my mother's side, yes, yes. Yes, played a great part in my life really. Gustav Mahler was the chap I was thinking of.

Oh right.

I don't...I like Gustav Mahler, and I do like `The Song of the Earth', but some of those long symphonies I find rather too tedious. Sometimes they're beautiful. There it is. Anyway, where do we go from there?

Am I right in thinking you met Helen at Goldsmiths'?

Yes, yes I did, yes, yes, yes.

Was she a fellow painting student, or what was she?

She was a fellow painting student, yes she was, yes, yes.

And you did a portrait of her during the Thirties, didn't you?

Yes, and my friend Jeff Horwood has a portrait that I painted just about, before the war, of her, dressed in a black sort of dress with a scarf over her head; it's quite a nice one really I think, quite nice.

Did she paint you?

No, I don't think so.

What was her work like at this stage?

Well, she was quite talented, but she was always one of those people who were drawn to all sorts of other things. She wrote poetry, she wrote books, she translated a book of her uncle, her great-uncle, from the German, and she has only fairly recently gone back to doing some painting, watercolours. I don't think it's quite her best milieu, I think she paints better in oils, but... She's a person of many different sorts of talents really. But she doesn't stay at things very long, she clears them up and leaves them, and then she doesn't do any more for a long time you see. There's lots of people like that really I think. And she gets very interested in a lot of other people's work, and she was interested in my friend Denton Welsh for instance, and his books. I've just painted a portrait of Denton Welsh's boyfriend which I wondered whether I might send to the Academy, I don't know; it's only a little tiny portrait but I think it's not a bad one.

When you were at Goldsmiths' were you quite convivial, did you go around in a group a lot of the time, or...?

Oh yes, I think we did really. There were a lot of people that... I think one of the great things about art schools which are better than public schools and any other, even universities, is the sort of comrade...camaraderie if you like, which exists I think more than anywhere else really, and one's friends very often in the year that one was at college remain one's friends almost all

one's life. I mean they may disappear for a long time, but they're always quite happy to pick up things which were common to them really. And Goldsmiths' was a particularly happy time. There was very few students there, and a serious, or a chap who was being very serious could often get a whole room to himself to paint.

End of F1904 Side B

F1905 Side A

Just going back to something you said. When you were talking about Gardiner introducing you to Poussin, can you remember really what you learnt about Poussin, what he said?

He was awfully clever really. He drew my attention to Poussin. I mean I didn't think particularly very much about him, and he said, `Well you like William Roberts, don't you?' I said, `Yes, I do, I think he's a very interesting artist.' He said, `Well I'll show you somebody who did it better than him.' And he showed some Poussins against...and he pointed out the fact that he was doing this wonderful rhythmic design, the sort of, all sorts of things which, one was at first put off a little bit by a rather sort of stiffness, or, you know what I mean, a lack of humanity too.. Although his figures all were working, they...I wanted something more alive than those. And eventually he pointed out to me that there were marvellous things in these Poussin pictures, many of the things which I was trying to solve myself.

And when you later on came to teach yourself, would you actually point that sort of thing out to the students or would they have to show a particular interest in [INAUDIBLE]?

I took a lot of what I was told, and I found it very useful, because I must have been luckier than most other teachers because they didn't seem to know all this. And I was very very excited about picture making really, and all the things, and I always, I felt very much like a film director, only my thing that I was producing was much more personal, because you can't produce a great film entirely by yourself, you have to have all sorts of other people come into the media really. But I had the feeling that I wanted to produce something rather like a film, but with great handicaps. I had...there is no speech in it, there is no movement in it, so you've got to invent ways of producing movement, you've got to in a way make your figures look as if they're acting on the stage, and you've got to try and indicate movement, and you've got to do all these various things, and you haven't got any resources except the way that you place the things on the canvas. And so that's an intriguing thing, it's as good as a crossword puzzle really, and all that were things which were occupying my thoughts in this sort of picture.

And one thing I was going to ask you, because of the atmosphere of some of the pictures, was Eliot's `The Waste Land' important to you, did you read that early on?

I read...yes, I'm not awfully good at reading poetry. I did think that Eliot was a very very good poet, and I did read `The Waste Land', but I... Of course somebody like Blake appealed to me more I think, because it was easier to understand really.

And, we talked about you going to the cinema when you were younger, were you going at the period of Goldsmiths', was that an important part?

Yes, I went to the cinema right up until fairly recently, and I hardly ever go now. I would have liked to go, because I always enjoy it providing there's a good film on, but I might go once a year or something now.

But I know before when you were talking, making the parallel you weren't being literal at all, but did you ever consider film-making, was it something that ever really...?

I thought about film-making, but I didn't ever seriously think I wanted to do it really. I thought about making autobiographical films in which you didn't see the hero but his thoughts and things were, and what he saw and what he was doing, I thought that would be rather interesting to do. And things like those sort of ideas came to me, but I never did one. I was rather interested when I saw these television things they made of me, and I was interested to see how they set about it, and some of the things I thought were very clever, some I thought were rather naive and silly.

Like what?

Oh, I don't know. Well if they're doing a biography about one, oneself, and me in particular really, they all were brilliant.....[INTERRUPTION - BREAK IN RECORDING] Now where were we?

You were just talking about the things that were daft and the things that were brilliant in the television programmes made about you.

Well, yes, when he was making, the director was...I think he was very good really, and had a lot of praise for him really, but they wanted always to make it into something that they were wanting me to do, which I never do, and they took very nice pictures of me standing silhouetted against the window and that sort of thing, painting my pictures, and it meant nothing to them that I was painting in absolute blackness, and those little things I found irritating. But he was very good, but he was always trying for effects for himself really, but, I would like to see him paint a picture in blackness but... But I suppose it's a silly idea isn't it really. Anyway, there it all is, and...

So when you say you were at Goldsmiths' just two days a week, what were you doing the rest of the time?

I was painting my own pictures at home, and I haven't got any but I did a whole lot of pictures of Shepherd's Bush, and portraits sometimes, and sometimes I was planning...I was planning things to do at Goldsmiths' you see. But after a bit I left Goldsmiths', and then they offered me a job on the staff there. I had, you know, I told you that after Goldsmiths', and after I had showed pictures in the Academy, because I showed all these various pictures, I didn't show that one, but most of my things that I had done, I showed them, and I got quite good notices and things for some of them, and I was surprised one day to get a letter from a head of an art school at Beckenham, a man named Henry Carr who was a portrait painter, a very good painter really, and he said, `I liked your pictures in the Academy very much, and if you ever felt you would like to come and teach, come and see me'. So I thought, well, I realised that I must have some money, and my parents weren't very rich and they couldn't keep me.

Had they supported you at Goldsmiths', they were funding it?

They supported me, yes, but my father wasn't rich, and he anyway was going to retire very soon, and I didn't want to be a millstone round his neck, so I was quite pleased at the idea of teaching, and he gave me two days teaching there at Beckenham, and I held on to that job from somewhere about '34 or something like that right up until well into the war.

And you held on to it because you enjoyed it, or because of necessity?

I rather enjoyed it really. I quite liked seeing...I don't know whether I'm a good teacher or a bad teacher, but I enjoyed it for several reasons. I mean one was that I got very interested in the students themselves, and another reason was that I liked very much to leave the empty studio and see people and other members of staff which I liked to see. And Henry Carr was a very good headmaster, and...I think it's a very good thing to get out of your studio, otherwise paintings seem to be on top of you too much. I found it's not a thing I quite keep to now because I do go to the studio quite a lot, almost every day, Saturdays and Sundays.

Because you try to work an early morning start, and go on until the light goes don't you; it sounds as though you're quite rigourous with your timetable for painting.

Well I'm not as rigourous as all that; I mean, I go and see the woman next-door sometimes and she gives me lunch or something like that, or a friend comes round, but I don't try and...I think there are enough Weights in the world so I'm not worried about that really.

But when you were at Goldsmiths' it sounds as though you were painting very hungrily most of the time.

Hungrily?

Mm, avidly.

I seemed to waste a lot of time then. Of course when one is very young one has all the business of falling in love and moping about and all that sort of thing.

Had you fallen in love before Helen, or not?

Ah, I suppose so, I suppose so.

Had your heart been broken?

I think I was only...about once had my heart broken. Well not exactly broken, but felt very very... But that I suppose was during the war when one was quite sort of alone in a way, and when one got into funny states of mind in a way very often. I didn't really think I was going to be killed or anything, although, one never knows does one really, what one felt about, because although I didn't feel... Once when I was being trained I was given a bomb to throw, and I was petrified with it really, and it was a complete change of mood when you had this damn thing in your hand. Supposing I slipped over at this moment, anything could have happened really, and I threw the thing and I was jolly...flung myself on the ground, and there was a terrific bang, and that was it, and I came off all right really. But then of course we were living in those days, which were very different to how we live now; I mean if you lived through the Blitz for instance it created an absolutely different situation really. I don't think I was terribly frightened even then. But one of the most terrible things about all this sort of thing, I felt, the poor old Iraqis really, who are terrible people in many ways, but...

But you seem to associate falling in love with the war, and death and...

What?

You seem to associate falling in love and heartbreak with the war. You made a very direct link.

No, I think that, I think you very often found yourself very worried. But sometimes it was very exciting. I don't know.

But, you and Helen have been together really for about 50 years haven't you?

I suppose so, yes, quite a long time.

When did you actually start to be a couple, was that at Goldsmiths' or later on?

It was at Goldsmiths' really, and so in a way it was just part of one's, I suppose life that one felt that one, it was very very lovely to have somebody who was thinking in a similar way to you, and one could discuss all sorts of exciting things which was happening to us all really.

And what do you think she has given you over the years that's expressed in your work? Do you think there are...?

Oh I don't know about that. I honestly don't know. There again I think what one's work, it's very...it's given to one I suppose a sort of placid sort of life that one's work is so separate I think really.

Would you talk to her about your paintings at Goldsmiths'? I mean would you have...?

I suppose, yes I suppose one did more than I talk about my painting now. I don't know whether a lot of people would entirely understand me, because I don't express myself that wonderfully well. Anyway...

Because a lot of your paintings actually are very sympathetic to women. You're either...

I like women immensely really, yes I do. And, well I don't know that one... Of course there are tremendous differences between the sexes, but I have great friends that are men and women too.

But I mean some of them are very good at expressing women's fear, and also ones like the, there are two which I don't know if they are parallel in any way, where there's...I can't remember the title but it's the `Dream of Girlhood', something of that kind?

What?

Is it called...?

Yes.

Where there's a seated woman and then a phantom-like figure, and there's two of them, and I think painted quite widely apart, but it's obviously you getting inside a woman's head, thinking about her age or her death or what she's lost.

Mm, that's right.

I mean, do you think you get some of that sensitivity through Helen or do you think you have it anyway yourself?

No, well I mean I suppose from Helen possibly to some extent, from almost all the women that one knows I think. From my mother, and from Rose, and from... I find that, much as I like women and that sort of thing, some things I dislike intensely about them, and...

What do you dislike?

I don't want to go into all these things very much, but... I don't know really but, there are things about men that I dislike very much too.

Can we just, on the end of this session could we just talk about who you were teaching and what you were teaching at Beckenham. Was it quite surprising to find yourself teaching other people so soon as you had been taught yourself?

It seemed to come very natural to me. I suppose in the meantime, one of the things I was asked if I would teach was to teach young people to do still lives, which I always thought is a basis of learning to paint. You've got an object in front of you and you can paint it in any sort of way you like; I mean it can be a sort of Picasso still life it could be, or Braque or somebody like that, or it can be a very very visual thing in which you are just learning the ABC about painting, and you are trying desperately to get it as close to the thing that you see as possible. And all that opens up a great, a very wide spectrum really of the things that you can teach people. You watch the child or the young student drawing and you can find that there's an emphasis in one particular thing that they like. They may want to build dreams round the old plate and whatever it is on the table, or they want to be terribly literal, and then you try and help them along, what way they want to go. And so it's all rather intriguing, and what one

wants to do really is not to push one's own thing onto people, although you can help them a great deal by advising them how to do a thing if they're stuck a bit.

You mean technically really, how to do it?

Yes, yes. But I've always found that very very intriguing really, and I don't want people to paint like me. But I mean, poor old Johnnie Minton suffered so much on that score because he was so much idealised by young students that, I remember him painting a picture with the students because he thought it might help them and he found, we found at the end of the time there were 20 Johnnie Mintons there, and I don't awfully like that really.

I read somewhere that you had said that listening to John Minton criticising a student's work was like listening to no one else, and I wondered why.

It's quite true.

What were his qualities that that...?

Well he was a wonderful showman, and he had a wonderful sense of words, and he talked with great elegance and was terribly funny. Everybody's only human, and you might have been disappointed if you had heard him give three or four lectures because they turned out to be a bit similar, but the sheer impact of the first few lectures that he gave had a profound effect on a lot of artists really, a lot of students, in his day.

And on you, by the sound of it?

No, not really, because we were both...I didn't...I think we were just very very good friends. I seemed to go fairly, perhaps dully in a way but I kept more or less to my thing, and he on the other hand was continually changing. And he was influenced by all sorts of people, and Colquhoun and MacBryde were two people that he shared a flat with at one time, and then after that he lived with Keith Vaughan, and all these people had a certain effect on him really, he wasn't rigidly saying, I'm not having anything to do with...; he took what he thought was useful to him. And he finished up by becoming very interested in portraiture, and he painted some very good portraits as a matter of fact and was very much influenced by Ruskin Spear. But he was I think, in spite of all that, there was always his own personality shining out very clearly in everything he did, but he was perfectly, he was modest enough to be able to take things from other people. Oh he was a lovely person, and I was always...and a person of great generosity and kindness.

When you say he was modest enough to take things from other people, you could put it differently and say he was weak enough to take things from other people, couldn't you?

No I don't think you could quite say weak, because I think it very often added to his stature as an artist really, and artists very often were very influenced by...I mean look at the whole teaching of art in the old days, in the days of the Italian Renaissance, they would take on pupils, I mean like Titian took on as young apprentices people like Tintoretto, Veronese, and a lot of others, Pisano, a whole lot of them, all marvellous artists, marvellous artists, and their job was not to become marvellous artists but to learn the job and to be able to paint so that they could produce work which to the ordinary man in the street was a Titian, and they were very...but eventually, with all that wonderful know-how that they had got, they could break away and they could do their own work, and it didn't impede them.

Who do you think has been most affected by your work?

Oh I don't know. There are a lot of...there's a person who is a great friend, Olwyn Bowey, and she is a very good painter, and I think she has been rather influenced, but I don't think she is so influenced now, but...and it hasn't done her any harm, she is I think a good artist. There are a few people that have been influenced I suppose, I don't know.

Presumably one of the things about teaching is, as you were saying you can sometimes help students technically, you are presumably having to face their problems and having to perceive what they are trying to do in a way that if you were just painting in a studio you would just carry on in your own direction. Have you ever learnt things from having to think of them from the students' point of view, do you think your own work's been changed?

I think you do, yes, I think you do. I think it is quite true that very often you do learn things. You learn things by other people's mistakes. Sometimes one is...and almost impelled, one doesn't do it of course but one has this great feeling, `Oh let me take over your brushes, I'll finish that picture; I know exactly how I could finish that picture and make something good of it,' and this person is...you know they're not going to make anything good of it really, but, that has come up but it's quite interesting really to see it.

And you would never do what Bateman did and just scrape someone's picture away?

Oh, no I don't think I would do that, and I don't think it would be quite right to do it somehow. But, I don't know. If a person can stand up to that, then it means they're quite tough, which is quite a good thing really.

End of F1905 Side A

F1905 Side B

The first one-man show you had at the Cooling Gallery in 1934. It must have been a tremendous shot in the arm wasn't it?

My mother had a rich friend who was one of the Wertheimers that Sargent painted, and he was a dilettante sort of chap who painted a little bit, and my mother said, `Oh, my boy's a wonderful artist,' and so he said, `Oh, send him round to me and I'll soon tell you what I think of him.' And so, he got much more sympathetic about what I was doing and was rather nice, and he commissioned me to paint a picture which very curiously enough is now in the National Portrait Gallery, a self-portrait. And then he said, `Well, I'll tell you what I'll do...' I found out I think that you could have a show for about £50 in a gallery in Bond Street called the Cooling Gallery, and it was a gallery right at the top of, almost at the Oxford Street end, and not only would they give you a show for a month for £45, but they would also give you, I don't know, 500 invitation cards, and it would be in a top gallery which was a lovely gallery, right at the top of the building, £45 for three weeks. And so that absolutely excited me. And the thing was that there were no lifts in the place, and all the...you have to be rather a youthful sort of enthusiast to go up to the top floor you see. Well, a private view happened, and apart from one or two of my mother's friends who bought pictures, nothing much else happened. And then I was talking to a friend, and I happened to mention that, the critic on the `Observer' then, the Sunday `Observer' had been criticising work at Goldsmiths', and he particularly praised me, and so my friend said, `Well you're mad, why don't you write him a little note and ask him to come along'. I said, `Oh, he wouldn't want to come to see a student's work.' And so, I wrote in rather a slightly trembly hand, ill-spelt I suppose, and any rate I sent a letter to him, and to my great surprise he came, and although he didn't give me exactly a rave notice he gave me a good notice, and people began to come in. And before the show ended, it was quite a success; I mean I didn't sell everything but I sold two-thirds of my pictures, which gave me an independence, and this was all rather before I had got this teaching job you see, it was just at the end of the time that... So, I was very lucky. As I said they were mostly flower paintings, and looking at one or two that I've seen since they weren't too bad really; I mean that one for instance is quite a nice I think one really.

I mean, when you left school you were talking about the fact you weren't a very confident person; by this stage, when you had had a successful exhibition, were you feeling much more secure about yourself and your work?

I suppose I was feeling a bit more secure, yes I think I was, I think I was. And then of course, I went on, ploughing on in the same sort of way, showing in exhibitions, and then I came

across a... Oh then, I think the Leicester Galleries had a...they were having a rather wonderful idea, I thought, a mixed show every year, `Artists of Fame and of Promise', have you ever heard of that exhibition?

Only through reading about you.

What?

Only through reading about you, I haven't come across it otherwise.

Yes. Well, that was rather remarkable, because you would take pictures down to Mr Brown who was a sweet chap and very sympathetic to young artists and that sort of thing, and he would suggest that you might like to show in one of these shows. And it was a mixed, a really mixed bag in which you would find yourself hanging, not with any old Tom Dick and Harry but with Monet or somebody, you know, he sprinkled his rather wonderful Impressionists and people, and one felt so pleased to be hanging next to a Monet or something like that. And he supported, he showed my pictures right up until the end of the war, and I had two shows after the end of the war, but I don't think I had any actual shows before the war, I think I just showed works there you see.

And were your fellow students, were you all worried about getting exhibitions and shows in the way that youngsters are today, or was it much more low-key and haphazard?

Well, I suppose I was lucky, I don't know; a lot of people never thought of having shows you see. But it was quite possible to have... You see the Leicester Galleries was what the Marlborough is today, but it was a much poorer Marlborough, I mean they weren't buying pictures for thousands of pounds or anything like that, but they were showing Epstein and Sickert, and all these people, some of the best painters in the country, so one felt that was rather wonderful. Then there was a woman...no, a couple really, who started a gallery in Grosvenor Street, and they had the idea of picture hire, and what you could do is to either buy a picture, or if you didn't feel quite you wanted to buy a picture or you hadn't got the money, you would hire a picture out for so much a month, and half of the money went to the gallery for upkeep and that sort of thing, and the other half went to the artist. And I had two shows there.

Who were the people, and the name of the gallery?

Pardon?

Who were the people who ran it, which gallery was that?

Oh, what was...? It was run by...oh dear, I can't remember his name now, Derek...can't remember, can't remember. We shall find out for you. Any rate they were very nice people to deal with. And then I introduced, I got them to have a double show of me in one room and Ruskin Spear in the next room, and that, I did quite well, poor old Ruskin didn't do so well, but...

Why do you think that was?

No idea. His pictures were lovely I thought. But any rate he soon made up for lost time and he soon established himself. He had patrons that...well, I mean patrons, they would buy pictures for four and five pounds each, and...but he kept going all right, he had no money, he was at the Royal College and he was on a scholarship for a time, and then he got an odd bit of teaching, rather like I did. But there wasn't a lot of money, but it was enough to somehow plug on with you see.

So was this a very happy period? It sounds as though it should have been.

Oh yes, yes it was lovely. And then, we had our little circle of friends, and all sorts of...people seemed to be much more possible to get to know; I mean Ruskin knew, oh...

Dylan Thomas?

Yes, and we knew all sorts of people really who I suppose would be much too grand to be known nowadays.

But did you go drinking with Dylan Thomas in Fitzrovia and things like that?

I didn't do that myself, no, but I think, Ruskin did, and...I didn't really know him so well, I just met him occasionally, but...

Were you the sort of person who went and sat in pubs, or not?

What?

Did you go to pubs much, was that part of life?

I went to pubs to a certain extent. I wasn't a great drinker, but I went for the pleasure of seeing all sorts of friends, but as a lot of them were killing themselves with drink, people like R.O. Dunlop, do you know him? No, he's a bit forgotten, but a very good painter though. And, I think Ruskin would probably be still alive now if he hadn't drunk so much.

Did you known Nina Hamnett at all, was she drinking [INAUDIBLE]?

I met her but only when she was really such a soak you couldn't understand what she was saying. But I read her book; did you read the books?

About her?

No, she wrote a couple of books.

No.

There's one called `Laughing Torso', I can't remember what the other one's called. They're rather good. Gives you a good idea of what Soho was like in those days.

Right. But for you that was just a sort of little detail in your life, it wasn't very much...?

No, it wasn't a lot really. But we did have this friend of ours that I told you suggested the title of `Allegro Strepitoso' who was a complete Bohemian and drank like hell but was a rather brilliant man in many ways.

Who was it?

His name was Leo Pavia, and he moved about in society. He was a secretary to James Agate, the critic, amongst other things, but he had an enormous sense of fun, and his enemies called him a buffoon but as a matter of fact he was terribly funny, and added a great deal to my education I think really, because he would always talk about books that one hadn't read, and one itched to read them, and he was a really marvellous man from that point of view. And he and I and Ruskin Spear and Helen went out very often to pubs drinking and he would be extremely entertaining. Sometimes he would be in a filthy mood and would be swearing at everybody and so on, but you had to put up with that sometimes. But there it was.

And was it at about this period that you met Kenneth Clark, or he came into contact with your work?

I met Kenneth Clark a little before the war, and he asked me if...he bought a picture of mine, he was opening an exhibition somewhere or other, I don't know where, and he bought a picture of mine which had a quotation from Blake I think, I don't know whether it was that which had attracted him, I don't know really. But he invited me to paint his daughter, which I did, and we got on very well actually, because I think he was a wonderful man to talk to. He knew a great deal about artists and, well of course he had already written quite a lot of books about them, and I always greatly admired him. One of the first things I did when I became Professor at the Royal College was to get him to come along and give lectures, which he did, and he was very very good.

Can you remember when you first met him, any particular conversations with him that were exciting? I mean did he open up avenues you hadn't considered before?

I can't remember anything very much. Well I was always asking him about artists and that sort of thing, and...I don't know whether he was strictly truthful any more than my other person who I had a great respect for, the other teacher, Edgerton Cooper, but he invented such wonderful stories which somehow, one didn't...if they weren't true one didn't mind, they were so wonderful really. A lot of art critics have derided Clark to some extent, because they said he wasn't sound on these things, but I think he was...I like the idea of imaginative... I think the critics today have reached such, they're so boring, I can't read art criticism, it just makes me vomit really. I would much rather have somebody that would add romance to the stories, that's much more, I think more palatable, to me anyway.

Do you think art needs to be written about? Would it be all right if nobody wrote about it?

I like certain stories about artists, I think that's lovely, but, I don't know, I don't... I read this book the other day about Stanley Spencer and I thought it was very good because this man had really tried to find out about him really, and it wasn't... You see most of these art critic people are so...they're only wanting to tell you about themselves and what clever people they are. But, I don't know, perhaps I'm wrong.

Do you think it would matter for example if there wasn't a column in the Sunday papers and the daily papers about art, do you think it would make any difference?

I think art critics are an unnecessary evil really, on the whole.

But do you think there's some value in the sense that even if the writing hasn't got much connection with the artist, at least it means people are still thinking about paintings and exhibitions and talking about them?

Well it's not much good if they're all thinking wrongly is it really? I don't know.

I mean do you ever, do you read reviews in newspapers about paintings?

No, not really. Sometimes, say, if I am showing in a thing, see what they say, and I sometimes get bored with them, but I really ought not to read them because they either annoy me or I think they're silly.

And do you go to exhibitions a lot, are you a great exhibition-goer, or not?

Not a lot, no. I ought to go more than I do, because always when I go, I enjoy seeing lovely pictures. I couldn't help feeling that having seen the Monet exhibition and then seen this other exhibition, and then, we've had nothing but French Impressionists and that sort of thing going on, I suppose I've seen enough Impressionists for the time being, much as I love them.

But do you wander down Cork Street every now and then, or absolutely never?

I wander down there if I want to get to the other end really, but I... I rarely ever go into their galleries unless I see perhaps a friend showing or something like that.

But you wouldn't sort of regularly look down a list of exhibitions and see if there is something you ought to go to?

Once I walked down Cork Street, not two years ago something like that, and it was raining, I was looking in the windows as I was passing, and I saw one of my own pictures hanging in a gallery, and I thought, well, I don't generally go into galleries that I don't know, but I thought I would go in and see this, see whether, what condition it was in, because it was a long time since I had seen the picture. So I went in, and looking at my picture, and the girl behind the desk said, `Oh you're Carel Weight aren't you?' And I said, `Yes I am.' And she said, `Oh, I think...Mr Jacobson would love to meet you.' And so I said, `Oh well that's very nice.' And she said, `Oh well, he's downstairs, I'll give him a ring and see if he will come up.' And he came up, and he was all over me, and said, `Would you like to come downstairs, I've got some of your pictures downstairs?' And to my great astonishment he had got about 30

pictures of mine down there, and that quite surprised me really. And then he said, `Oh I've always wanted to show you, and I would like some time to put an exhibition on.' So I said, `Well it's my 80th birthday in a few months' time, why don't you do it then, a reason for it?' He agreed, and I had that show at Jacobson's gallery. It hasn't done me the slightest bit of good from the monetary point of view, because he had bought up all these pictures cheap, and I think I've only sold him three pictures in my life, and then he always wants to make such an enormous lot out of them that he can't afford to pay me more than I can get from ordinary little dealers you see. But it was rather nice to have a show, and he did a very nice catalogue; you've seen the catalogue haven't you?

Yes. So what do you feel about dealers doing that, sort of collecting work and holding it back, and creating virtually an artificial market in a way?

Well it's a business isn't it really. I don't know really. I don't awfully like it, and in fact I had one quarrel with Jacobson while I was having the show, which was a pity, but it wasn't his fault, it wasn't my fault, it was some rather malicious person. But anyway, I prefer in a way to...you see I can sell my pictures, not for wonderful prices but I can get what I think they're worth, and I'm quite happy. I have the Royal Academy where I can show six pictures every year, and so I look on that as a sort of show place really; various pictures I'm painting for the Academy as you saw upstairs. But the main thing is that I can more or less exist, unless I suppose the country fell into a terrible state and nobody could ever afford any more pictures then I might feel...but there are two or three dealers that I do send pictures to, there's one terrible chap really, an awful man, but he sells my pictures and I don't care really, and he sends me the money for them, and I can make just as much money from this rather obscure man that lives right out of London than I can with Jacobson.

I mean it's been quite important to you, hasn't it, to have your pictures accessible to people, or not, or is that just the fact that it's happened that way?

Well people see my pictures I think in the Academy, that's one, but they perhaps only see a certain sort; they don't see my little pictures which I like as much as the big ones really.

I meant actually accessible in terms of being able to afford them.

Well I like people to be able to afford my pictures really, and if they come to me they will probably get them cheaper than anywhere else really.

[END OF SESSION]

End of F1905 Side B

F1906 Side A

[Interview with Carel Weight in the artist's studio, April the 4th 1991.]

You very kindly got out a picture today that uses `The Day of Doom' as a background. Perhaps you could say something about that for this tape.

Well the sitter is an interesting factor here. He was a model, and he came into my studio in the College one day unannounced, and in a very cockney accent that he had, he said, `Got any jobs guv?' And I looked at him, and he was standing just in the doorway of my studio; curiously enough just behind was a skeleton that looked rather like him, he had a curious...and the whole of the arrangements around, which had come entirely by an accident, I thought were rather wonderful. My picture of `The Day of Doom' was just behind him, but it didn't turn out...it didn't look...I didn't paint this picture from him, but I painted another one in which all the objects were exactly as they were. And I got a great deal of pleasure in painting him, he was a good sitter, and he was the first of about five paintings I did of him.

What's the name of this picture then?

I call it `The World of Mr Stanhope', and it's partly true. He came from Fulham, and I thought at once that there was something that would relate my picture to `The Day of Doom', and so that was a theme of that particular thing. There he is, sitting right against the picture, and almost, you could almost imagine him walking across a street, or just sitting somewhere in the street. And that was the whole idea of that one. The other one I painted, just an absolutely circumstantial sort of portrait of him in a room you see.

With the skeleton?

Yes, yes. But I have done a whole lot of pictures which I can show you in which I have used my own pictures, rather introducing them into my world of portraiture you see.

Can you remember when you first did that? Was it because of suddenly seeing somebody with a picture, is that how it happened, or...?

Not all...no it didn't, but very often, for instance I painted a rather brilliant girl student who was very keen on black magic and that sort of thing, and I borrowed one of her pictures and I used that as a background.

One of hers?

Of her, yes, yes. And I do like that, and I do like always that the backgrounds of pictures should in a way contribute to one's knowledge of the artist, of the sitter. And for instance, when I painted Orovida I painted her in her own room, not only with objects which belong to her but also which belong to her father, Lucien, and her grandfather Camille. I thought all those sort of things seem to me to contribute to the portrait itself you see.

What about, you did Linda Kitson's father didn't you; did you do the same thing there?

No, I think that's not right. I painted Linda Kitson three times. I never painted her father, but I think you may have thought that, I think he bought a picture of mine.

Right.

But, no, Linda is an extraordinary girl, and she was one of my students at college, and...you know her work probably, do you?

A little, yes.

Yes. Well she paints all sorts of weird monsters in her pictures, and in at least, I think possibly in all the pictures I had something of her own in the background, or things which I thought would add something to her in them.

And you did a daughter of Kenneth Clark didn't you?

I did a daughter of Kenneth Clark, that was before the war and she was a little girl then, and I just painted her in her room actually, a rather straightforward painting, yes.

And when you introduce your own pictures into the background, is that usually for formal purposes only, or is it also part of the narrative and the relationship?

Well it's part of the narrative, but it's always, the essential thing is to make an effective and good picture out of these things. So in a way one is looking for two things at the same time; one wants to add to the sitter, and one wants to make it into an interesting composition.

And would you always, if you decided you were going to introduce one of your pictures into the background, would you always actually look at the picture, or is it sometimes your memory of a picture?

No, I look at the picture because I want to get it as close to the actual scene as I can, and so I look on the sitter, and the background, whatever I put in the background, on equal terms, rather like a still life; sometimes the sitter isn't quite so still as the thing behind.

And what about the small differences that there are? I mean there's a...

Well as a matter of fact it's fairly close to the thing, but I haven't always troubled to get the exact look of the people in the windows[??]. But as a matter of fact, when I painted him `The Day of Doom' wasn't in fact finished.

Ah right, so was there a figure with an arm like the one in that, the arm raised just behind him?

Well yes, there was, and there was this figure, had an arm going off.

The woman in the green skirt in `The Day of Doom'.

That's right, yes. And it became all altered. I spent a long long time painting that picture.

So there were figures in it that were painted out, were there?

Yes; they weren't absolutely painted out, I think their attitudes became different.

Right. Did you always in `The Day of Doom' have this slightly empty piece of pavement, which works terribly well, doesn't it?

Yes, I think I did. And you see this man, he was very similar in his sort of slightly orangey-brown trousers, and there it is there you see.

Just coming in on the other picture.

Yes. Slightly different but...

And where is the painting you did of the model with the skeleton, where has that got to?

That was sold, and it's in somebody's collection.

Privately.

I might be able to show you...next time you come, if I can remember, I'll bring along the photograph of it.

Oh right, that will be lovely.

But, I painted about...I like painting models in a way, even rather ugly ones, because in a way I can control them better than I can a sitter who is paying for their portrait, because they can be awfully troublesome, and you know, they fix up a whole lot of sittings, `Oh my husband wants to take me to the Antipodes; we'll only be away about six weeks or something like that'. And then they come back looking like, oh, sunburned and hardly recognisable you see.

So you have to wait for the misery to come back.

Yes. But I quite like painting portraits, but, in fact I could do many more than I do, but I rather tend to put people off if I can.

When you were saying earlier that you have just done, I don't know, is she a teenager, who you had done when she was a little girl.

Yes.

Did the fact that you had painted her before, I mean you say that she is physically very changed and that's interesting in itself, but did anything from the previous picture feed its way in? Would you have done a different picture if you had never have painted that initial one?

I don't think I would have done a different picture, but I would have...because she has in fact changed very very considerably, and it was only when I looked and looked at her, perhaps not at the first sitting, that I began to see there were things which I had recognised before, but they were almost submerged in quite a different... She was a charming girl as a little girl, and she was equally charming now that she has just got married and I painted a portrait as a marriage portrait for her.

Oh right.

And now she is insisting that I should paint the husband, and so I think I had better get on with it before children arrive or it shall never be finished.

Perhaps you should do a parallel portrait to the Arnolfini one.

Yes, well that's possible, yes.

But do you think something like that, do you think you are quite good, through having had that experience at looking at a child and knowing how its face is going to develop in ten years, or do you think that's an impossible thing to acquire?

Well, in a sort of way it is good, because even it makes you flexible, but it's your eyes that you rely on, not on any preconceived idea about the development of a person really.

But does the process of ageing interest you visually, or not?

It does really, yes, yes. But it is absolutely astonishing sometimes, the extraordinary changes that come about. Often very pretty girls when they're young become quite plain, and the other way about, the plain girls suddenly become ravishing.

And I remember one of the characters I was going to ask you about is, the little boy in the blazer in the, is it called `The Silence', the one that the Academy has which I think is to do with Remembrance Day isn't it?

Yes, that's right, yes.

Is that little boy a memory of yourself or was there an actual little boy?

No there was an actual little boy, and I wanted to get three people, different way of life, different sorts of people, each thinking and completely separate. They are neither related or have...the lady in the middle was a sort of, a charwoman from Ireland.

In reality, or you just...?

In reality. The other, the younger man at the further end of the, on the left-hand part of the...was a...he was in the Army with me, and I knew him a bit before that, and he is about the

most boring man I know, but there's something rather nice about him.. And the little boy was the son of another painter.

And did they every actually pose for you together?

No.

Did they pose for you at all, or was it based on memory?

Yes they posed for me on the spot, but I always had them separately, so I wanted them to be isolated, the whole idea was that they would be isolated. I would normally, if I were painting a group, I would like to have several people together you see. In fact I did a family group of a noble lord and there were I think seven children, and the youngest was two-and-a-half, and I went up one summer to a place in Northumberland, and I had to sort of arrange it so that I could get two of them together, and I had to bribe them by saying, `Now if you ride round the...if I let you ride round the field three times you will come back and pose for me for half an hour,' that sort of thing.

And so the three people in the, the one we're talking about in the Academy never met at any stage, even afterwards, they just...

No.

Their only knowledge of each other was through that painting.

No I don't think they did at all, no, unless it was purely by chance.

It's a lovely idea. And is it the silence on Remembrance Sunday, is that what it's about?

That's what it's about, and that was the theme of the picture, and I thought of it because, you know, that happened for many many years, it went on for quite a long time after the war, the two-minute silence, and I always found it a very eerie moment. In fact there was a two-minute silence every November the 11th from the First World War, so I was more or less brought up to that slightly eerie moment, I always thought it was very eerie, when everything was absolutely quiet, except for a dog, or some noise that couldn't be stopped you see. Of course the cars stopped in the early days, everything stopped, but then you would hear a dog barking, wondering what the hell has happened, do you see, to everything. And that was

really eerie I thought. And so, I had always meant to paint that as a subject, and so it eventually happened.

Do you still keep that two-minute silence yourself?

No, no, no.

Because I think it was last year, wasn't it, that a man in the crowd set fire to himself during that two minutes, and you're right, it was eerie.

Yes, I dare say, yes. There was something very awe-inspiring about the whole thing really.

But do things like the Remembrance Sunday service in Whitehall, does that move you at all, or do you feel unconnected to it?

I feel a bit moved in a way, because it's part of one's life, and, well it brings back sorts of memories of when one was very young. But I know that, when I was quite young, you know, I told you that I had trained a bit as a singer, and I always remember painting in a room by myself at Goldsmiths' as a student on that day, and I had completely forgotten about the thing and I started singing Mozart in a tremendous...and everybody was astonished you see to hear this great big bit of noise coming from there. Because they really did take it very seriously.

At least Mozart's fairly reverential in a way.

Yes.

And where is the garden that that picture is set in?

My garden at home. When I first moved there it was a wonderful garden to paint, because there wasn't a lot of flowers in it, and I'm always very lazy as a gardener, I don't do anything like that. My parents always used to make me garden to a certain extent, and I hated it, and I just did as little as I could really. So when I owned a house and that sort of thing, I didn't do it, other people did do things there you see. Well now it's become so overgrown that it's almost impossible to paint, it's difficult to work out any sort of scheme of design that would hold the thing together, so I've rather given that one up.

Did you actually have a tortoise?

Did I have what?

There's a tortoise in the picture.

A tortoise, I did have a tortoise, yes, yes. I think it is in the picture, mm, yes. I think it's dead long ago really.

Are you quite a big animal lover? I know you've got a cat.

Cats, yes. I'm not really, not what I would call...I like cats if they're no trouble to me, but I'm not, I would never keep any myself.

So this was just one tortoise you happened to have at the time?

Pardon?

This was just one tortoise you happened to have at the time?

Exactly, yes, yes, that's right.

Was he a present or had you actually gone to buy him?

It wasn't a present to me; it might have been to somebody else in the house, but what I think...it may well have been a tortoise that could somehow get into several houses and fed by several different people, I don't know. I think they're rather fascinating, tortoises, to watch really, but I find them also slightly repellant.

When you say somebody else in the house, how many people were living there?

Oh, I think three, three.

That was sort of, family, or...right.

Mm. But anyway, I'm at home so very little really, and, I'm here a good deal of the time, and then one gets invited out a lot and one thing and another. I like being at home up to a point, and I play my gramophone, or read or something like that. I don't paint much at home, except when I see something that I particularly want to paint. The road opposite me, where I painted `The Witches' and all those sort of things, there are quite a lot of subjects that I had done

there, but now I seem to be slightly more...I like painting the country rather, and people in the country. Do you want to see any of these things that, one or two things there are that you could see.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Could you perhaps say something about `The Sewing Machine' which actually we looked at just towards the end of the last recording but we didn't say anything about it.

That was painted about 1938 or '39, and that was my mother's house, my parents' house, and it was in Shepherd's Bush, and that was the sitting room, and it was in the evening, the lights were on, it's painted if you remember by, there's a light over her, and there's an old-fashioned sewing machine, and she was rather keen on resurrecting clothes and changing them and all that sort of thing. And so, that...well, I used to go in and see my mother in the evening very often, and that was the sort of thing that I always saw there, she was just sitting at the table, and it was... Out of the window, it was a very noisy house because there were, in those days, various trams still running, two lots of trams met at the terminus just outside the window, and there were buses and there were an enormous lot of noise really going on. Luckily it was over a bank, and the walls of the bank were very thick stone or concrete, I don't know, but almost like a castle, and so not all the noise came in.

It's a lovely picture. Is it in private hands, or...?

Well, it belongs to a friend of mine, I gave it to her ages ago, because she said she liked it and...I had one or two things of my mother, I've got a drawing of her, and of my father too.

And there was one that, I think about the same period, called `Edna'.

`Edna', yes. Well Edna was one of my first patrons, and she was rather beautiful, older than I was, and she lived in Holland Park and she was a collector of things. I think really, I don't know whether she really bought things because she liked them or whether she just thought they were good investments, but she certainly had a great gift, in the days when, I don't know if you know Portobello Road, do you?

Mm.

Well it used to be a wonderful place to find things, and she, amongst other things, she found a Ming horse - a Tang horse I mean, and wonderful Gothic carvings, and, she had a wonderful

eye for things, but she also bought painters, contemporary painters' things, and I seemed to be one of her favourite people, because she could get my pictures very cheaply. I don't know what happened to a lot of them, but there are quite a lot that are reproduced here, but I do know that she must have sold them and other people got hold of them. But she had quite a good...she had `The Football Match' for instance, and a lot of other quite well-known - well, quite known pictures of mine.

How did you meet her, through showing in the Academy or something?

I met her through a friend who, a chap who was a really rotten artist but who was at the Slade, and he somehow met her and said, `Oh I want you to meet a most interesting person'. So I met her, and we became quite good friends, and she was nice, but with a very strong commercial sense. Anyway...

Have there been other individuals who have been very important as steady supporters of your work over the years? I mean we talked a little about Rebecca West having a lot, but...

Yes. I seem to always have...I always, like Lowry in a way, there seem to be a certain number of Weight addicts, not really...I don't know why they bought them, but they did. I mean, Jeff Horwood for instance, who is a great friend of mine, has got about 50 of my pictures, or more, and another chap named Robin Bynoe has got almost as many I think. There are all sorts of people that seem to have got a lot of things; they don't buy them in ones and twos, they buy whole lots of them really.

And has that been...it's obviously been financially helpful but is it emotionally helpful to have somebody steadily collecting, or is it slightly unnerving?

I don't think it's unnerving, no, it's very convenient if you think you've got a source. But one of the things that artists don't have is what they would call a regular income, and if you are fairly sure that some of your friends will buy your pictures, then a lot of the worries of an artist are at an end aren't they, really.

End of F1906 Side A

F1906 Side B

.....telling me about the painting which uses `The Day of Doom' and the model at the beginning, that's in the studio. It's quite interesting from the point of view of the artist being rather vulnerable; I wonder if we could actually record what happened over this.

What do you mean?

The story of the person buying this picture on the right.

Oh well, I've only had a few pictures stolen from me, and that was one of them. It was stolen in a way that, a man came down to the studio who I didn't know, and he said, `Well I'm very very fond of your pictures,' and rather flattered me up you see. And he said, `The trouble is, I haven't got any money at the moment.' And he seemed perfectly all right, and rather a pleasant man. And so he said, `I would love to have that picture.' And so I said, `Well, perhaps if you would like to pay in instalments, we could do that.' And he said, `Oh could we? That would be wonderful.' So he gave me, I don't know, a very small sum, it might have been ten quid or something like that in those days, and he went off with the picture, with a promise that he would pay another instalment in a couple of months or something like that. And two months came and went and I had nothing from him, and then eventually I wrote to the address he gave me, and I heard nothing. And after a little while I wrote again, and again I heard nothing. In fact I never heard from him again, and he had given me a false address. And so, I just thought, oh well, these things happen to people and it can't be helped, one musn't worry about it, just let it go. So, I heard nothing more, and I should think 30 years passed, and then somebody said to me, `A picture of yours is coming up at Christie's'. So I said, `Oh have you got a catalogue?' It was illustrated in there. And I said, `Well that's my picture.' And so I phoned down to Christie's, and I said, `Will you please stop the sale because that picture was stolen from me.' And so, they stopped it, and they withdrew the picture from the sale. I did this under the direction of my solicitor. So, then I had a blow really, because my solicitor is a very nice man but he's very lazy, he hadn't gone to see what the law about it is, and that if a certain time elapses, you can't claim it after a number of years, it may be about ten years or less, and this was well over that time. So Christie's had got their solicitors on it, and I, poor mug, had to pay the costs of their solicitors and my own, and I lost the case, and the person who owned it quite obviously was not the person that stole it. So, I just lost a lot of money over that. And then my friend, Jeff Horwood, who is always very interested in all these things, he was very sympathetic that I lost quite a lot of money over that, but it was entirely the fault of my solicitor that hadn't found out what the laws were. And so he went up and saw the...oh then they put it up for sale, she put it up for sale, and it

didn't reach its reserve, and one of the things about portraits, particularly portraits of men, they don't fetch as much - well they're difficult to sell, because a lot of people wouldn't want in their house a portrait of somebody they didn't know unless they were a very pretty girl or something like that you see, or a great celebrity; well he was neither. So in fact it didn't reach the rather substantial reserve that she put on it. And so my friend Jeff Horwood said, `Well I'm going up to see her,' and he went up to Oxford where she - was it Oxford? I can't remember but it was somewhere like that - and saw her, and he made an offer on my behalf, a rather small offer, for it, and that's how it's here, and it only came back... Then, what was worse about it was that in its process of going from one crook or one person to another, it was rather badly damaged, and so I had to have it put it in order in my own way, and it has cost me quite a lot of money, I don't like to think how much. But still, there it is, and I'm rather proud to have it anyway, it's nice to have it.

Yes. I'm glad it's come back to you.

Yes, yes. But then I've had other things, and one even since then. A woman rang me up on the telephone and said she was getting up an exhibition in Birmingham, would I lend her a picture just for it you see, and so I said well, `Oh yes, all right, I've got very little but I've got a smallish picture'. And she came along at a rather awkward time when I was seeing somebody else. And she came in, and I said, `Would this do?' And she said, `Oh I think that's a lovely picture, I would love to have it.'

What was it?

It was a painting I did in Scotland of a rather dark shadowy figure, and behind was one of those pseudo Scottish castles, imitation French chateaux, with lots of minarets and things in it, and a little picture I quite liked really. And I said, `How long is it going to be away?' And she said, `Oh it will only be away for three weeks,' or something like that. And so, do you know I was so silly I didn't get her address, because I spoke to her on the telephone, she spoke to me on the telephone, and I thought, she seemed perfectly all right. I've never seen the picture since.

Did you remember her name, I mean did you make any attempt...?

I've got her name but I haven't got her address, and so, it's a fairly commonplace name, I don't know.

How long ago was this?

Oh, in January.

This year?

Oh so there's still hope.

No, no hope I don't think, because she would have returned it by now if it was only away for a very short time. Anyway...

Has it made you very suspicious of people, or is that [INAUDIBLE]?

No, I'm always a bloody fool about it really, and I just think I was absolutely an idiot not to have got her address. But somehow, first that she rang up on the telephone, second that she would come down and collect the picture, and if... I should have taken her address, which I didn't do, so it serves me right. Anyway, there it is.

Picking up briefly on what you were saying earlier about splitting your time between home and the studio, the fact that they are quite far apart, and presumably you could if you wanted to, have room in your house...

Had what?

You could, there's space in your house to paint if you wanted to paint.

If I wanted to. In fact I've done portraits occasionally there, in fact very often, I've painted the three things of [INAUDIBLE] in my house, and I have very often. I like to be here for painting my portraits because then I have the sitter, and there are not other people; the milkman doesn't come, people in the house running upstairs cleaning up and that sort of thing.

Do you think it's linked though at all to the fact that in your childhood you had [INAUDIBLE]?

Pardon?

Do you think it has any link to the fact that in your childhood you were split between two households, do you think that's sort of natural to you?

I don't think so, but I've always rather liked the idea of having a studio and shutting the door at 6 o'clock in the evening, or some time, and saying, well that's it for the day, I shall now go home and do whatever I want to do.

Right. Can we go right back now to the...

Mm, gosh. To my birth or something? (laughs)

No no, not that far back. To the build-up to the war. We've talked about you being involved with the AI...

AIA, yes.

Yes, and helping the refugees. And obviously at some point you realised that the war was going to come and that everyone was going to be involved. Can you remember what your feelings were at that stage?

Well, it was a sort of depression. I suppose everybody felt the depression, not only...because it...I thought that I had started my art career reasonably well, and I had a teaching job which I liked, and I saw that all that had got to end some time. I didn't feel that I wanted particularly...I wasn't...I felt that the war had a sort of justification; I felt that the sort of Hitler thing was pretty awful really, and so really I felt that it had got to come about and we would all be drawn into it. But I made no particular effort to join before my time. For one thing, I was not that young; I was about 34, 35, something like that, and whereas I didn't particularly want to join the Army and that sort of thing, I knew that I would be a very bad soldier anyway, I always have a feeling that if they didn't call up any artists the war would probably have been over two or three years before it was, because I don't think I did much good in the war, and I had a heap of frightful discomforts and that sort of thing.

Do you think if you hadn't had to go and do something, could you have shut yourself away and just painted?

I think I could, yes, yes I think I could. But on the other hand, there was a certain feeling that one...if I felt that I was going to be much good as a soldier, then perhaps I might have felt different about it, but I didn't think I would be really.

So what in practice did happen?

I was called up in the normal sort of way and found myself in the tanks, in the Royal Armoured Corps, which was one of the least satisfactory things to be in really from my point of view because I'm not at all mechanically-minded, and most of the people in it were people who had been rather carefully selected; they were people that kept bicycle shops on the outskirts of Birmingham and that sort of thing you see, or worked in a garage or something you see. I didn't have any of those particular advantages. I found the training of soldiers, and shooting and that sort, you know, practising shooting, very distasteful. Curiously enough I was rather a good shot, and they all thought me a complete dud but they did admit that I could shoot.

Do you think you could actually have shot a person?

Well I would try not to I think. If it were a matter of them or me I suppose I would have chosen them, but it's very... You know, it's very extraordinary. You can get worked up into a certain state and think, well, it wouldn't be so...to be a soldier it shouldn't be such a very difficult thing. But, I remember when one was throwing hand grenades, not very nice things to throw really, of course what happens if you, you know, you throw it like a cricket ball, but supposing you tripped over something at that moment, you would be blown to smithereens, and really when I did that sort of thing I was really frightened. And before that I thought, oh well, taking it purely...just expecting these sort of things; but when one is faced with death, it's quite a different matter you know, at least it was for me; it may not be for you, but there it is.

And were you able to express any of this at the time, or did you all have to pretend that you were great fighting men and everything was wonderful?

I didn't pretend to, no I didn't pretend to, and the sergeant and people rather thought I was the dud of the place, which I probably was. I had a rather...they attempted in all sorts of ways to rather bully one, and... You came across lots of sadistic people; I mean our sergeant for instance on occasion would put us through it in a way that, drilling for instance, you had rifles and things and you put your rifle, they say, `Shoulder arms,' and then expect you to run at the double. Well, no sensible person would ever tell them to do that, because what it did, it took all the skin off your shoulder, but that, he said, `Well, that time you see what...I was just punishing you all because you weren't being put through your paces'. It was just pure sadism. And that sort of thing you see.

It sounds like a re-run of your grandfather.

Well in a way, yes I think it was.

And did the other people sort of buckle down to it more, or not?

I think they were more adaptable to it, yes, I think they were. And also, I was one of the oldest there, and then I had to keep up with the others. If we had a great cross-country run, I found myself coming in last, or practically, because I was that much older than the others and they could take it in their stride.

And did you meet anybody there who became a friend at all?

Oh yes, lots. I enjoyed certain of the things. I enjoyed meeting all sorts of people. There was a professional footballer on the bed above me, I quite liked him, but I did meet some very very good friends. I'm only telling you really about this initial stage of the Army which was...it was particularly severe; I mean they put you through it to harden you up, and that was the object of the thing really.

Where were you?

I was in Yorkshire, at Catterick, which was a famous training ground really, first of all at Warminster and then Catterick, but after that I went to...oh I was...I had become very friendly at the early part of the war with Lord Clark who was...and I wrote to him a fair amount, and I said it's all pretty awful. He wrote me back very sympathetic letters, and he said, `Well I'll try and get you out for odd things to do.' And he was already interested in founding the war artists thing, and he used to get me out to do paintings, and perhaps I would get away for a month or so doing paintings of things to do with the Blitz. I had to do that painting which I think you know, the four of the bombs on the zebra house at the zoo, I did that one.

Yes. Did you go and look at the zebras, or how did that happen?

No no, it was all done. It was actually...and I had to try and find out exactly how it was, what happened, and so I went there and I saw the various attendants and the doctors and people who would describe the whole thing, a bomb dropped on the zebra house, destroyed part of the cage that they were in, and killed a number of them, but a few of them got out and stampeded and ran like mad things all round the zoo, and one of them in fact got right out of the main entrance which was open, and was chased by an attendant in a, it was an Austin Seven I think, and eventually they cornered it and brought it back. But I knew exactly where

the cages had caught fire and that sort of thing, so it wasn't too difficult to imagine what had happened.

It's absolutely a perfect Carel Weight story isn't it.

That was all right, yes, that was fine.

And it's almost like a continuation of `Allegro Strepitoso' isn't it.

Yes, yes, yes.

And, why did it take that form? Was it always going to be [INAUDIBLE]?

Well I wanted to show...I felt it was difficult to show the whole thing in one go. I wanted to show the animals running around the zoo and even the incident of the man, the zebra being chased out of the zoo down towards, oh, wherever it is, in the main road you see. But then I did another one before that, which you can see in the War Museum, called `The Recruits' Progress'.

Ah, yes, I saw the photograph of that, yes.

Well there are four pictures of those.

Can you talk about them in some detail? You had to really argue to get permission to do that didn't you, I seem to remember from the letters. Helen wrote and...

That's right, yes that's right. And they sent me there, and I saw those for the first time when they put them up in the...they are on show in the War Museum now, and I saw them recently, well, quite recently; I was quite pleased with them really because I didn't know how they would turn out.

When did the idea occur to you? Was it something you saw that triggered it, or what?

Well it was my life, and I took four incidents, the sort of being bullied in one of those early morning parades; a moment...the medical inspection, the very early morning where we went through a sort of thing to make sure you hadn't got VD or something like that; and then there was one more jovial scene, Saturday night in the local pub. I can't remember what the other one was.

And did people pose for you?

No. No I had to make it up.

And were the recruits aware that you were looking at them with that sort of thing in mind, did they know you were painting at all?

No, no I didn't see that there was any need to tell them about it. But, I think some of them were rather jealous when they heard that I had got a few weeks off to do them really; one sergeant in particular was particularly awful. But on the other hand - I don't know whether this is wasting a lot of your time, because I'm going... I remember after, there was another sergeant who was a little bit...he put us through all the very arduous and tiring afternoon, what they call square-bashing, which was the parades on the concrete ground, and at the end he said...he was famous for this voice which was like a fog horn, and he said in this thunderous voice, `Company C, dismiss, all expect Private Weight'. And I thought, what the hell had I done? I thought I was being reasonably all right. And then, when everybody had gone, it was only me and the sergeant there, he came strolling up to me and said, `I 'ear that you're a artist.' And I said, `Yes'. He said, `Well, I do wa'ercolours too; would you come down to the sergeants' mess, come down and stand at 9 o'clock outside the sergeants' mess and tell me, I want you to see my watercolours. But my gawd, I don't want any of the chaps to know that I do them.' You see in those days of course it was the greatest piece of effeminacy that anybody would think of ever doing watercolour.

Did you tell the other recruits that you were an artist, did they know?

Oh I told a few, yes I suppose, but not...

Can you remember their reactions?

Oh, rather, you know, they were rather amazed really.

And what was this fellow's watercolours like?

I can't remember now, but I tried to be as constructive as I could about them.

It must have put you in quite a difficult position, given that he could give you hell on the parade ground.

(laughs) Oh well. He wasn't a bad chap really I think when you got to know him. They were all...well they weren't all, there were some that were absolute horrors, but, yes. And then actually, through Kenneth Clark I got transferred to the Royal Engineers.

End of F1906 Side B

F1907 Side A

Just before we get you transferred, did the Yorkshire landscape have any effect on you? It's very flat up there isn't it, that particular bit?

No it isn't really, it's very beautiful, but I never got time to do anything much really.

It's not the...I don't know much about the Army, it's not the piece that just joins on to the moors then, that part?

Well yes it is, yes. I did do some rather beautiful walks there, on a Sunday afternoon we sometimes got the time off and we went very often to see a woman who was reputed to give soldiers very good teas, and how she got the stuff I don't know quite, but we paid her for the things but it was a very nice break for one, to get out of the camp, which might have been about five miles across the moors, which was nice.

And did you get any time to do any of your own painting during this period? Presumably not.

Not at that moment, but then, as I said I was just...Clark got me...he said...there was a rather silly idea that artists would be very good at drawing maps. Well they weren't, but, it couldn't have been nicer for me because I got out of that, and I found myself amongst all sorts of artists, because they had all been recruited, very few of them had turned out to be very good at drawing maps at all, and I wasn't very good.

Where was this?

It was on the edge of north Devon, just over the border. There's a very famous beauty spot called Llangollen, and we were just on the borders of, the English border, called Ruabon. And the officer in charge was a real, he was a real human being really, and was very sympathetic, and rather pleased to have a lot of artists there. All sorts of people were there. I wasn't there just at the time, but Willy Scott, William Scott was there, and I met all sorts of very nice and delightful people; they were much more the sort of people that I would be dealing with you see.

Were there are stories about William Scott while he was there? Did he leave any kind of reputation behind?

He was an even worse soldier than I was I believe, but, no, I don't know of anything particular.

So what was the day like there? You got up first thing in the morning and started drawing maps till dusk, or what?

Well that was the sort of idea. But you had also, you weren't entirely free from other things, and one of the things was to blow up things, places, you know, so we took charges of gunpowder or whatever one was using at that time and blew some of the cliffs, and it wasn't a very pleasant thing to do either. What you did was to put the thing, bury it right into the... I remember once we had done that, and then we came right back into a place of safety, and then the sergeant...you know, these things that you push down a charger, like you see in westerns, and nothing happened. He had pushed it down hard, and there was just a faint rumble and nothing else you see. And so we were a bit perplexed, including the sergeant, couldn't think what had quite happened, better go and see what's happened. So we went up, we started climbing up towards this thing, and suddenly we saw the whole of the front of the cliff coming towards us, disintegrating and coming down in great boulders. And we turned and we fled, and great big boulders...how we got down in time I have no idea, but curiously enough nobody was hurt.

Did you ever paint it?

What?

Did you ever paint it?

No I didn't do it, I didn't.

Because...

It would have been rather a good subject really, but...

Do you tend not to paint things that are too close to you like that? I mean, had you heard about it I can imagine you painting it, but I mean for instance you didn't paint, as far as I know, your own studio when it got bombed and burnt.

No.

Which could have been another sort of...

No, I didn't, no I didn't. Well I saw it, to me, in a different sort of way. It wasn't the blowing up that upset me so much as the loss of everything, and...

But I mean, a lot of your paintings are to do with fright, and some with fire, I mean in the sense that, `The Day of Doom' was inspired by that.

Yes, yes.

That both the incident of the rocks coming down and the studio could have...

They could well have done, yes. I think that, possibly if I were having a tranquil time or something I could have thought about that and done it, but I didn't have that sort of time. But what we did do was that the colonel came to us, and I think I've got rather a nice thing for you people. You've all by orders, you've got to go down and attend church on a Sunday, but if you go down to the early service which was about, oh I don't know, it might have been about half-past 6, an ungodly time in a way, and it was a mile or so, two miles down to the place, he said, `I'll excuse you all duties and you can go out and do your watercolours'. So that was a godsend to us really, and we went off. And there, in that part of Wales, was absolutely beautiful. There was the River Dee, and it was becoming, it was early summer, and whenever we got the chance we went down there. Sometimes I would get an evening off and I would go down with...we only had watercolours because you couldn't carry about anything much more than that, but...

Had you used watercolours much before?

I used them a bit, but I painted entirely in watercolours there, and at the end of the summer I had enough...I got a group of friends who were also painting these things, and I arranged to have a show in London, and we did very well, I think I sold all my pictures and they sold quite well. And it was in Constable's house in Soho.

How did it come to be there?

Well that's where he lived.

And can you describe them, what they were like?

No, they were just local views, local...but I think they were rather good some of them. There were one or two people who were students from the Slade, and there were some girls from the ATS who were, one or two of them I kept up with and I see occasionally now.

Did they carry on painting?

Yes. Well one in particular who lives in Cambridge is a very good painter, and she does sort of impressionist landscapes, and her painting hasn't changed so very much since she was there really.

What's her name?

Her name was Robin Mackertich and she was half Polish, and then, she's now Robin Drewe but she still calls herself Mackertich professionally. But there was a lovely man who was a great friend of mine, Pat Gierth, who was a commercial artist, and he, I think I helped him rather a lot with his painting, but he did [INAUDIBLE] and he did some extraordinarily good, nice things really.

Do you think your own work would have been different in any way if you hadn't had this period in Wales? Was it significant at all, or was it...?

Awfully difficult to say isn't it really, but, I don't think it changed very much.

How long were you there?

Well, I should think about eight months, six or eight months.

So it was a relatively painless time in terms of...?

It was relatively painless, yes it was. And everybody was...well I say everybody, but most people were extremely pleasant and nice to know really. Some remained my friends afterwards, I saw quite a lot of them. There's one chap, and I can't remember his name either, but he's a lecturer at the Tate at the moment, and... But I think it did play havoc, not so much with the older men but with some of the young ones, because one of the most promising chaps was a very brilliant water-colourist who came from...from Bristol I think, Bristol, yes, and he came out of the Army and he went to the Royal College, and curiously enough when I went to the College I found him there, but, he got married and then went completely mad, and how, one would have thought that at last he was able to do things he wanted to do, but he

wasn't able to take it and he was...and he used to write me mad letters, and came to see me once in the College when I was there. But afterwards I heard he died. It was very tragic really.

So what happened after that, why were you transferred again?

Well, it was getting towards the end of the war, at least, perhaps it wasn't but it was getting on a bit, and again Clark said would I like to go into the, to be transferred to the Royal Education Corps. And I thought, well that sounds rather good, so I said, `Yes, I would love to,' and he arranged that and got me there. I think I was the only artist - no I think I was the only artist in that outfit, but also the only person who didn't have an honours degree, which was, I quite enjoyed. And so, I was transferred with the rank of sergeant, which was a surprise to all my friends, but...

And to you?

What?

And to you?

Well, no, because I did know that this thing went with a sergeant's rank, because in a way you had to be something above, or they wouldn't take any notice of you, you see.

I mean did the ranks mean anything to you?

Well it meant a little to me, because a sergeant's mess is more comfortable than a soldier's one. And I was then, and I suppose Clark had it in mind, he was thinking in terms of having the fine arts represented; there were lots of people in hospitals with war wounds and things there, and if there was somebody who could encourage them and get the materials that they wanted and let them get on with things, it would be therapeutically very good for them, and as...and he also thought in the future, if war comes to an end you've got all these chaps who would have to stay in the Army for some considerable time after the war, and they could arrange courses of appreciation of art and that sort of thing you see. So I suddenly found myself in charge of all the art in the London area, and that was rather good because I knew how to do it. I could get all the best teachers.

Like?

Well, Ruskin Spear, oh...you see I did know an enormous lot of people, Victor Pasmore. And I arranged, I started having a series of day courses of appreciation and practice of painting, and we arranged it so that they might have two or three lectures, and generally practising artists, and perhaps a little time painting themselves and seeing what they could do and so forth. And that was very popular. And while other people were trying to arrange music things and that sort of thing, I had already got about three of my things off, and so I rather distinguished myself.

Did you do any of the teaching yourself, or...?

What?

Did you do any of the teaching yourself, or were you principally orchestrating it?

I did a little, yes, when I could, yes, mm. And appreciation of their works and that sort of thing. That went very well. And then, towards the end of the war, there was a chap named...well his surname was Richards, who was a war artist, was with the Parachute regiments, and he was killed, and I applied for the job and I got it.

The fact that he was killed didn't put you off?

I don't think it did, no, I think it was just...but he wasn't the first to be killed, there were about four or five people killed during, on active service in the war. One was killed in a submarine, and...yes they didn't get off free. And then you see, I suddenly found myself lifted to sublime heights and was then a captain. And I went out for the last year of the war, the war was...no, the war was just about coming to an end and I went out for a year in, first to Italy, and then I really did enjoy myself, and I always took it as a scholarship from the Army, for the time I spent wasting my time.

Had you been to Italy ever before?

Never, no, no that was wonderful.

So can you...what was your itinerary, how did it all happen?

Well, I saw...it was more or less left to me. I had to report to various people during my time there, but if I could satisfy them of what I was doing I had a pretty free hand. And so I went

to...I wanted...I landed in...we went on a troop ship which took about three weeks to get there, because they had to dodge through possible submarines still about, or mines and things.

Were you a good sailor?

Well we didn't run into very bad weather really; I must say I was tremendously impressed, coming into, and delighted to come into the Bay of Naples, and you know, they always say it's the most beautiful thing in the world, and it's no joke, it is actually the most beautiful place I've ever seen. On a spring morning, sailing into the harbour there, and first of all passing Etna and Stromboli and then later in the morning you come up to the Bay. And then, they hadn't got anywhere specially for me to stay so I said, well I'll sleep anywhere you like, and so I went into a camp on the hills overlooking, and there I saw for the first time, I saw fireflies, and it was so like fairyland, and wonderful really. And, I stayed a little while, enough time to look around in...you see it was not very good from the point of view of seeing art, because, well it was to a certain extent but nearly all the museums were shut of course. But then, my aim was to get to Rome, because what I meant to do was to commandeer one of the studios in the British School, so... I had all sorts of adventures going up there; I suddenly found myself, because I was a senior officer going in the train I was Officer in Charge of Train, and I thought, well that's all right, I'll have a nice comfortable seat or something. It wasn't quite as easy as that, because when we reached Caserta...no, what's the place, there was a terrific battle on the way up. We had come up, and you see it was a very long journey up to Rome, although you can do it in a couple of hours or so now, but all the bridges had been blown up and you had to go to a certain spot and cross a very flimsy sort of rope bridge, and get to the next part where there was another train waiting for you to take you to the next bit. And you had to do that several times. And when we came to Monte Cass...whatever it is, we had to stop for lunch.

The terrible battle hadn't taken place at that point?

What?

The battle hadn't taken place at that point?

It had taken place, yes.

It had, right.

Yes.

And did you know about it?

Oh yes, yes one knew all about it, the Germans and Austrians had retreated from there. But there were a whole lot of the inhabitants there who were peasants, and they were pretty well starving, and I had to, I had instructions that on no account must any...I had to post sentries on various points on the train, and if any of these poor unfortunate people came near they were to be shot, and that's not a very nice thing to have to do.

Did you do it?

Well I had to, and I did say to them, well, I should shoot to frighten them away, you see. But, I'm sure I would have been reprimanded and punished in some way for saying that, but... Anyway, luckily nobody came up, but I didn't enjoy my lunch there, in case something happened. Then we proceeded, another train. I think I took a whole day to get there, into Rome, and I first found a...I stayed about two days in a terrible hotel which looked very grand outside but it was full of bugs, and so I got away from that as soon as I could, and I stayed in the grandest place, next, which was more or less a place for Americans and that sort of thing. I don't know how I got in that, but I did somehow or other. And I met correspondents and those sort of people up there.

Anybody in particular?

I met a man named Eric Linklater, do you know his...?

Oh yes.

Who was rather nice I thought, and I had my first dinner there with him.

What was he like?

Very Scotch, quite amusing, rather conceited, but rather old. He was, I should think, about sixtyish, old for a soldier - well he wasn't a soldier, he was a correspondent for one of the papers, a Scottish newspaper I should think. And I met a whole lot of people on the boat too going out; I met a university lecturer, I don't know what...he was a philosopher, in philosophy, in Cambridge I think, and...I can't remember all the people I met, there were quite a lot. I caught up with a lot of my reading, which was rather nice too.

You mentioned reading `The Pre-Raphaelite Dream', something like that, is it called?

Yes, that's right, yes, yes.

What is that? I don't know what that is.

`The Pre-Raphaelite...' was it...I don't think it was `The Pre-Raphaelite Dream', it was the Pre-Raphaelite something-or-other, and it was by a man named...

Gaunt.

Gaunt, William Gaunt, yes. He wrote a series of these books which were rather good really - they're not very good really, but he did...all those things were not known much about in those days I don't think.

Can you remember what else you were reading?

I can't remember off-hand, no, no, it's a long time ago.

So having got to Rome, what...?

Having got to Rome I went around, charging round to see various people, and what I had to do in a way was to somehow get to...you see Henry Carr, who had been my...he had been there before me, and he was a portrait painter, and he painted all the generals, he painted Eisenhower and he painted, well the English generals and the French ones, and so, I didn't particularly want to paint portraits anyway so I was very pleased when I was more or less, they said, well you...what you ought to be doing is to paint all the various buildings which, or places which sustained damage, monuments and things. So I planned various places I should go to. The trouble in a way was that, although I had the magic rank of captain and I wouldn't be shot if they saw me painting things in places I shouldn't, where troops or people shouldn't be, but I had no way of getting to these places. I had only to listen very carefully and find out whether certain people had to get up for some reason or other to another part, and then get there, and then find somebody who will bring me back. I did occasionally get a flight up to Milan once, which was quite interesting, but I didn't do any painting there because I had to come back too quickly. I did see `The Last Supper' which is amazing that it was still there, because the Americans dropped a bomb, well, in the next room almost, and so that wasn't...

But so, what did you feel about `The Last Supper'?

Well, it was a ghost of a picture, but it was a very marvellous ghost, and I would love to see what they've done with it now; whether they've spoiled it or whether they've been able to get it more or less as it was, I don't know. I thought it was, I was tremendously impressed with it really.

End of F1907 Side A

F1907 Side B

Well it was the most wonderful ruin, but you had to use your imagination to know what it was like originally. But for all that I was tremendously impressed, one of the things that really impressed me most of the things I saw in Italy.

`The Last Supper'.

Mm. But then...I went to Caserta, which is a very old Mediaeval town with a castle, I suppose dukes live there, and I did a painting of the part where the English and Americans signed the peace pact with the Italians, I thought that had some interest, and I painted a great staircase.

It was in a palace, wasn't it?

What?

Was it in a palace?

In a palace, in the palace, Caserta palace, yes, yes. It was a rather wonderful place. I suppose it didn't hold a candle to the great palaces in Europe like Fontainbleau and Versailles, but it was very grand and, it was in a state of decay really, because they hadn't done anything to it for a long time.

Had you in the past ever studied architecture at all? Had you thought much about it?

No, but I've always been interested in architecture, and I remember the chap that talked to us about it in art school, he said, `If you really think about, if you get to know about architecture, and you're travelling about, you will never be bored,' which is perfectly true. And, so I stayed a little time there. I don't think I painted anything else but that one picture there.

Wasn't there some sort of art school going on there?

No, but there was when I got to Florence. There was an art school... Of course the war was over, and they were now giving troops the chance of doing things, or preparing themselves for the outside world, and a lot of them just felt what they really wanted to do was to draw, and learn about the wonderful places that they were in for the first time, and not having to think about Army duties and things you see. So that was very popular, and they started an art

school there, but it was moved while I was still there, and they moved to Perugia - that's right, it was Perugia, and I went up there, and I did quite a lot of painting in Perugia. First of all I did paintings of various people taking the courses there, and then I painted a few pictures of the old town and with the troops there, and going about in the cafes and that sort of thing.

There's one of your paintings of somebody standing, a man standing on a balcony, where you see the back view of his head; was that painted there?

Oh, that was in the, I think, I think it was in Perugia, I think that was in Perugia, and it was just, I just saw him against the light, he was not taking in a rather difficult lecture, and I did that one there. And I also did...I did one of the rooms, a dressmaking class for the ATS, and there were a lot of men in it too, I don't know if you saw that picture. And then I painted...but my chief thing when I was in, well in Florence, was to paint the bridges, because the Germans, when they were retreating, they blew up all the bridges capable of bearing tanks, which meant every bridge except the Ponte Vecchio, you know the Ponte Vecchio don't you, with the shops and things on it, well that was not a possibility of heavy things going over it, so what the Germans did do to prevent anybody using that bridge very much, even for light things, they blew up the entrances, the entrance to the bridge, the neighbourhood around the bridge, on both sides, so it was quite, you could go across, you could still walk across but that was about all you could do. And, I painted a picture, got up onto a ruined house and painted a picture showing how close the bombing, that bombing was to the great treasures, and there's the Michelangelo `David' just there, and the houses, the blown up ruins in the same picture, just between, a few yards further on really. I did that, and I did then a painting of what was left of the various bridges, generally just a mound of masonry, and one of the most beautiful, this bridge of Santa Trinita, was a complete ruin, it no longer existed. But in a most miraculous way, afterwards they pulled out all the original stones and they rebuilt the bridge, and when you go across it you could mistake it for, that it had never been blown up, it's quite an amazing piece of masonry and whatever it was.

It must have been a very strange introduction to Florence really, to see it in pieces.

Yes, yes it was, yes. I stayed a little time, and explored the various places, and then I went on north to Verona. Of course Verona is a rather wonderful town from a Mediaeval point of view, because it's in a curve of a tributary of the Po and it's like that you see, and the town is in that piece there, so when they were having to defend it, there's only one part that you could attack them, and that is a very small band of ground, as I say they've only got a very small bit to defend you see. And so, there the Germans had blown up all the bridges in exactly the same way and I painted two or three of those. They didn't, again, blow up the Ponte Vecchio.

Very strange you know, really, when I came back a horrible little reporter came back and said, `Ah, you must tell us all about, from your point of view, how devastating the bombing of the treasures were.' And I said, `Well, you know, we are on very dangerous ground there, because the Americans blew up everything on sight, and we were much better, but the Germans were immaculate about what they should blow up and what they didn't.' And so, I thought I had made that quite clear to him. The next day in the paper it said, `War artist tells of the horrors of the Nazi...' thing you see, so I might just as well have kept my mouth shut.

What was the atmosphere in Florence and Verona at this time?

Well it was a feeling of great relief, and their great feeling, not only in Italy but in Austria too, of getting back to a sort of peaceful end of things. In Austria it was even more marked. I didn't like the Austrians because they always told you how they hated being Nazis but they were absolutely amongst their staunchest supporters, but what they did do, which was marvellous, by the time I got up there, and it was only shortly after, very, a matter of a few months after the war, they had got all the theatres open, all the...you could choose two, although the opera house in Vienna had been sort of burnt to the ground really, they had got a choice of operas. You could go to which opera you wanted to, and I used to have a box every night there.

Oh, wonderful.

Well, am I...I've sort of gone on too much, but I've been...

Did you actually get to know any of the Italians, did you mix with them or were you really mixing only with the British?

To mix with what?

The Italians.

Oh yes, I did meet some Italians. I didn't awfully like the Italians in Rome, although I met some of them, they seemed to be rather snobbish and, I don't think they liked us very much.

Did you meet any Italian painters?

I met a very bad sculptor who was responsible...do you know Rome?

A little, yes.

Do you know that monstrosity of modern sculpture with I don't know how many thousands of figures in it, St...Victor Emmanuel?

Oh, yes.

Well he was one of the chief architects in that, he was a confirmed Nazi, or whatever you call them, and I didn't take to him very much. Yes I met a few, not very famous, though I did meet people after, when I came back, I wanted to see de Chirico but he wasn't there at that time, but he had a show in London shortly afterwards. It wasn't very much good because I could speak hardly any Italian and he couldn't speak any English so we didn't get on very much.

And did you get any sense of whether it would have been different being a practising artist in Italy than in England in peacetime? I know you were there at an odd time, but did you get any feel of it?

I think that the Italians had a pretty lousy time really. I think there wasn't a lot of food, and...it's a difficult question to answer, I don't know, I don't know.

And, you didn't like St. Peter's terribly much I seem to think.

What?

You didn't like St. Peter's terribly much I seem to think.

I suppose I didn't. I don't know. I went round with a chap in charge of the fabric there, and he took me down into the crypt of the...and some places which they had only just recently discovered, that was very interesting, of Roman remains of the temple underneath there. That interested me a lot. I didn't like the cathedral very much, I mean... It's a very curious thing but I've got a...when I look at St. Paul's I always get a tremendous kick out of seeing the dome, it means something, it's so beautiful I think really, it has a sort of abstract beauty which I love. I didn't get the same feeling about St. Peter's.

Are you talking about the outside view of the dome?

I'm talking about the outside of the building, and the inside, I found the colossalness of the... It didn't move me a great deal. I suppose, perhaps if I went back now it would move me more, I dare say, but it wasn't like the splendour of St. Mark's in Venice for instance.

You didn't go to Venice on this war trip, did you?

What?

You didn't go to Venice on this trip in the war, did you?

No I didn't, I've been back there, I've taken students over there from the College on two occasions. I love Venice, I think it's so wonderful. I only flew over it but I never...but I did go to Rimini, because there was some fighting round there, and also, what's the other place, Ravenna, on that coast.

Did you go to Urbino?

Urbino? I didn't, no. You see I had...it wasn't really like a holiday entirely because I had to look as if I was doing some work, and in fact I did do a lot of work really, but I kept to places which were affected by the war. I went to Pisa, and it wasn't very much damaged but there was some...in the part adjoining the cathedral a bomb had dropped and destroyed some very fine murals there.

Did you go to Siena?

Yes, I went to Siena, but that was really, I shouldn't have gone because nothing much happened there, it was an open city, but I did...I liked Siena very much.

Going back to the Sistine, to the St. Peter's, you had thought you might do a painting there with British...

Oh I did a comic painting really, yes.

Can you tell me a bit about that?

Not very much, except that everybody was rather relaxed, and there were a whole lot of English clergymen who had come up to see the...and they were taking all the girls round and I thought that was rather funny, and so I did...that was all really, it was just a...

And what about the Sistine Chapel, that did appeal to you, didn't it?

Yes I looked at that when I was in Rome, and I was again tremendously impressed with it, I thought it was wonderful. In Rome they did have a few things open for people to see, and they had opened...and they had some pictures, a selection of Italian pictures to be seen, and I remember some Caravaggios and some Titians and all sorts of things which they brought out, which was lovely to see.

And did you see the Vatican collection at all, was that available?

I saw, yes I did see the Vatican collection, and yes, there were some very fine and beautiful things there, mm.

And there were some other churches that you liked weren't there, particularly?

There were a lot of churches, yes, yes. I can't remember their names really, it's silly of me. One by the station there, it was very marvellous, wonderful. But the things of course which were tremendously impressive were the Giottos at Assisi, they were early ones but they were particularly beautiful I thought.

[END OF SESSION]

[Interview with Carel Weight at his studio on Tuesday the 15th of May 1991.]

.....about the work you did during the war, and we talked a lot about what you did abroad but I just wanted to recap on some of the early things you did in England, because when I was in the Imperial War Museum I read some of the correspondence, and I gather you did one of a scene you witnessed from a bus, and it was rejected, and I wondered if you could talk about that a bit.

Well, I was in the Army already during the worst part of the Blitz, and there were raids all day long and all night long. And I had been to see my mother, and I was crossing London, I don't quite know where I was going then, and got onto a trolley bus, and we were going along somewhere in south London, and suddenly there was gunfire, and we looked up and we saw a German plane swooping down at us. And you can guess the tremendous sort of consternation that there was, and the panic. I was sitting in the front seat, and there were all these ladies there with huge parcels of shopping and that sort of thing, and they were all making a rush to

get out, and of course it was no use me trying to because I was bound to be the last one off the bus. They were pushing and... But what had actually happened, the plane swooped right down, and I thought, well they're probably machine-guns or something, but then the pilot evidently thought that this was a mug's game really, and it wasn't worth his shot, and so he just swooped and then went up again. But the consternation that it had caused, and the panic was such that, for one thing the bus conductor, who was the only sensible person, got underneath this trolley bus, and it was then low on the ground so I don't quite know how did it, but there was his feet coming out of... And then, the funny thing about it was that all the people got back on the bus feeling thoroughly ashamed of themselves to show such panic you see. They didn't discuss any of this extraordinary happening, they just sat there, there wasn't a conversation...I suppose they were in a frightful nervous state, but you would have thought that they might have said, `Oh, I thought that was going to be my last,' or something like that you see; not a word. And they seemed only too pleased when they got off the bus you see, at their destination. And I thought, well this is a subject that I really ought to paint, and I somehow or other, I think I was on leave at the moment, and so I started this picture, and painted it as authentically as I could really.

Which part of the scene did you paint, what was the painting?

You didn't see it, you didn't see a photograph of it or anything? No. It was going...I was in the seat inside the trolley bus, and they were...we were passing through one of those nondescript, boring places in south London, rather miserable shops and nothing of great interest there at all. But a lot of south London is, was and is like it now, not even good shops of their kind, just a very boring place you see.

But you are quite drawn to that as well, aren't you?

Well I've lived and been associated with that part of London; you see I had taught for about eight years before the war in Beckenham, and places like, oh dear...Penge. Could you imagine what Penge is like? Well it's exactly like that. And I chose the spot where this happened, not in the actual spot but in one of these typical places. And then I painted this picture with great gusto, and painted it very quickly, and took it down to the Imperial War Museum who at that time had taken quite a lot of my pictures, and the unheard of happened, that they rejected it, because they said this is not a very good thing to show, that the English public, whatever position they're in, show any sign of panic.

So in other words it was censored.

It was censored, yes. So I brought it back, and I think I showed it at the Leicester Galleries, I think so. And I believe, but I'm not absolutely certain, it's in the Portsmouth Art Gallery.

Oh right. But I'm sorry, I still haven't got it clear. Is the scene actually what happened inside the bus?

No. No it's a general view of the trolley bus coming along with the plane swooping down at it, and the bus conductor trying to get under the bus, and all these people who were carrying their bags and everything, just pushing against each other and jostling each other to get off the bus. I don't figure in it because you couldn't see me because I was right inside.

Right. But it was sort of life acting out a Carel Weight painting really, wasn't it, by the sound of it?

I suppose it was. I felt I really must paint this, because it will only happen to me, I hope, once.

And then you did one called `The Battle of Suburbia' didn't you?

Yes, that was really about the sort of life in the early days of the Blitz. The people living amongst ruined houses, and I remember seeing so often people walking along the road carrying wreaths, and going to funerals, and, it was an amazing situation really because there was such a feeling of closeness to everybody. People would go out of their way to come up to you and talk to you in the street, and say what a dreadful night they had had the night before, or we had such a narrow escape, a bomb dropped on so-and-so. And we were all rationed, but it was quite common that they would open their bag and say, `Come on deary, come and share my supper with me,' or something like that, and that was really quite extraordinary. I suppose everybody was so frightened really that the English natural reserve was pushed on one side you see.

And did you feel your reserve going as well?

Oh yes, I think we were all the same. I could tell you a story, but I don't think it's much...well I will if you like. There was a housekeeper that lived in the house where I was staying at the time, and she was married to a funny little chap about half her size, but who was a rather sort of cockney chap, and he used to call every evening and take her home after her day's work. And it was in the days when the doodle-bugs were coming over, and they were walking along a crowded street and suddenly, there was a warning that these things were coming, and

suddenly they heard this noise of the engine which was rather like a slightly irregular car thing, brrr, brrr, brrr, brrr, like that you see. And suddenly, it stopped, and that meant that you had got to...you had just about two or three seconds or so to fling yourself where there was some shelter you see. And the husband was walking a little ahead, and she followed, and suddenly a chap with extraordinary self.....

End of F1907 Side B

F1908 Side A

There was a tremendous sort of self...well he knew exactly what to do at that moment, and he flung himself on top of this woman you see, and there was a terrific bang, and they got up, and none the worse for it except very dirty. And the husband came back, and to show that he believed that his wife had been completely virtuous to him during this moment, shook him very sort of calmly by the hands and thanked him for doing this you see. But the whole thing, that if anybody could have misbehaved in such a moment, would be... But that's an absolutely true story.

And did you ever paint that?

No. No I didn't. It would have been a nice thing to paint, but...I didn't do that one.

Right. And you did one, didn't you, of people sitting on a summer evening in the moonlight during the Blitz I seem to think.

I probably did but I can't remember; I did a lot of little things like that really.

And, I mean when the committee rejected your trolley bus picture, were you furious or did you just accept it?

Well I wasn't too furious, no, because I thought they might do that. And actually, the censorship was really very liberal I think on the whole. This was just one that they turned down amongst hundreds, and I've never had anything else... They not only took a very broad-minded look at everything, but they even congratulated you, and were very nice about most of the work that one sent.

And, what you were saying earlier about the general reserve of everybody going down, and feeling quite united with people, links to another question I was going to ask, which is, I've sometimes wondered, during a war the artist actually has a sort of public role that's recognised and understood, and it sort of unifies him with the rest of society in a way that mostly isn't there in that 99 per cent of our population couldn't give a damn what you're painting.

Yes.

And you know, vice versa in quite a lot of cases.

Yes.

I mean how did that affect you? Did you feel that you suddenly had a function that people understood, and did it make any difference?

Yes I think it did. I think that people were rather interested in what you did, and, mind you, you had to go out fortified with all sorts of permits and that sort of thing, because funny old ladies would come along, or, old gentlemen too, would come along suddenly and say, `What are you doing that for?' Because they thought you might be the enemy you see. And it was terrible for old Kokoschka, whom I knew at that time because I used to go and visit him. It was very sad for him in a way, because here he was, an Austrian in London, he could hardly speak any words of English, and he really loved, well his whole art was concerned, at that time anyway, with the visual world, and so he went out and painted, and on one or two occasions he was almost arrested, and then eventually they did, the War Office gave him a pass and he could show that. But it made him very terrified really, in case something went wrong you see.

I passed a plaque on the Finchley Road or somewhere round there saying that's where he lived.

That's right, yes.

Is that where he was then?

And that's where I used to visit him, yes, he just had a very, well a very boring little flat with small pokey rooms, and I think he was...I can't remember whether it was about the second floor or something like that, it wasn't...it wasn't very high, but... He hated being there, he was most unhappy.

Was he part of a community of other exiles there, or not?

He kept himself fairly aloof, although he did when they asked him, because he was perhaps the most famous artist, refugee artist at that time, but he kept on the whole much to himself. He, with his very tall wife, lived there, and I think he was...he was obviously very nervous, but in spite of all that, he was quite...he was quite brave about everything I think.

Did you used to go there for meals, or would you just go and talk to him for a bit, or what would be your contact with him?

He would always supply some sort of food when I used to go. I used to go and see him on leave, I always made a point in going over to see him. And of course he was the most wonderful story-teller; I never believed a word he said, but at the same time he told these marvellous stories, and you didn't care a hang whether they were true or not really.

Can you remember any of them?

Well, not at this moment, but dare say I could think of them.

Oh right, it would be interesting.

But, oh he told me a story of how...of course he was in the First World War, and he was a...he was in the Cavalry, I don't know, what do they call themselves, Oulans[ph] or something, the very...rather equal to the Life Guards you know, a very very swagger sort of... And he went into battle, and the first time he went into battle he was wounded, he was hit...a shot hit his helmet and deflected, and it gave him a graze across the side of his head. It wasn't very serious...he wasn't very seriously ill, but what with that, and they didn't think he was a very good soldier, any more than I was really, and so he got out of the Army eventually.

And did he have any money when he was in England?

What?

Did he have any money when he was in England, was he...?

Well, yes, he was all right, because he was looked after by a lot of Jewish bankers and people. I think his money side was all right. But he felt terribly alone in an alien city I think really.

And do you think he ever lost that feeling, did he ever settle to it?

I suppose he did. He did go off to Scotland for a bit, and he went off to, oh to Cornwall too, he travelled about, and I dare say in the country if he could...there were whole parts of England which were not affected really by the war, oh except that you had to have ration cards and all that sort of thing, but places where, these places were never bombed or anything like that you see.

And was his marriage very close, was his wife a great support, or not?

I would think so, I think she was. She had been...she was very well connected. I think her father had been a very important person in the government in Czechoslovakia.

So when you went to see him, would she be part of the conversation, or would she be...?

Yes; she kept a very...there was only room for one person to talk in that place really, but she was very nice, but quite passive and sort of didn't have anything very much to talk about.

And did he show much interest in your paintings, did he see your work?

Oh he was very sweet about it. I was carrying a picture, which I had just done, on my way there, not to show him, he said, `Oh show me,' you see. And he said, `Ah, I shall never be able to paint like that again.' But he was very nice, you know, he was very generous with his praise.

Do you remember what the picture was?

Yes I do, it was...it eventually went to...who is the great actor who died just recently?

Burton?

Not Burton, no, the other one.

Olivier?

Olivier, yes, Kenneth Clark was giving it to Olivier, and it was a picture of `The Sentries of Midsummer Night', and it was really about, a certain amount biographical, because I was doing a lot of sentry, standing up all night, sort of marching up and down, with nothing much happening. And I imagined that it got mixed up with the `Midsummer Night's Dream', and I had fairies and all sorts of things dancing round, that sort of thing. I don't know where the picture is now; I know Clark gave it to him, but I've never seen it since.

Were they great friends? Why did he give it to him?

Yes, yes, yes they were very great friends.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

There was a painting I think you destroyed that you did in 1941 called `The Land of Ears'.

Yes.

What was that?

I painted it, the theme was the people in Nazi-occupied countries where people were frightened to talk, because they would feel that their conversations would be somehow minuted and they would be charged with espionage and that sort of thing you see. And so I thought of arid and horrible sort of country with these huge ears coming out of the landscape, and they were in the wind, and they were swaying like this, and they were picking up every bit of news you see, or every bit of private, very private conversations. And in the middle of the picture was an innocent-looking watchman sitting, as they did in those days, with a pail full of coals, you know, and with the red of the coals sort of sparkling up there, and that was the main source of light. Underneath, where he was sitting there was some sort of, rather like somebody mending a road or something like that; underneath there was great caverns, and underneath you could see the third...the...the opposition, the, what do you call them, the third.....[BREAK IN RECORDING]

What we're looking for is the British supporters who were, I mean British people who were supporters of the Nazis, and we can't remember the word.

That's right, yes, yes, yes. Silly. But any rate you know so that's all right, let's go on.

Right.

And underneath there were...there was a room, and there were printing presses, and they were producing propaganda, anti-Nazi propaganda under the...

Anti-Nazi or pro-Nazi?

Anti-Nazi, because this was in a foreign country.

Right.

`The Land of Ears' is supposed to be in one of the Nazi-occupied countries.

Right.

So in a way, that was the whole thing, which I thought was rather good really, because I got the whole lot in one picture, and it wasn't a bad picture at all I thought. And there's a photograph of it, do you see, in black and white, you've seen that haven't you? And it was quite a big picture, I don't know the actual size but I should think about 12 foot by 8 or something like that. And I showed it in one of the Artists International exhibitions at the same time as Kokoschka showed one of his pictures.

Which one, do you remember?

It was under the general title, `What We Are Fighting For', and his was allegorical, which I didn't really understand what he was aiming at, but I know that Gandhi was in it and all sorts of people were in it. And so, it was a very good picture of Kokoschka's, but if one could get hold of a book it certainly would be reproduced.

But, am I right in thinking that you destroyed `The Land of Ears'?

Yes. When I had got out of the...when I finally left the College I had got nowhere to put this great big picture, and so I cut it up and I made it into about half a dozen little pictures, which was a silly thing to do, I would rather have kept it myself, but I didn't, and, I suppose I could paint another one, I don't know whether I could now but, I don't think I will.

It's rather different in character from most of your work, isn't it.

Well it's different because in a way I didn't ever think I would be wanting to paint pictures which had a sort of propaganda sort of thing about them really.

It's got a surrealist edge to it, hasn't it.

Well it has indeed, yes, but I've always been rather sympathetic to surrealism, and I do use it in my own way really. I think so much surrealistic things are rather silly, and I like it to be things that are going on in the mind and that sort of thing. I don't particularly want to shock people, I rather like them to understand those sort of pictures really.

But, it's not characteristic of you to destroy work, is it, that was just...?

It isn't very, no. Although I have destroyed a fair number of things in my time.

Why, why would you normally?

Well, I suppose simply that I don't think they came off, but this one was different because I did think it came off rather, and I destroyed it just for the convenience of not having a lot of big pictures you see. I do know that when a bomb hit my studio, which I told you about, in Shepherd's Bush...

We touched on it, but you didn't really go into detail, it was something I wanted to ask you about again.

Well, at the very early part of the Blitz I had a studio in Shepherd's Bush, and it was on the top floor over a hairdresser's, and it wasn't a very big place but in those days you didn't worry too much about what you could get really, but, I wasn't there very long. But then the Blitz came along, and besides, outside the window was a railway line, I think it wasn't used very much, it was for sort of goods, and somebody said to me, `I wouldn't sleep there, you know, because they will certainly see, on a moonlight night they will see the railway line and they will bomb it, even though it's not a very important line'. So, I thought there was a good deal of good sense in that, and so I had some friends who were living up at Notting Hill Gate, which wasn't very far away, and so in the evening, before sort of the air-raid warning started, I used to go up there. And it was only about two days after I had started doing this when, well there was a terrific raid in that part of London, and the whole sky was just...like the last act of the `Gotterdämmerung'. And the next morning I went down to my studio, and I thought, well, life isn't so bad now really, the sun is shining, the birds are singing, because they were. And I walked down and I was just sort of deep in contemplation, with my nose, watching the paving stones and that sort of thing, but not... And I had my key in my hand to go into my studio, and I looked up, and instead of seeing the front door I saw a beautiful view right the way over to the hills of Surrey. And I gasped, and there was nothing of my studio or the house, there was not two bricks standing on each other, there was just a huge heap of rubble. And there were already one or two AFS people there, you know, the air-raid wardens, and a chap came up to me with a very singed book which happened to be my passport. And he said, `Did you know of an artist, male, who lived here?' I said, `Yes, that's me.' And so he gave me the passport, and then, I looked around and I could find absolutely nothing that...there was...I found eventually a self-portrait which looked most sinister, because it was on a panel, and I suppose that part of the bomb had somehow gone right through the mouth, which made me look very curious. And, I never found any of the pictures, and that really, at first I thought, oh thank God all that rubbish has gone, but after a long time I rather regretted

it, because there were quite a lot of paintings there, I suppose forty or fifty paintings, and some of them were all right, some not so good.

Can you remember some of them now?

I can't quite remember what there was there. I luckily had lent a number of pictures to various people. I can remember one war picture which I painted which Augustus John rather liked I think.

Did you know him?

What?

Did you know him?

Not very well, no, but he was always rather nice when I did meet him. And, no, they were quite early works, but it would have been nice to have had a number of them. I think, I wouldn't have destroyed them myself at all, I don't think.

Were there any that you were aware of re-doing, doing other versions of afterwards?

I don't think I ever did, no, I can't think I did, I can't remember.

And did it make you go dormant and stop painting for a while? I mean obviously you had to find another studio.

No; I remember going back home afterwards, and, there was nothing to do there, it was just rubble, and I had searched and all I found was a tin box which was intact, and the tin box contained all my evening clothes which were completely intact. So I went home, and...

When you say home, you mean to...

Well, to where I was staying, yes.

Which was with Helen, or with your parents, or somewhere else?

No, a group of us had taken this place, which was important, because one of the things, it was in a block of flats, and that was...that was very important in those days, because there was

such vibrations if a bomb dropped near, you felt much safer if you were in a place which had sort of concrete foundations and that sort of thing. So that's why I was there, and it was only about a mile from this spot, just up the hill at Holland Park.

So the studio was literally just a studio, you weren't living in it at all?

I wasn't living in it, no, no, although I had been, I think I said, earlier on.

And were you living in a sort of commune in this flat, or...?

Well, yes in a way. It was so important to try and get a place which had some sort of foundation which was sound really. So, no I went back there on that morning and I took a panel, and I hadn't anything, I had got a few brushes there, and I did a painting, but it was nothing to do with...something out of the window which was more peaceful.

So you got straight on with the next thing.

Yes.

And, there was a big disaster at a factory in Herefordshire in 1945, an ordnance factory or something.

In where?

In Herefordshire I think it was, that you wanted to go and paint, I'm not sure whether you actually did or not.

I can't remember much about that one. No, I think I may have said I would like to have gone, and I dare say I would have enjoyed to...well not enjoyed it very much but it would be a thing that I could do.

And when we were talking before about your time abroad, we didn't talk about Greece at all, because you went to Athens as well didn't you?

I went to Athens, yes. I didn't stay long, it was in the middle of the....God! Am I all right? [PROBLEM WITH MIC?]

Yes.

It was in the middle of the ELAS rebellion. Well that was a Communist... You see the war was just over, and I think the Communists felt that, and I don't blame them altogether, that now was the time to try to get power, and they started...I suppose they were supplied with arms from Russia or somewhere like that. At any rate there was a war going on when I got there. And I remember, shortly after I arrived I saw an English sergeant who had been there longer than I had, and he said, `What do you feel about the Greeks, what do you feel about them?' And so I said, `Well, they seem a very nice, charming people, I like them very much.' And he said, `Well you wouldn't if you had seen what I've seen.' He said, `I saw a whole cart-load of their people with their throats cut.' And it was true that there was war going on all the time, and when I got right up to the Yugoslav border I started painting various things, and bullets were flying all round while I was painting. And I couldn't help suddenly stopping my work and thinking, well you're a bit of a silly fool, aren't you, to be painting with this scene going on! (laughs) Any rate I wasn't hit.

And presumably that was entirely voluntary, because it wasn't our fight that was going on, it was you choosing to go and record that. Nobody was asking you to, were they?

Well, in a way; I asked for suggestions because I didn't know quite what had been going, and I was quite new there, and I went to see...the chap who was in charge of the, looked after the journalists and all those sort of people, and I tacked myself on to that, was Osbert Lancaster.

Oh right.

And he said, `I've got the very thing for you, Carel, you can go up to the north, we'll send you up to the north of Greece on the Yugoslav border,' you see. And I didn't know quite what I was in for, because the roads, many of the roads hadn't been repaired for fifty years or more, and I went up in a Jeep, and I've never been so shaken to pieces in my life, it was absolutely terrible. And eventually we came up to a place called Kozani where a detachment of English troops.....

<u>End of F1908 Side A</u>

F1908 Side B

.....the Communists you see. And, there's a painting in the War Museum, I don't know if you noticed it, of a view of Kozani, which is a very curious place right up in the mountains in very rugged country. And I stayed there for a little while. It was terrible weather, and everybody was covered in mud; you've no idea what it's like, really, if you are in a town where there's no pavements or anything like that, and it's very poor. But it was very interesting really.

Did you like the Greeks?

Yes, I like them very much, and I met quite a lot of people there, some of them taught English, and there was...I got on very well with them really.

Did you see any of their painting or sculpture that mattered much to you?

Well I saw the old stuff of course, I saw, I went to all the sightseeing places, I could do that fairly easily. But I didn't see any modern painting at all.

And did the ancient sights have much impression on you, did you respond to them much?

Well I had seen the British Museum before. Yes, I think it's very beautiful, marvellous, and to see it in its own setting, wonderful country. I went to the great sort of...Epidaurus, where there's a great amphitheatre, and...yes I tried to see everything that I could while I was there.

And do you think any of the Greek landscape influenced you subsequently? Did it have any lasting effect?

I don't know about lasting effect, but I liked it very much, and it...you know, one thing that rather did strike me was, it was not in the height of summer at all, in fact it was very cold sometimes, and you would have this brilliant sunshine, and then suddenly it would change and there would be a squall, a pretty hectic storm, and it was the sort of place I couldn't help thinking, well this is where they got their ideas of the gods and, you know, throwing thunderbolts about. And then it went as quickly as it came really.

Because skies are very important in your works aren't they.

Yes, yes, yes.

They're quite often white.

Yes, yes.

I mean do you think that that is coming from English sky and imagination, or do you think that's fed in by other landscapes, have you any idea?

I don't know, I suppose one's influenced by everything one sees really. I think that the...I remember that there were very beautiful skies in Greece, and I'm sure it had some effect on me.

What's your favourite time of day?

Oh I always like the evening really best, because in a way, you get these wonderful colours which...you haven't...did you see my pictures I sent to the Academy with the what's-a-name in it?

With the...

With the tiger in it.

Yes, you were just doing it when I first came.

Yes, that's right. Well those are the sort of days that I like really, evening and...

Dusk.

I said some time I would take you next-door...

To see `The Presence'.

Yes. Would you like to go now if they're about, or would you prefer.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

What was Osbert Lancaster like?

I didn't like him very much, because I thought that in a way, particularly I didn't like him when I saw the tremendous discomforts he put one to, because he didn't know what I was in for, he only thought there might be something interesting. I was grateful in a way because there certainly was, and I enjoyed that. But, I didn't find him a very sympathetic person or... I'm a great admirer of his drawings, I think they were lovely really. But I had met him before in the College, and so forth, but he didn't...I didn't feel any warmth for him very much.

Right. And of the three countries you visited, which of them mattered most to you, or...?

Pardon?

Of Austria, Italy and Greece, which were the three places you went to...

Italy, yes, Austria and Greece.

Yes. Which of them mattered most to you, or made you respond most?

Well, to me...they all had their various things, and I responded to each one of them, but I suppose the one that I felt most happy about when I was there was Austria curiously enough, because, you've seen `The Third Man', did you see `The Third Man', that film? Perhaps it was before your time.

No.

Well, it was full of crooks and all sorts of extraordinary things happening. There was the black market, and there was...and mixed up with that, they had opened the opera house, not the actual opera house that they...of course that had been absolutely destroyed. But it was so extraordinary, it was like a film really, and I used to walk at night, and very stupidly I was told, right through the Russian lines, and I used to wave to the sentries and they waved back to me, and the colonel dressed me down thoroughly and said, `It's a wonder you're still alive'. I thought they seemed quite nice chaps, and so, I don't know, but... But it was rather exciting all that really. And I could also have wonderful evenings at the opera, because I was, as a sort of senior officer I was allowed to have a box every night if I wanted it. And then I had...they gave me a studio in the top of a penthouse overlooking Vienna. I really lived it up in great splendour, and I did do a number of paintings there, and I was only there I suppose a month or so, six weeks, something like that, but it was lovely.

And you were away for about a year in total, weren't you?

Yes.

And do you think you were a different person at the end of that year?

Yes I think I was really. It did completely separate me in a way from the frightful monotonous life of the Army, and it kindled me with all sorts of thoughts about what one could do when one could have more time, and more especially freedom.

And, two other little questions I was going to ask. There's a picture you did of a refugee girl from, is it Anzio?

Oh yes.

I wondered who she was, and how she cropped up.

She just...Henry Carr, who had been a war artist before me and was a portrait painter, he told me about wonderful models you can get if you wanted to in these places, and she suddenly tripped into the British School and said, `Have you got a job?' And I said, well, yes I don't mind doing a painting, I don't see why I shouldn't do a painting which is nothing about the war at all. Except that she had been to Anzio where, there had been a lot of fighting up there, and she told me in her really broken English a little bit about it, but... She was a nice girl, and so I did a little sketch of her, but there's nothing much more to say than that, I can't remember much else about her, but she was very nice.

And, another detail I was going to ask you about was, I gather there's an anecdote in the very beginning of your time during the war in England, when you were asked to paint some naked ladies for the soldiers, or a painting of naked ladies.

Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes.

And I wondered if you could tell that on the tape.

Well, my sergeant came to me and said, `You're an artist,' and I said yes, and so he said, `Well, the Colonel wants somebody to paint some murals in the officers' mess, and would you do it?' Well, that was a great advantage, because we were digging tanks out of snow-drifts at that time, it was really tough going, so I said, `Well I'm very...yes, I will do my best'. And so, he gave me a little money, this was in Yorkshire, and he gave me some money to buy paints,

and I went down there and I painted this mural in about a fortnight or something like that, or perhaps a little more, I don't know, and he was delighted with it, and he said, `Just the sort of thing,' he said, `when my officers get thoroughly browned-off they can come here and they can think that they're on a South Sea island with beautiful girls and that sort of thing.' So, that was all right, but the splendour of it lasted only a very short time, because I suddenly heard that this chap had been posted to another unit, and the new chap was a much younger man and he said, `What are these terrible things of...?' And so they said, `Oh, we've got an artist here who has just done these for them.' And he said, `I must have them all off, I can't have this; we'll be most embarrassed if I asked any of the ATS to come in while these terrible murals are...' Well they were quite harmless, I don't think that there were any particular...there was nothing very pornographic about them, or, they were just sort of the usual sort of thing you see, which I was told to do. But he was very much against them, and I think as soon as I had gone I was told that he had them all removed, so...

So you didn't have to paint them out yourself?

I didn't have to paint them out myself, no.

And, the war work is obviously very distinct from before and after, your other paintings. I mean how do you feel about it, where is it placed for you mentally?

Well I feel the war work, I really began to feel that I was back at last painting things that I wanted to paint, and I was very lucky to be able to paint and bring a great deal of the things that interested me back into my work really. As I said Henry Carr, who had been the person out before, was a portrait painter, and I wouldn't particularly have wanted to paint portraits of people, and so I considered myself very fortunate, and I looked on the whole episode of this as being a sort of scholarship from the Army you see. And I was living in much better comfort than first of all when I was a private, in the days when we were battling against the elements, and also I did a... I didn't mind altogether my life when I was an ATS...I'm sorry, when I was in the Army Education Corps, and I did...I was able to organise things, and I did fairly well in that, and I had the dizzy rank of a sergeant then, which gave me a certain amount of, well, it was certainly quite a more pleasant situation for me.

Do you feel that the work, even the work you did abroad, is sort of a little detour from the rest of your work? Do you see it as being separate?

As a little what?

Detour from the rest of your paintings.

I look on it, the best of it, as very much in line with all the other things I've done really, yes.

And did it make you look at architecture in a different way, the work you did in Italy for example?

Well, I always loved architecture, and I loved looking at, particularly in Italy it was wonderful really. And I went to various places all over the place; I worked in Perugia, and in Rimini, and...I didn't work at Ravenna, but...

But for instance, when you then came back and looked at roads in Clapham or Putney or wherever, did you look at those buildings in any kind of different way, having had to draw architecturally in that way? Did it make any technical difference?

I don't know. I can't really say. Yes I think it did really, I think it did; I think I was more aware of the character of buildings really. But then of course I painted, when I got back I painted very much like those two men that you saw walking down a very sleazy sort of street, those are the sort of subjects that I like doing really. I've never...I did...you see when I was in Italy I painted some of the great buildings, I painted the palace at Caserta, which is a very Baroque building really; I've never painted anything like that in England.

So you would never have painted it without that purpose, would you?

Well I painted it for the simple reason that that was where the peace treaty between England and Italy took place.

But it was in a sense because you were commissioned to go and do that sort of painting.

Yes.

You would never have done it of your own free will, would you?

I don't know. I might have done, you know, if somebody had said, `Would you like to paint this?' I don't think I would, no, probably not.

And did you have any feelings about the work of other war artists, like for instance the work that Richard Eurich did or Edward Burra, or...?

I saw...I didn't see much of what Burra had done, I saw a few things, but...I always liked Burra's work really. Eurich I saw more of, and Eurich has always been a friend of mine and I liked him very much. I did see, the person I saw a lot of really, well earlier on, was Edward Bawden, and he has always been a friend, and in fact, I think I said that we had very often gone off on holidays in the summer together.

Do you think the war changed him?

Yes, I do. I think it gave him a sort of purpose. In many ways I think he was one of the best of the war artists really, I think he did some very very interesting pictures. And during, for a highly nervous man, I thought was very brave in... When the Dunkirk thing happened early in the war, he was one of the last people to leave really, he wanted to finish his drawings.

And, we haven't talked about Richard Eurich at all, when did he come into your life?

I didn't see him as a war artist at all, and I think I only met him casually before the war, but of course, I've always liked him, and I always felt that we had something in common. You see he's half-German, and I have German blood too, and I thought that we have certain characteristics which are rather similar really. He's a very thorough sort of artist; I don't say I'm very thorough, but, I don't know, perhaps I am in a way. And he...well, he goes on painting in a very...he's never disturbed by anything at all. His output is very huge really, but I think he did do some of the very best war artists things really, I mean just as pure reportage, not that I think that they are all very wonderful, but certainly he did what he was told, and made pretty good jobs of them really.

What sort of a man is he?

What?

What sort of a man is he?

He's quite short, and he hasn't any sort of thing which I dislike in people, he's not an arty man at all, he just is a man rather like a carpenter who likes to do a job.

Right. And do you know the piece of countryside he lives in and paints so much?

In where?

It's Hampshire isn't it?

Hampshire, yes.

On that coast.

Yes. No I don't, I've never been to his house, but I have been...I've been to Hampshire for some of his exhibitions, and he...I always like seeing him, and we always talk when I see him once a year now. He's very old, he's much older than I am, I should think he's in the late eighties, and he's very active, and he's very deaf. Not a good man for you!

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Again, going back to the main war, there was a convention of painters in Perugia, I think, that Coldstream attended and Bawden and John Aldridge.

Before my time.

It was, was it?

Mm, yes.

Did you not cross over with some of them?

I saw them, yes, I saw them all, and they were just about to go back to England when I came out, they all had really enough and they wanted to go home. And I saw them all, and we were taken round really by Edward Bawden who knew his way about all right in Rome, and he organised sightseeing tours for us, and he had all the Baedekers and things, and we had a very good time. He was very precise always, and would organise you until you wished that he would make a mistake. But we enjoyed, I enjoyed it immensely really.

And were they quite gregarious days, or not?

Fairly gregarious, yes, yes they were, but they were very short actually, I suppose I only saw them for about a week.

Right. And what was Coldstream like out there?

Oh, I always liked Coldstream, he was a pleasant person, and very charming really, and quite amusing, he had a very good sense of fun, and so forth. I liked them all, and John Aldridge too, who was a very nice person.

And were there any romances going on out there, among the painters?

(laughs) I don't know. I don't know really, I rather doubt it really. I don't think that, any rate Eurich wasn't the sort of chap to chase girls or anything like that, and nor do I know any of them who did really.

And did you get very homesick?

No, I don't think I did. I was very very excited about all the things I was seeing. And if you've been for four years peeling potatoes and God knows what, naturally you found yourself very happy to be in enchanting places seeing wonderful things and listening to lovely music and that sort of thing.

And how did it happen that your letters to Helen have recently been published by the Camberwell Press, how did that come about?

Well, that came about because one of my students at the College became the head of the printing staff, production staff, a book production thing, Eileen Hogan, and she's a very great friend, and she was a student with me in the painting school simply because she won a scholarship to come to the College because she wanted to do book production. And the head of the printing department there, Dick Gyatt, came to me one day and said, `They've sent me a girl and I've got nobody who is qualified to teach her, because she knows so much more about these things than any of my staff.' And he said, `But what she would like to do to fill in the time, she would like to spend time painting,' and so could I find a place for her. And I said, `Well, I am very short of space, but I'll see what I can do.' And I did find an odd corner where she could work, and we became very fast friends, and she's a very clever girl who is just as good as a designer as she is as a painter. And she is, well she is on the list as a possible candidate for the Academy now; whether she will get in I don't know, but... Any rate she now runs, she is not only the...she runs the printmaking and has done for a number of years, and she comes very often to Helen who is very literary and gives her advice about things, and she mentioned these letters, and so they produced them. I don't think they're of interest to anybody, certainly they don't interest me very much, but...

How heavily edited were they?

What?

How heavily edited were they?

Not at all, they were as they came. I was edited in a way, because all sorts of things I knew that I shouldn't be saying, because it was very, even after the war there was a very stringent censorship, and so you didn't write things that, you knew half your letter would be crossed out really.

And are you a great letter-writer otherwise, or was it...?

No, I'm not. I got worse and worse about writing letters, and I hate writing letters really. My heart sinks when a dear friend writes me a ten-page letter and expects something back, but...

And while we've got it in front of us, changing tack completely, can you talk about this portrait that you've recently done and how it came about, and who the figures, the other figure is?

Well, I went to a party not very far from here. It was Nancy Carline's 80th birthday, and she was one of my oldest friends, and I'm very fond of her. She is a very good painter who has never really had much of a chance of really making a great name for herself, but she is a very very good artist. And I went there... You see, she had a family and they were poor and so forth, and she was married to Richard Carline whose sister was married to Stanley Spencer, and I got to know particularly Stanley through her, and I also used to go out painting with her, and we used to go away, various holidays before the war. And she asked me to this party, and we sat talking almost all the evening about things, we knew so much about people that we both knew very well, and somebody came along and took a snap of us, and they sent me a copy, and only a little thing - so big - and somehow I felt I would rather like to paint it as a group. I had never done a painting entirely from a photograph before, and you see I hate things done from photographs if they look like a photograph at the end, I can't see any point in doing them, so I had to try and make it look like a painting.

What did you do, when you say you had to try to make it look like a painting, what did you do?

Well, you could either paint it absolutely bit by bit, every bit as close to the photograph, or you could be adding pieces of your own about it. And this was a sort of double...I was doing both those things you see. And I went through a lot of stages, and I'm never quite sure whether I like it now very much, except that it is quite memorable. The thing I thought.....

End of F1908 Side B

F1909 Side A

It was not only a very interesting photograph, but it was an extremely interesting composition I thought, and I suppose that's what drew me to do it really, but...

What were the elements that you added that weren't in the photograph?

Well for instance there was not a window at the back, because I wanted to throw up the head to a certain extent and make it dark there you see. There was just a wall there. And of course I had to eliminate various things, because we were sitting in a group and there was a man sitting on that, there were two or three people sitting on the sofa, and some of their boots came through. Well, I somehow didn't think it would add very much to have various pairs of boots just coming into the picture at the bottom. And then various things, I put that curious table with the plant there.

Is that entirely imaginary or is there a table like that somewhere?

No, there's no table like that, I just made it up. And the plant was based on a sort of plant I saw. So, in a way it has certain imaginative sort of qualities about them.

I'm interested that you put in those little paving stones, because quite often your pictures include bricks...

They do, yes, yes.

And you're obviously drawn to that sort of texture.

Well of course there you see in a way the bricks are a contrast to the flatness of the walls and that sort of thing you see; in fact I've been making some use of patterns, and I don't know whether the...I can't quite remember whether there's a pattern on the sofa there, I know there was a sofa there, but I know...I'm not quite sure. I can look at it when I get hold of a photograph of it.

And you've got the two things that occur in an awful lot of your paintings, I mean just fragments of a vertical tree trunk and the railings as well.

Yes, that's true, that's true.

Has Nancy Carline seen it?

Yes, she liked it, she said.

And has it got a title?

No, I just called it `Painter Talking to Nancy Carline' something like that, not very original.

It's wrapped up, is it about to go somewhere, or...?

No, it's just come back, I just sent it to a little exhibition.

Right.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

And, can you tell me about it, how it came to be as it is?

Well, it's a park, Bishop's Park in Fulham. This is just on the main road, and it meant a lot to me because I used to play there as a child, and it has all these various characteristics. As I said earlier on, it's the time of night that I, or evening, that I really love, because in a way it kindles my imagination and I see all sorts of weird shapes in the trees like monsters and that sort of thing, and it keys one up I think. And here you see there's a ghost walking right through the middle of the picture, and the people are sensing that there is an atmosphere, a strange atmosphere here, but they can't see him. The only living body that can see clearly is the dog, the rest are just feeling a bit uncertain of what's happening. And that's the story, take it or leave it.

And how did the figure come to be this woman, almost transparent figure? Is she somebody...?

Well, I wanted to introduce this...she is no particular person, but I once painted very early on, a woman that reminded me a bit of her. She was always having Victorian dresses and that sort of thing, and it just gave me a sort of idea about her. There's a blind man walking along there.

And did I read somewhere that there was other people who had a sense of a presence in this particular spot, or have I made that up?

Not in this particular picture, no.

And what about this sky, is this a sky you made up or...?

Yes, I made it up. I was very flattered because somebody said it was the best sky, a professor at Nottingham University said he thought it was the best sky painted since Turner, which I thought was very nice.

You can't do better than that actually.

No, you can't do better than that at all.

And the scale of it is perfect isn't it?

Mm.

Was it always this scale or did you do a smaller one first, or what happened?

I did innumerable smaller versions, mostly, there's one...no, I'm sorry, no I had done quite a number of small versions of it really, but where they are I have no idea.

But the small ones led up to this?

Mm, mm. So, there are other pictures in this room.

Can you describe them? Because people will be able to see `The Presence' because it's reproduced, but some of the others...

Well this one is also reproduced, and it's Mrs Vallentine's oldest daughter who I painted many years ago, she is now married and is pregnant at the moment, but I painted her in this room with...they're a very musical family, and she played the violin and she I think played the piano, but the other daughter is an even more talented musician, and I haven't painted her but that is her done by Olwyn Bowey.

Is that Helen?

What?

Is that Helen?

Helen, yes, did you meet her?

The one who works at the Academy.

Yes that's right, yes.

I recognise that one.

It's a very nice portrait.

The one that you did is the one where you elongated the bow because you felt it was better for the composition.

That's right, yes. You see these lines running through the picture, the emphasis on that, which I wanted to make a lot of with the bow.

And, is this the person you were talking about when you said you had painted somebody as a child and you had done a wedding portrait of her much grown-up?

That's right, yes. Oh she's got the portrait now.

Right.

This picture is called `The Land of Birds', and it's a small version of a large one I did in the Academy a few years back.

Right. And the larger version is in the Bernard Jacobson catalogue isn't it?

That's right. It's quite interesting, yes, yes it is, you can compare it with that.

Can you tell me the story behind that painting?

No, because I don't know it. I just invented this strange place really. I saw a picture by somebody, I can't remember who, which was just the outlines, and I took it from these few lines and made it into a more substantial place you see.

And it started with the shapes of the trees, and grew down, or...?

Yes, the shapes of the trees were rather like that, and then I saw, they looked a bit like a bird, and I decided to play up to that really, and that's what made it. And I always rather like artificial light with twilight, and what is happening in that room I don't know but it's rather strange, I don't know.

It's almost infernal.

Yes, yes.

It's got that quality to it.

Yes, yes.

And you quite often mix that sort of element with particularly women who are very suburbanly dressed.

(laughs) I do, don't I, yes, I suppose I do. I can't help repeating myself, but...

No no no, I wasn't meaning it was repetition, it's something you've done [INAUDIBLE].

That is Mr Valentine, this little painting, and if you come into the next room I'll show you some more.

When did you do Mr Valentine?

Fairly recently, about a year ago, less than a year. He just was recovering from illness, he had had an operation. And that's Olwyn Bowey; Olwyn Bowey was a pupil of mine at the College and, well, I mean she was at the College, and... In here we've only got about one picture, but this is her most recent picture, which had been...there is quite an extraordinary story about it really, that it was stolen, and...can you see it? I think you can see it better from here, it shines badly.

Ah this is your male model in front of `The Day of Doom', `Day of Judgement'.

That's right, `The Day of Doom'.

Right.

Yes, that's right. And a man came to the studio and he said he liked this portrait so much, and he said he would like to buy it but he hadn't enough money, but he...

Oh he's the one who said...

He was the man that went off with it, yes.

He would buy it in instalments, right.

Yes. And then I never saw him again, and nor did I ever see the picture again, and then it came up at, Christie's was it, or Sotheby's, at Christie's, and I got it back, but it cost me a lot of money, and then Mrs Vallentine said she would like to have it, and so she bought it, and so there it is. There's nothing else of mine here.

There's a Leonard McComb which makes me remember, he's just done your portrait hasn't he?

Yes he has, yes.

How did that happen?

Well he suddenly wanted to paint my portrait. He's a person that I, well I got to know under a rather strange way really. He was having a very minor job in a school, at least at the Oxford Polytechnic, and I knew that he was a good artist, and I was able to persuade him to give up the job, and he's done very well since, and he is now a member of the Academy, and is a very good friend, and he has done this portrait of me, I don't know what you...have you seen it?

No.

No. It's, I don't know whether I like it or not, but any rate he's very...I think he does landscapes better than portraits, but I don't know, you may like it. It's a bit like a sort of Van Gogh or something.

Do you find it hard to sit for portraits, being on the receiving end?

I do a bit, yes, yes I do. But he made it as easy as he could for me. He had a group of people who were taking pictures...

They were filming you weren't they?

Filming me, yes, yes.

And Ruskin Spear did a portrait of you, didn't he, that's in the Academy?

He had two, he did two, but I didn't sit for either, he did them from photographs.

Aha, and how did you feel about those?

I like the first one very much indeed, the second one not quite so much, but they're very good likenesses.

Why do you not like the second one so much?

I think he...I don't know really, it's difficult to say. I think the other one was a better painting, the first one was the better painting myself, but I may be wrong about that.

And before we leave this room there's a poster of yours, `Homage to Monet'.

Mm.

What's that, what's the story of that?

Well I just found a photograph, a black and white photograph of him, just standing like that, and I thought I would try and make a picture out of it, so I invented the studio and painted it. And the thing I like best about that is the cigarette with the ash just about to fall into his palette.

Did you ever smoke?

No, no I didn't.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]
Recorded in Mrs Valentine's house next door.....

Olwyn Bowey, yes. And it was done in her house in, well in Wandsworth really, just down the road here, and I was very proud of that coat, and I never thought anybody could paint it, and I think she made a jolly good shot at it really. These things would drive you up the wall to paint, it's not even a pattern, it's just a sort of atmosphere isn't it.

It's wonderful.

Thousands of dots and so on. And I stood for it, I was quite adventurous in those days. (laughs)

And how do you feel that compares with the other portraits you were talking about?

Well I don't know, I honestly don't know at all. I think it was like me in those days, but I don't know whether it's so like me now because I've lost all my teeth and one thing and another, there's not much, nothing much in my head, and the whole thing is rather empty now, and I look like a professor there.

Well you were a professor.

Perhaps I was.

Did you feel like a professor?

I don't know. I don't know what they feel like really, but... And that's another Olwyn, she specialises in painting these lovely great greenhouses which I think is rather good.

Did you say there was a sketch for that somewhere?

What?

MRS VALENTINE: It's not for that, it's in here Carel.

What is?

MRS VALENTINE: A little sketch that Olwyn did of you.

Oh yes, that was...

MRS VALENTINE: When I saw this one, all your tweed coat was popping off it I'm sorry to say, she's had it rolled up for twenty years, anyway, stuck back somewhere [INAUDIBLE].

And where were you when that was done, the sketch?

I have no idea, I might have been down staying with her or something...

MRS VALENTINE: It's in Pulborough.

In Pulborough, yes I think so, yes.

You look very contented there.

Yes, yes.

MRS VALENTINE: He had just come in from the cold and got these rather hot cheeks, having been painting outside all day.

That's right, yes, yes.

MRS VALENTINE: Olwyn said.

Did you draw her at all?

I've only done one tiny little drawing of her really, I ought to have done more, but she's not a person that lends herself, will allow herself to be painted very often, one feels very honoured to be able to do it. But, let's take them out, and then you must go because.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] Oh dear. Well, the whole of the background is a picture which is reproduced I think in your book that you so cleverly got hold of.

The Bernard Jacobson catalogue.

Yes. And it was really about, it had nothing to at all with the principal feature of the picture, but it was just that the picture was there at the time, and it was a lady that was bidding for freedom, and she was leaving her rather awful husband, or lover.

MRS VALENTINE: Does that reflect on me Carel?

It's nothing to do with you at all, I've made it very clear.

We tried to paint in here didn't we, I mean not in the bedroom particularly but downstairs, because [INAUDIBLE].

Yes that's right, yes, yes, yes.

MRS VALENTINE: [INAUDIBLE] background obviously. And we tried awfully hard, didn't we Carel.

That's right.

MRS VALENTINE: [INAUDIBLE] and somebody phoned or called in or something.

That's right, it was very difficult. And then I waylaid her and we did it much more easily really, at least easily for me, very difficult for you I think really.

MRS VALENTINE: No it wasn't, because there were so many interruptions, there seemed.

And I think it's quite like her in a way, I don't know.

But it's very interesting in that when we were talking before about when you are doing portraits you quite like to have the objects as a person around them, or when the male model came into your studio and there was a picture in the background. But in this case you've actually worked the portrait into another painting.

Into another painting, that's right, yes I have.

It's an extraordinary combination.

Yes.

MRS VALENTINE: I think everybody must love...sorry...

No, how do you feel about it?

MRS VALENTINE: Must love to have their pet things with them. I actually asked Carel if I couldn't sit in front of `The Presence'; I don't know whether he took against... I know the light was so bad.

`The Presence', yes. Yes, it wasn't awfully good there, no it wasn't. I did do two, I did the portrait downstairs in that room you see, but it was much nearer the window.

The portrait of the little girl?

Yes, with the violin, yes, yes.

MRS VALENTINE: But isn't the curtain rather good downstairs Carol, it's...

Yes, and it's still there.

MRS VALENTINE: Olwyn's coat, yes, it's falling to pieces.

By the way, I love the Michelangelo that you've acquired. She comes in with a Michelangelo.

MRS VALENTINE: It's got apparently, Carel, to be rubbed down with very fine sandpaper and then layers and layers of milk; this is Helen from the conservation people.

Is that what they say to do?

MRS VALENTINE: And you end up with beautiful marble, and...

Oh well that's interesting isn't it really, yes.

But, sorry, just to be pedantic, was the painting that you've incorporated into the portrait actually in the studio at the time, and that's why, or you thought it was particularly appropriate?

Yes, it was in the studio. I had done it fairly recently, I mean it's a fairly recent picture, and...

MRS VALENTINE: Is it three or four or more years ago.

It's about that, yes.

MRS. VALENTINE: It was when you first moved in next-door that it was done.

Yes, that's right, and I think I painted this one...

MRS VALENTINE: Five, six years ago.

Yes, about five years ago I should think. But, I painted this one, and the view is in Sussex.

MRS VALENTINE: This is near Olwyn's again.

Yes, yes.

Oh so you recognise it too?

MRS VALENTINE: Yes, I mean I thought that this [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, she's got a lovely summer residence down there.

MRS VALENTINE: It made a sort of halo for me, this triangle of rather strange-coloured barn behind.

Yes, yes.

You sound as though you're used to sainthood.

MRS VALENTINE: Used to what?

Sainthood.

MRS VALENTINE: (laughs) Not much, no, it's never come before or after. But you were sitting actually quite close to me because there's not much room up there, you're rather looking down on to me.

Yes, that's right.

MRS VALENTINE: Which is why it looks like that I think.

Yes.

Do you have any sort of fellow feeling with the other people in there, or not?

No, no.

MRS VALENTINE: Almost thalidomide hands, that lady, not much. no. The thing is I wasn't actually looking at it, I had got my back to it, and I think perhaps I was not involved as if I had been looking at it.

No you didn't see it, no.

MRS VALENTINE: Whilst I was sitting I was looking at another picture, which Sternfield[ph] has got I think.

It's...mm.

MRS VALENTINE: Pretty people playing, meeting, punk music and things, and I got very involved looking at that.

Yes, yes that's right.

And what's Carel like to sit for?

MRS VALENTINE: Oh marvellous.

Terrible.

MRS VALENTINE: I can't think how you painted anything at all, I never stopped talking.

Well no, it's all right. I don't like people almost sitting too rigid, but on the other hand I must sometimes say, `Now you've got to, you know, hardly breathe for a few minutes,' and so, but she's been very good, she's awfully good really.

MRS VALENTINE: And you did daughter Josephine, didn't you, you said she was very good, and sat very still, but she doesn't talk so much as I do.

She was ideal too, she was lovely really. I believe that they secretly, although it never showed anything, because she was always sweet when she was a little girl, but I believe she complained to you that she didn't want to sit.

MRS VALENTINE: Oh yes, yes yes, I was thinking about it; well she got married last August and Carel did one then, that one she was about 16 years old. Yes she said it was the most boring thing on earth, a fortnight nearly given up, wastage of her holiday, and she looked as if she was ready for geriatric nursing.

It was awful for her.

What does she feel about it now?

MRS VALENTINE: I think she likes and admires it very much, [INAUDIBLE].

Of course she was very long-suffering I must say, she was an awfully good sitter really this time. I did it quicker, this one.

MRS VALENTINE: It's nice, she was a little bit brown and she had got a red jersey with a polo neck, it's nice colouring.

Mm. But she has changed a tremendous lot, hasn't she, really.

MRS VALENTINE: I suppose so Carel; she still looks much the same to me, about 13.

Well of course you don't notice it like I do. I notice it because there's a long period which I didn't see her at all really, and...

MRS VALENTINE: So did it seem a more mature face?

What?

MRS VALENTINE: Did it seem a more mature face to paint?

Yes. You see she's very beautiful, I always think she is a beautiful girl, and she still is, but she's not like she was when she was young. Of course there's the long flaxen hair that she had which was very [INAUDIBLE].

MRS VALENTINE: Presumably the older they get the more character in a way there is in the face.

Yes they do.

MRS VALENTINE: Have you talked about Mr Smelley[ph] and all.....

[END OF SESSION]

[Interview with Carel Weight at his studio on June the 9th 1991] - ACTUALLY 3RD JULY 1991

How has the Summer Show at the Academy gone for you this year?

Well, I think quite well. I only sent four pictures that were for sale; I showed two of them, and two are rather outsize pictures and rather difficult to sell I think really. But I think, people seemed to like them, and of course it's early days even now. The general sales are down this year, but not tragically. I mean I suppose the state of the world has had its fate, but I expected it to be rather worse myself. I was told that the sales are a little less good than they were last year, which was a record year, so they can't grumble.

Right. And what do you feel about this year's show, do you think it's got interesting things in it?

Yes. I thought it was perhaps the best for some years really, I thought it was quite varied. And it's very mixed criticisms, and I don't think you can ever judge, I think it depends on the people's liver or something like that, when you ask them, they say, `Oh it wasn't as good as last year,' or `It's much better,' or something like that you see, and I think it's very hard to look back for a year and... Because it doesn't depend on a whole lot of superlative pictures, there are bound to be rotten pictures and good pictures, and it's a very complex thing to decide.

Is there anything in particular that stands out for you this year?

Well, you see...have you been yourself?

No I haven't had a chance yet.

No, well the first room for instance they've gone to a lot of trouble to get some stars who are honorary foreign members, and there are all sorts of people. That is the sort of kick-off for the exhibition, the first room there, and there are some quite good pictures there, and it's well hung. But the other rooms of course are bound to look a bit odd, and you get all sorts of things hanging together, and it's rather difficult to avoid that. I think a few contrasts is quite a good way to hang an exhibition, because it makes people sort of, well it doesn't lull them off to a sort of, to sleep or...you know, they, `Look, fancy putting that shocking picture next to that beautiful picture,' and that sort of thing you see.

There weren't any youngsters you came across this year that you particularly found exciting?

I think there were one or...I don't know whether they were young or not because it's rather difficult to know, but there are one or two people who are quite unknown to me that had very very good pictures, not marvellous but...well they made you look several times, and...

Can you describe any of the ones that you were particularly alerted by?

Oh well, there was just an absolutely straightforward portrait of a girl hanging not very, in a rather sort of dark corner, and I thought that for me was rather an outstanding picture. It was beautifully painted I thought, and vigorous, and, it was academic, and there was nothing that is absolutely unique about it but very beautifully painted you see. I don't know, difficult to say. I don't think there were things that absolutely knocked me for six or anything like that, you don't expect it really.

And, what about the new Sackler Galleries?

The what?

The new galleries at the Academy?

They are really rather exciting. Because it's not just the galleries themselves, they've opened up a whole part of the building, and shown great possibilities of, they've got this glass lift which is, people will say it's a bit of an anachronism there, but still, it's rather beautiful. You go up in this glass cylinder and you can see the side of the building which has been all done up and made to look rather delectable really. And then you get up... The gallery of course isn't huge, but it's beautifully done; you get a feeling of airiness and light, and they've got a sort of, as you get out of the lift you come on to a corridor and there they've put up a little display of certain pieces of sculpture which they have, some things which have always been

despised, ever since I can remember, rather pretty, early...well, done in about the 1830s, and they are rather sugary, and classical in spirit but very well done. A man named Gibson.....

End of F1909 Side A

F1909 Side B

.....Gibson, who had bequeathed all the contents of his studio when he died, and a large sum of money so that there could be in Burlington House the Gibson Gallery which would be a fair size room of his rather sugary works. But looking at them now, one has to admit that they are rather well done, and I should say they're very good sort of second-rate sculpture, and they've placed several of these rather classical life-size things along the corridor, and also, and as you go along you come on to a piece of Greek archaic stuff, and a figure of a, I don't know who it is quite, but a Greek heroine. And then you finally come to the Michelangelo Tondo, which I thought didn't look as marvellous as it should because it's placed in an alcove with very thick glass in order that no lunatics can sort of damage it, and even if you shoot at it I believe it's bullet-proof. But the glass over it gives a slightly greenish colour, and it looks as if it's slightly subterranean, you know. And then again, I don't think they placed it well, because I think reliefs should always be lit from one side, but they have got a sort of blanket light on the whole thing, and consequently you lose the dramatic effect of it really. And then you go into these, I think there are about four, four or five rooms, which look splendid, lovely light, and very colourful flow of paintings, and I was quite delighted with them really. And of course up there as well is the library, which looks equally marvellous. They've done all that extremely well really.

Do you think the Academy has changed greatly under Roger de Grey after Hugh Casson, do you think it's altered?

Well it has in two different sorts of ways. [BREAK IN RECORDING] Yes, each one has done their own thing, and it seemed to work very well, because neither have gone off in tangents and are doing something quite different. Hugh was marvellous because he was so much loved by everybody, and also he had exciting ideas, and of course so does Roger de Grey. I suppose...hello pussy - that won't go down very well. I suppose that between the two of them they have re-vitalised and changed the whole thing, the whole conception of the Academy really, and if I was going to, I don't know whether you want me to, but if I were to contrast it with the Academy as it was when I first came into it about 1955, there was a tremendous difference in spirit. For one thing, if you were a newly elected person you were very much the new boy, and they...oh I hope that cat's not going to go out of the...I'm a bit frightened that.....[BREAK IN RECORDING]

When you became an RA you were still very much the new...

One was treated like a junior coming up from the infants. And when I was...they put as a great concession that associates should have a year on the Council, and I was asked to do this, and I was very sad that when it got rather interesting the President would turn round and say, `Would all the associates now leave the room, as we have got to discuss finance,' or something like that you see.

Who was the President then?

Charles Wheeler, he was a sculptor. He was not a bad chap in a way, but very old-fashioned and was very much against any modern art of any sort. But, I mean I'm sure he was a very good man, but not particularly for the Academy. And, one crisis came up when I was on the Council that year. The Academy was pretty well bankrupt, because they only did two things every year, one was a summer exhibition and one was an exhibition generally of old masters in the autumn, and few enough people went. It was suffering very much from a lot of really bad presidents, and Wheeler was one of the better ones, but if any...people like Munnings or, well a whole string of them were so reactionary, and Munnings said at a dinner...the media wasn't supposed to hear but in fact it was broadcast all over the...`Oh if I saw Picasso, I would kick his arse'. And that doesn't go down well for a learned society, or any sort of society really, and of course they picked that up and it did a tremendous lot of harm to... And just about that time Stanley Spencer died and I went to the funeral with the President; he always seemed to want to take me round, I don't know why. It was very small and very poor, it was very poor at the time, and...

The Academy?

Yes. They had no money, and it got into such a pass at this time that there was a crisis. Somebody suggested, well why don't you sell the Leonardo? And, well it was a sensible thing to do I suppose in a way, but they didn't do it properly. They got three-quarters of a million for it, which was chicken-feed really as you know for that sort of thing, and sold it to the...oh they would only sell it to the National Gallery; it was a very patriotic thing to do, but it wasn't the way to make money. And so it was sold, and within a year they were in just as bad difficulties again, and they didn't know really what way to turn. It looked, they were looking for other things they could sell, but one saw really that that was no answer at all really. At that time the President died and he was...Tom Monnington came along who was a good deal better really, and a man with a certain amount of vision and a certain amount of sympathy for more current things. He wasn't dead against all developments and so forth. And a certain ground was re-gained you see. But he died after a few years in office, and then the members felt it was time to do something, and the...it had always been very much

supported over the years by the staff of the Royal College, and Robert Buhler and Ruskin Spear were both, and Rodrigo Moynihan, were all elected before I was, during the war or just after the war you see, and they formed a little band of rather, people with more...feelings towards a more contemporary outlook and so forth. But the whole...there were other members who were always being shot down by people like Munnings, very much like the Labour Party would be today, they never got a word in edgeway really. And so they ganged up, and for some unknown reason - oh this was actually before Munnings, after the death of Wheeler, and they pushed me up as a candidate, and nobody thought...I was rather pushed in it against my will, and...well there was a very... And also, another person was Jim Fitton, who was a rather progressive artist, and I think they had made a big mistake by putting me up for it because if they had kept to one candidate then I think Fitton would have walked in. The trouble was that with this divided thing, people were rather against Monnington, they rather looked on him as one of the older brigade; in fact he was in many ways very good. But the election was, the first ballot I was leading, I was absolutely, began to feel I didn't want to be President at all, I just wanted a quiet life and get on with my painting. I had enough things to do being a professor of the College you see. Anyway, then the second ballot came up and I was still in the lead, and then, thank heaven, two drunken architects came in and they both threw their lot in for Tom Monnington, and I was beaten by one vote, and I was really very pleased that that happened you see.

Had you thought what you would have tried to do had you become President?

Well, I would certainly have encouraged a lot of younger people. I was dead against the old reactionaries there who seemed to sit on everything. There was a very great number of portrait painters, society portrait painters, who were affluent, and they were also very reactionary, they hated any portraits, even their own portraits, which were not in the manner of, well all the Academicians who had gone before for the last eighty odd years you see. And also the older faction were against letting young people come in, certainly they didn't want to elect them as members. They might occasionally have got pictures into the Academy, but that was about as far as they... It was a stifling atmosphere there really, and I don't think I would have been very good, but I would have had certain ideas to try and breathe some new air in. But anyway, Monnington came in, and he wasn't at all bad and everybody was very pleased because he was doing the sort of thing I would have liked to have done myself, but it takes a long time to break down a tradition which is ingrained there when you've got a majority of older people who didn't want change, and every election was a little battle, every...wanting of changing of laws were... But it progressed on the whole fairly well under Monnington, and when eventually Monnington died and...what's his name?

Hugh.

Hugh Casson came in, he really, he was a really great innovator, he really did...he didn't care a bit for the ancient tradition and that sort of thing, although he didn't fight it at all but rather walked over it. And I think things went very well. He was much beloved by almost everybody there in the Academy, and was a...they had...but he was full of ideas and full of the principal ideas of having much more going on, and to have Schools, which are part of the Academy, functioning properly, and all that sort of thing. And it was a great personal triumph for him really to have got right the way through so much red tape, and be able to put it in a reasonably good position again, and a position which a lot of artists who would not have come into it suddenly felt, well, perhaps it's not a bad thing. And the few rather progressive artists, like, oh, well Augustus John and Stanley Spencer, well a lot of these came in, but Stanley Spencer and John had...that was just at the time of Charles Wheeler, they both resigned, and one of Hugh Casson's things was to get them back, which he succeeded in doing. And they had people like Lowry, and it was becoming, well a lot of fresh air seemed to be coming into the place really. A lot of artists still stayed out, but it had a lot of support from the College, and we all thought that if we could get a lot of us we could really do things, and we elected, well, almost all the painting staff and some of the Print School staff became members of the Academy. And then we elected perhaps too soon, but any rate we elected Bratby and younger students to that, so it gradually got working. And other things that Hugh Casson did was to organise a Friends of the Academy, which was an immense success straight away, and that really opened up a major financial thing, much better, and when they felt, well they've got Friends, they've got to give the Friends something to see and do all the time, and so they organised lots of exhibitions and invited things which would interest students and younger people to come to the Academy you see, and they put on exhibitions which would have been impossible ten years before. And then of course, when Hugh retired we elected Roger as being the most suitable person to go on with the job, and he has developed on the same sort of lines as Hugh, and he is a very social sort of man and he copes with all that sort of thing. He speaks well, and is an Old Etonian, but in fact he does all that sort of thing very well indeed really.

Do you think he's adding anything that wasn't there before?

I think he has added all sorts of things, like this new building programme which I think, well for one thing we were never in a financial state to do very much in changing the building, it was always falling down; a 17th century building is constantly needing...we heard that this room or that room was full of dry rot, and this ceiling was going to fall, and there was a great battle about holding the thing together. And Hugh introduced and brought into the Academy

a lot of the rather eminent architects and surveyors and people that were of practical use to the Academy you see, and this last thing is one of those things you see. And nowadays, if we're not too reckless, I think it is rather a thing that we are, I think we've spent about four or five million doing this thing, well one's got a sort of confidence that it will be worth it, but I can't help sometimes feeling that to put in the super lift like that, we could do with one that is a little cheaper, but still, that's only perhaps an old reactionary idea, but... Anyway, it is at the moment, I think...you see, Hugh appointed some very good people to run the day-to-day life of the College, and to develop things like exhibitions, and they got a highly eccentric character to be exhibitions officer.

Which is Norman Rosenthal.

Norman Rosenthal. And he is a man that puts almost everybody's backs up, but he does his job very well and he goes all over Europe and he somehow negotiates to get some of the very best exhibitions seen in London really, and that has greatly improved the, not only the prestige of the place but the financial side of things you see.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....making quite a lot of controversial statements about who is a valuable artist and...

Yes, he always does.

Do you have strong feelings about what he says?

Yes, I think he talks a lot of absolute rot, but it doesn't matter really. Well, in a way I think it does do a bit of harm because a lot of people get very angry, but he has a limitless enthusiasm, and the exhibitions that he has brought over are not the exhibitions that he would necessarily choose or to have himself, but he's very very clever at getting these. He's really quite a pleasant man really, but he puts almost everybody's backs up by talking in the way that he talked in that article.

Including yours?

What?

Does he put your back up?

I thought that was a very silly article really, and I don't believe at all in his attitude to art or what he likes, but I have to admit that he has achieved probably more than any other person in this country at getting exhibitions over here and negotiating for things and all that sort of thing. He is such a silly man in some ways, because he constantly puts up members' backs who are not reactionaries at all but they just think he talks a lot of drivel, which he does. But he constantly, if he sees any old codger member of the Academy, he won't even notice them, he will just walk past them with his nose high in the air. Well I think it's so silly of him. He's supposed to be very intelligent but he makes so many enemies.

So is there any kind of movement against him, to oust him, if he's got all these enemies?

Oh there are quite a lot of people that would like to get

rid of him I think, yes. But I think even they do realise that his track record is very good.

End of F1909 Side B

F1910 Side A

When you actually were invited to become a member or an associate member of the Academy at the beginning, what were your feelings about it?

I've always been rather keen. I thought quite simply that if it was good enough for Turner and Constable, it's good enough for me. And it was I suppose fairly reactionary in those days, and they never elected Turner to be President of the Academy, and he was very hurt because he felt he ought to be; and Constable had to wait until he was right in middle age before he was elected at all. And in spite of that, I always had a sort of love of the Academy; my mother used to take me there and see the Summer Exhibition, and it was the first sort of live art I saw really.

And what do you think it means to a younger artist today to be asked to join?

I think most of them would be very pleased to join. I dare say there are people... But it's surprising really, nearly all the people that have shows in Bond Street, with the exception of two or three, all have been invited to join, and they've joined. I mean we have Hockney and Kitaj, and a whole host of other people, and very good young people which in a way we've encouraged to join, and they've been very good members.

Henry Moore had some problems there, didn't he?

Oh Henry Moore, he was...his thing was, he was so shocked and horrified when Munnings made the statement I told you about, that he would never have anything to do with the Academy really. But he did occasionally come to shows and that sort of thing, he was on good terms with Hugh Casson and the other people, but he felt in a way that he would prefer to be out of any art institution. But it's the rather younger people that have been more enthusiastic about joining.

And while we're on the subject of current exhibitions, have you been to the Richard Long at the Hayward?

No I haven't. I suppose I ought to go, but the thing is, I don't seem to go to very many exhibitions, it's a bit of a...I don't like too many exhibitions, and I don't know whether I should like it or not; I dare say, it sounds quite interesting, but... You see when you get old you tend to just get immersed in your own problems, you find that's quite enough without criticising other people's.

And since you mention it, what was Stanley Spencer's funeral like? Presumably he had left lots of directions about it.

I didn't actually go to the funeral; I went to a memorial service there, and, I don't think he did really, I think he was a very...he was very ill towards the end; he probably would, if he had been weller he might well have made suggestions. I used to...I saw a fair amount of him, he was a very nice person to me; he liked one of my...you know that picture of mine of `The Betrayal of Christ'?

Yes.

He liked that picture tremendously, because it was doing something a bit like, well it was sort of a comment on the Bible really, a Bible subject, and, I found him a very nice person to deal with, and a very interesting person. I went down - well I could tell you a long story about it but I won't at the moment. Or would it be better if I gave you an account of it which I wrote in the Cookham, it was the centenary of Stanley Spencer, I wrote a short article there, and I describe the thing I told you, and I can let you have that, not today but I will get you a copy.

I'll put it in the Archive. But, can you remember who spoke at his memorial?

Pardon?

Who spoke at his memorial service, can you remember?

I don't remember now, I don't remember.

I mean given that he was quite a difficult character, can you remember the atmosphere of the service?

I think there was nothing very special to say. It was entirely his friends, and I sat next to the President and represented the Academy, and the two daughters were there that I knew slightly. I don't remember anything which wasn't extremely conventional. But now, I think I told you, I'm the President of the Stanley Spencer Society and I go down there occasionally for special things, and it's run by a group of very ordinary people down there who run...it opens every day and they have a whole rota of people that do this, you know, in between all their household chores and that sort of thing, and they do it with lots of feeling, and they're wonderful I think.

And did you feel that exhibition at the Barbican recreated the pattern that he wanted and, you know, by making those little alcoves and like a chapel?

Yes, yes, yes. I thought the exhibition was very nice. I can't bear going to the Barbican, I thought the pictures look as though they were in a public lavatory, but you know, it had no sort of...it's just the sort of thing which we can now do much better. But the Barbican, do you like it? I hate the place really, I can never find it, and I've been to concerts there and I didn't think the sound was very good, and it's so depressing the whole place, but, perhaps I'm wrong.

Going back to you, can you remember what your thoughts were when you were returning to England after the war? Had you a picture of what the future would be like and what you were going to do?

Well no I hadn't really, and I said...Kenneth Clark said he would get me a job at a public school if I would like to have it, and I said no, well I didn't particularly want that. But I found no difficulty when I got back. The school, the little school at Beckenham where I had been teaching before the war at once said they would give me some teaching if I wanted it, and then Camberwell, there was a madman named Mr Johnson who I think made a great reputation by getting as many sort of well-known young artists on his staff, because he was more interested really in his, what do you call it, his advertisements for the school, than he was in the actual running of the place, and he offered me a job of a day a week there, there were all sorts of people like Pasmore and Johnnie Minton, and he gathered everybody together there, and I thought, well this is going to be rather nice. But I found that I was never getting the same students a second time, I just had...and it was quite hopeless to do any sort of formal teaching I thought. And so one day I was walking in the National Gallery and a man named Percy Horton, who had been teaching for many years at the College, whom I knew, he said, `Oh I wish we could get you at the College, we're absolutely at the end of our resources. We were evacuated to the Lake District, and when we came back we found that the building had been bombed, everything had been more or less lost, and we're trying to get straight but we've got no staff, and no money.' He said would I...and one or two of the staff had got fed up and walked out, would I join in on that, you see. And so I said yes, yes I would be very pleased to. It was only a small amount of teaching.

Did you actually look on teaching as something you wanted to do, or something you had to do in order to keep going financially?

No, I thought it was a perfect way of not becoming a pot-boiler, not having to paint lots of things you didn't want to paint. And in those days if you worked for two days a week you could make enough money to live on, you couldn't live splendidly but you could at least, you didn't have to trouble too much really, and if you sold the odd picture as well, that was perfectly all right really. Well, when I went to the...they wanted me to teach still life painting, because a man had walked out because he could earn more money doing commercial art, and he was a very good commercial artist actually, but I came there, there was no, you know, I was asked to teach a still life class but there was no still life. The students had brought in old potatoes and cauliflowers and that sort of thing, basically the best of the things, and they all felt, they all were very unhappy, they didn't know what to do. Some of them had come out of the Forces, some of them had had a very dreary war in the Lake District because they felt that they were cut off from all the civilised world there: I think they were jolly lucky in many ways. But they were all very depressed. And they didn't like the odd bits of teaching that they were getting from various members of staff, and they asked me if I would go to their homes and criticise their work, and, well they only wanted a little bit of encouragement and spark to really get them going again, and I made a lot of friends who I still have now.

Can you tell who some of them were?

Pardon?

Who were they, the staff that you were talking about?

Well, one was Norman Adams, who, you know, is now the Keeper of the Academy, and they are none of them very famous names, but they were very...they are all quite good artists. But, they seem to do extremely well, and they were very much heartened I think by somebody taking a bit of personal interest in them. Gilbert Spencer was the head of the, was the Professor.

I don't know anything about him, can you tell me what he was like?

Gilbert Spencer was the younger brother of Stanley, and he had lots of Stanley's mannerisms, was a much better painter than people thought because he was overshadowed by his brother. He was an eccentric, and not an easy man really. I got on very well with him actually. And he had a tremendous gift of talking, he talked and talked, like Stanley of course. They had this very confident way of telling you how the world should, well, how art should be run and all about the students. He was absolutely positive with everything. And he was liked to some extent by the students; people like Ruskin Spear said he was extremely kind to them when he

was there just before the war, and I found him likeable enough, but he was an autocrat really, he would hate anybody to tell him that he was doing anything wrong. And of course, I had only been there about a year and a term, but I heard that the Principal of the whole College was due for retirement, and everybody was wondering a) whether the school would be closed, the College would be closed down completely, as seemed likely because they all say it costs a lot of money to run, and the old story we heard, and nothing much was coming out of it. And then I heard that there were various candidates who would like to take it on. And one day I remember Gilbert Spencer coming, walking along the corridor and seeing me, he said, `Oh Carel, I've never before been asked to go before the Council of the College, and I've got to go tomorrow.' So when I next saw him he was looking a bit glum, and I said to him, `Well how did your thing go, Gilbert?' And he said, `I got the sack.' And that was really rather awful, because he had asked me down for the weekend to his place, and there was a terrible gloom, and he was one of I think ten brothers, and I think two of them were solicitors, so he was ringing up these, `Can they throw me out?' and all the rest of it, you see. It was really rather awful. I liked Gilbert, and...

Do you know what the grounds were for throwing him out?

I think that they decided that they must have a change, I think, that is what I would imagine.

And he had no idea it was coming?

He had no idea, he was just pitched out at a moment's notice. And then I heard that the Council had appointed a new man, Robin Darwin, and Robin Darwin was a grandson of the great Darwin, and everybody at once thought that his uncle was on the Council and it was a bit of nepotism. But it proved to be an immensely successful move, because although Darwin was, Robin Darwin was an absolute autocrat, he became absolutely married to the College, and it was his whole life, and in very little time he transformed the whole of the place into a really humming institution. And I remember the first day he arrived, and he was due to criticise the students' works, which had been... They had in those days, I don't know whether they do it now, a sketch club in which people would, students would do work away from the College and pin it on the wall and they would have a distinguished person to come along and criticise the work. And I always remember, it was done in the Victoria & Albert lecture room, and we all went to this, and Darwin came in in a black suit holding his umbrella, and he didn't look at any of the pictures, he said, `I'm not going to waste my time looking at these dreadful pictures'. There was a gasp, and he said to them, `I'm going to make a promise to you. If you work, I will do my part, and I'll make this one of the...not only the most vital art school in England but in Europe too, and I shall get the very best staff that has ever been put

together.' It sounded all a bit pompous, but in fact that's exactly what he did, and he didn't spare himself. It was not just in the Painting School but later on when he was developing the School he got rid of a lot of the old departments, and fairly soon he decided one of the things he wanted to do was to have a school of film and television, and he went to the governors and said he wanted this, and they just laughed at him. Where's the money coming from? And this is just a...we want the school to be just traditional, and we want it to be very good of course but we want it to be...we don't want all these new-fangled things, you see. And so he didn't take no for an answer, he went, I think he went to the Treasury, and he said, `This has got to be done or you will find the country is lagging behind,' and he got money, and he started the thing himself. He was doing that all the time, and he appointed the first Professor of Fashion, and he was quite revolutionary and quite ruthless. He sacked the whole of the painting staff, including myself, but he said to me, `I'm going to re-appoint you, so you needn't worry'. `But,' he said, `it's the easiest way, sack them all, there are a few people that I shall select.'

That happened to Moynihan as well, didn't it? Didn't he get the sack?

No, no Moynihan, he...this was before Moynihan appeared, because you see Munnings...no, before he appeared. Moynihan was appointed, he was the only man that he appointed from outside, because he was a great friend and had already made quite a reputation for himself, and he thought that he... And that was a very good appointment, and...

Why, why was it a good appointment?

Well, Moynihan has got a good brain, and he was asked to organise a painting school there, and he did it very well. He had a rather easy-going attitude to things, but in fact he knew what he was doing, and he organised a way of, a curriculum for the painters which, it wasn't amazingly original but it was certainly miles better than things... He encouraged people to paint in the life class and that sort of thing, but he also encouraged, he was quite interested in students doing rather more progressive work, and, well all in all he had a happy relation with the students, they liked him, and he used to get...we talked, I was always friendly with him, and he asked me who one should think of as possible people to teach there, and I of course suggested people that I knew, like John Minton and particularly Ruskin Spear who was a great friend of mine. And then I think Moynihan suggested Robert...no...I forget names.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] .....Hayes. But it was, in spite of all that, it had weaknesses in a way. For one thing we had no women on the staff, and more than half the students were women, and I always felt that was rather a bad thing, and when I came along I insisted on having at any rate two or three women on the staff because, you see a lot of these young people, they've come from the north and they suddenly find themselves in London, and

often sort of, you know, they were remote parts of the country and they find it very difficult to settle down, and there's nobody very much to talk to, and so I felt all that sort of thing had to be gone into. But any rate it did start, and we had a good lot of students. We had to, we found that there was no difficulty in finding people, because they all seemed to...you see there was, the only rival to us at that time was the Slade school, and they had a good tradition, but it was very much the old school going on just as it had been, and I think things began to move, and not necessarily always in the Painting School. The Painting School distinguished itself by having some good students who won scholarships and that sort of thing, but they...I've forgotten what I was going to say now.

You were saying that it wasn't entirely faultless.

Well I don't think it was, no, it wasn't at all, but it had to be built and it took a long time to build. Moynihan was quite brilliant at laying down a sort of foundation, but he soon got a bit tired doing it, and he was a bit erratic about things really, and after a few, some time, we used to see less and less of him.

Is that because he was doing his own work, or because he had got into something else?

Yes, I think so. And of course that began to worry Robin Darwin, and he... Oh and then Colin Hayes had got TB rather badly, and then he recovered and almost directly he got it again, and Colin Hayes was at that moment the senior staff, he was the assistant, second in command. And so Darwin was beginning to get worried, a) that the professor wasn't appearing very much, and the other thing was that his second was constantly ill, and so he appointed Roger de Grey as second in command you see. And, well Roger was a great success, and he had been teaching in the University.....

<u>End of F1910 Side A</u>

F1910 Side B

.....Grey had been teaching in Newcastle.

Yes. And Darwin, in spite of the fact that Moynihan had been his great friend at the Slade, he didn't hesitate, he said, `Well it's time we had a change,' and slightly to my surprise he appointed me in his place you see.

Had you been teaching full-time at this point, or...?

Pardon?

Had you been teaching full-time, or were you part-time?

No no, I only did two days a week. And it meant that I should have to work four days if I accepted the...and I didn't want to do that really. As I said I could get along perfectly well with two days' teaching and it was quite enough. He had already insisted that, Darwin, that if I taught at the College I musn't teach anywhere else, which, I agreed to that, and so I found myself in a dilemma, I didn't quite know what to do, and then I was determined...oh he said to me, Darwin said to me, `Well you know, there's not a lot for you to do, you could do all the work in the mornings and you can paint all afternoons,' you see, and so that sounded all right, and it was perfectly true, that was what happened. But as time went on, the management of the school took more and more time. For one thing, it was run, I ran the College and Moynihan had before, as a, if you like a benevolent dictator, I hope it was true, I think it was really, but as things went on it became fashionable, not only in the College but everywhere else, to have things run in a very democratic way. Well, it sounds very nice but it becomes much more difficult to do. Very often a decision that I would normally make in a flash could only be done by having two meetings and discussing it for, two separate long meetings, and coming to exactly the same conclusion. [BREAK IN RECORDING] And it got worse and worse. On the credit side, I had a beautiful studio, and I had two...but they also gave me two telephones which rang madly all the time, so whenever I dashed off to do a bit of painting I was always interrupted. So the only way of keeping up my output of painting was to come in at every possible, either in the mornings before the students arrived, I used to come very early, or else in the weekends I would use, because I had the place to myself at the weekends, and that's where I could produce my works you see. But we had done a lot of things, it wasn't...we had gone a long way. For instance, Francis Bacon who lived fairly close always used to envy us these wonderful studios, and I thought, well it would be a good idea, and I don't know whether it was my suggestion, but any rate what we did is, we said, `You can

work here if you like,' and then, that was rather good, to have a famous practising artist working in the College.

He was famously antisocial, how did it actually work?

He was most sociable. Naturally he would be annoyed if somebody walked into the room that I gave him in the middle of his painting. I always used to...of course a lot of the students at that time were very influenced by Bacon, and they used to come up to me and say, `Well could we talk to him?' And I would say, he's not a monster, although you may think he is, but he is...if you see him in the evening walking along the corridor or going off to...coming back from lunch or something like that and you want him particularly to get a criticism of their work, I don't suppose, if you're tactful and that sort of thing, he will probably be quite happy to talk to you.' And so, a very nice sort of atmosphere; it wasn't just him but we had other people too, and...

Can you remember what he painted during those years, were you aware of what was going on in his studio?

Oh, he only paints one picture doesn't he? No it's always men sort of getting on top of each other or something, I don't know, but, they were all like that.

Do you think he was influenced by anything that was happening in the College as opposed to vice versa?

No, I don't. But on one occasion, I'll tell you, there was a chap who was a great disciple of his, and I said, `Well go and talk to him if you like,' and he took Francis into...he had little cubicles, because we didn't have a lot of room for the students who wanted their own private studio, so they built little cubicles with screens round them, and when Francis looked at this picture he said, `Well I think it's absolutely dreadful, but if you really want to be a painter I'll show you how to do it'. And so he...you know the College was adjoining the Victoria & Albert Museum, and we had a little private staircase that led us right down into the museum, so he took him down into the museum, took him up and showed him Constable's, the sketch of Constable's `Leaping Horse', and he said, `There you are, do a copy of that picture and you will learn more than you can learn from...' well he didn't say from himself but he said that's a very good way of you finding out about painting. So, to our great astonishment this disciple came along with a large canvas and got permission to do a copy in the... It was a dreadful copy, and it didn't make him into a better painter, but...

Is he still painting?

I've no idea, I doubt it, I can hardly remember who it was now, but it did actually take place.

And do you think Bacon himself had copied that?

What?

Had Bacon himself copied that Constable?

I don't think so, no, I don't think he would, but I think that it was good advice, I think, and certainly it is a most wonderful picture.

Do you know if there were other students at the College that Bacon was fired by and actually was excited by their work?

Well it's difficult to say. I suppose what's his name, Auerbach and Kossoff may have been to some extent; they went their own way but I suppose they must have got something out of him really I suppose. And there were a lot of followers of him which I don't think came to very much really.

I mean what do you think was added by his presence in that room, painting?

Nothing except that they very often got an opportunity of seeing these pictures when he wasn't there, he sometimes took them in and showed them, and the fact that he was there and they were full of hero-worship and that sort of thing. I think it had quite a lot to do with...and they felt in a way they were part of a sort of painting situation. But that was only one thing; we used to get, I used to get various artists, practising artists to come along and talk to them about their own things, and, I mean one of the most popular people to come was Lowry, and everybody absolutely loved him, and...

What did they love about him?

What did they love about...? Well he was a wonderful personality, and he was so amusing, and he would show them exactly how he painted his pictures and all that sort of thing.

How did he paint his pictures?

Oh don't ask me those silly questions, because they've got to... I very often remembered his remarks to the students, he was always very keen that they should draw, and draw from nature, and draw things that you see in the street, and dogs and cats, but the way he drew dogs and cats were not the way which was generally recognised as being fine academic work really. But he also told them lots about life as an artist in a provincial town, which interested them immensely because they came from these provincial towns, and where there were no dealers, galleries, there was absolutely nothing that they got to see, things, you see. A lot of these, a great number of students came from the provinces. And then we...we tried in a way to get a lot of rather distinguished artists to come along and talk to the students, and not in a very sort of way that attracted...not in the kind of way that they expected to give words of great wisdom, but to talk as equals to them. Bacon after all is an ordinary man, and that sort of thing is...and they would contradict these people, and then they would be... But it was all part of growing up as an artist.

And the students were all keen to come and listen to other people, they weren't sort of thinking they knew it all?

As a rule, and the most...people most willing to listen were often the best artists. On the whole they were a very good lot of students, very much dedicated to their work. A great change came over the College really, because it suited me very well, because in the olden days, and before I ever appeared at the College and when Ruskin Spear was a student there, nearly all the students most of the time were surrounding a model and painting from the life. When it came, if anybody...there were very few that wanted to do much else, and they did it very well, but there was not much way to try and teach people to do imaginary painting, and one of the things that we did do, we wrote down this thing of working entirely in the life room. Mind you, we never dispensed with the life models, we had models there whenever people wanted them, but we also, we felt that so many seemed to lose any confidence to let their imaginations take its right place in a painting, and paintings all got...well they were very good life paintings many of them, some of the girls did superb life paintings, but one hoped that it could go further than that, and so one encouraged them not only to go into the life rooms but also to build little cubicles where they could do their own imaginary works, they could go out and they could get studies and things and work in seclusion, by themselves, because after all, when they leave the College they weren't going to have anybody to fall back on.

Was any part of the training at the College to do with teaching them what life was going to be like when they went out into the world?

Well I tried to do that, because, and that's still very much lacking, and the students were so frightened of going out into the world by themselves, many of them, that they put blinkers on and they would only look straight in front of them. But I did get all sorts of people, many of whom weren't very popular, very grand people that ran art galleries in London. I used to get the man that ran, oh, Colnaghi's and all the galleries which were rather like the Marlborough is today, we had all those; at least, I made a point in getting those sorts of people. I also got artists to come along and tell them how they were succeeding in doing other things. For instance, some of the students wanted to become portrait painters, and so I would get a portrait painter to come along and talk to them; and others might be good at animal painting. Well you see, one's thinking entirely not so much of producing wonderful artists as to get them a way of livelihood and they can go and do their abstract pictures if they... But if they have a great natural gift, develop it you see.

It must be very difficult, isn't it, developing somebody's natural gift if actually in your heart of hearts you don't find the work interesting?

Well, they had great freedom, and they could if they wanted to, draw dogs or something like that, not in the Painting School, but Skeaping who was running the Sculpture School had horses in the studios and if anybody wanted to draw a horse they could go over and do it you see. We tried to get away from the very narrow things which art schools had become rather you see. How is all that?

[END OF SESSION]

[Interview with Carel Weight on July the 11th 1991 in the artist's studio.]

.....received a letter from Goldsmiths', what was that news?

Well they suddenly decided to give me an honorary degree which, I didn't even know they gave them, and so it was quite a surprise to me. I've had some before but this was my old school you see, and I have this great feeling for it really, but I had an extremely happy time, there were hardly any students and most of the students had one room completely to themselves. I shared with another person, but the whole atmosphere was really idyllic really. I had made lasting friendships, and wonderful staff, and if they have art colleges in Heaven, that is the nearest I think one could imagine.

You can't say better than that. But who was it that you shared the studio with there then?

Pardon?

Who did you share the studio with?

Oh, a very sweet but absolutely hopeless chap. His name was Dunnit, and curiously enough he never did it, because he was always lacking in initiative, but he was a great chap. He had curious bees in his bonnet, one was that he collected steam-rollers, and he had a place in the country on the outskirts of London, a field, where he bought up old dilapidated steam-rollers and did his best to repair them. And of course in those days there was a great thing with the young to have steam-rollers, and they in fact had contests, racing contests, and all sorts...they particularly interested artists for some...heaven knows the reason for it. John Nash for instance would never miss a meeting of steam-rollers, and he took me to several. And they have a certain charm, although they were very noisy you know, but to see these great mammoth monsters sort of careering round issuing out blue smoke was something you know.

Where did the races take place?

Oh, they had them I think mostly in the south of England; they had meetings, friendly farmers would throw open a field for them, and they were very well attended, and of course like everything they betted on who would win. And they were jolly things. You never knew, you knew that you would never lose a fortune; you put about, two shillings was about what you put onto your fancies you see.

Have you ever been a gambling man in terms of horses or anything else?

No, I've never had any instinct for gambling at all; I'm sure it was very wrong, because most of the great people gamble at times and that rather puts me in my place.

Your mother gambled, didn't she?

Oh my mother did, yes, yes, yes she did, and her father was, he wasted away all his savings on backing horses, but I could see no point in it really.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....you coming back from the war, and immediately getting involved in teaching, but we didn't talk at all about your own work at this stage.

Well, you see I had been away from work for about five years, apart from the odd times when Kenneth Clark and various other people had got me out of the Army to do brief jobs, but the fact of at least being, every day having to do things at a certain time, to get up early when dawn was breaking and appearing on the parades, all this discipline told on one after a bit, one began to hate it really, and you knew that if you stepped out of line you would be punished in some sort of way. And so it was a great feeling of freedom when you woke up in the morning and said to yourself, I can go down to the river and do a drawing rather than having to go on some benighted military exercise you see. Mind you I had quite a good time in many ways in the Army, but I did lack that freedom really.

But by the time you had finished your stint abroad and were coming back to England, did you have a lot of ideas in your head about what you wanted to paint when you got back, or had you not actually thought forward?

I hadn't thought very constructively because I didn't know quite what I would find, and I thought it might be possible that I would be completely forgotten, and then I would have to try and build some sort of reputation for myself. I thought that...even Clark said to me, `If you're going to have a bad time,' he said, `I think I can get you a job teaching in a public school.' Well that just wasn't the sort of thing I wanted to do, and I really did feel a great desire to paint again. I had a feeling that the five years without painting might leave its mark on me and I might not be able to do the things that I would have liked to do.

You mean you would have lost ground technically?

Well I might have done, yes. That was a sort of worry. And even when I started painting I was by no means certain that the work that I was doing was as good as I had done just before the war.

What sort of things did you feel you had lost?

I don't know, because...you see, I was very...I tried to...you see I had nothing to go on much. I think I told you earlier on I lost all my early work, or at least not quite all of it but quite a lot of it, so I couldn't sort of look at those works and say, now, is the thing that I've learnt comparable with the things that I was doing then? And so one was feeling about a bit like a blind man to some extent, and I looked at...I was particularly interested in my friend Ruskin Spear who had been, because he was lame he did no Army or military service of any sort, and he in my absence had been elected to the Royal Academy and was well on the way to fame and fortune; he was painting some lovely landscapes - no, I'm sorry, he was making a

reputation more on portraits, but he was painting landscapes, he was doing all sorts of things, and I couldn't help wondering whether I had fallen considerably behind. And so I meant to get down to work as much as I could. And I wanted also, I had a burning desire really to just paint quietly on my own, and one of the things I did, I painted a series of pictures of the Thames. I used to go up and down the Thames. It was very romantic for me; the Thames was much more interesting in those days when, if you went down to a place like Greenwich or further down the river it was a most romantic place with huge great liners coming up and down, and yet there was a lot of the old still there. And that was a good subject for me, and I used to take my paints and go to various places and take a room in a hotel overlooking the water and paint a series of little pictures, and that I think really got me working you see.

End of F1910 Side B

F2546 Side A

You mean you would hire a room in a hotel to use during the day and then go home, or you mean you would just go off and have a nice holiday?

No, I would go away for...I never stayed away very long, I might have stayed for three or four days, which I enjoyed, I enjoyed going to these places, which I didn't know at all in those days, and painting, going out in the morning early and painting, or painting from the window. And I found it rather romantic and something absolutely different to the things that I had been doing. I had a freedom, and I used to perhaps sit in the pub and read or something like that. It was a fairly solitary life, my painting life was in a way, I didn't...occasionally I went off with various people and painted, but generally by myself.

Do you think you needed at that time to sort of re-establish your own life at that point?

I think so, I think so. One had to rather sort of begin to feel what you were again really.

Can you remember the actual bits of the Thames you were exploring?

Well, I drew right down past, now what is the place, well a good distance down beyond Greenwich and Rochester and all around there, which I liked tremendously really. And there was a tremendous lot of old shipping, I mean the wrecks of old shipping and that sort of thing, which was fascinating really. It hadn't been tidied up at all for ages, and I painted...around Rochester was a particularly interesting place for me, and, what's the other place? All along there anyway.

Right. And, did you spend quite a lot of time walking by the Thames, or would you go to a place and find what you wanted to paint fairly soon and just get on and paint? I mean how much was it sort of meditative in general?

It was active more than meditative. I didn't have a lot of difficulty in finding things to paint, they seemed to be all round one, one felt it was in the air, and one could...I did quite a lot of work. And of course, also I went up, it was not all at the mouth of the Thames, I went right up to Richmond, and I used to take a bus up in the early morning, perhaps the first bus, and about 5 o'clock in the morning I would set up my easel somewhere or other at Richmond or at Kew or somewhere like that. I chose that time because I always get a bit upset when a lot of people come up and watch what you are doing, it annoys me very much, and I always said to myself, well, they've got as much right to stand there and watch as I have painting there

really, but I tried to avoid them by going out early. And when I painted, I painted fairly rapidly and if I could get in two solid hours before people began to bother one, then one didn't mind quite so much.

So after that did you go back to the hotel and paint there, or did you stop, or what happened?

Well it depended very much on what I wanted really. If it was a sort of interesting thing towards the evening I would paint from my room. I had no fixed thing, I had no routine as it were, I just painted... You are at the mercy, if you paint those sort of pictures, the sort of things I was doing, you are completely at the mercy of the sort of weather you were getting really. Gravesend was the place I was just thinking of, and Gravesend was fascinating really, and I loved it there, and I used to wander up through this mostly Georgian and Victorian town as it was there, you could walk to the back of the town and go up a little hill and come onto a recreation ground where you had got a marvellous view right across the Thames as it wound towards London you see. That was very inspiring. I didn't want to paint panoramic views or anything like that, but it created a wonderful atmosphere for me, I was fascinated. I did a lot of painting there, and they're still about and people still seem to like them, and they come up at Christie's sometimes. And then of course I, as I got attached to art colleges and that sort of thing I had to fit it in with whatever I was doing in the way of teaching. I think I told you last time that I suddenly was offered a job teaching at the College, and I had two other jobs before, one at Goldsmiths' about one day a week and another one at Camberwell which I threw up, I think I told you last time. But I wanted if I possibly could to keep my teaching down to two days a week so that I could have plenty of time to paint.

Yes. You did one called `The Albert Bridge' didn't you, is that part of the series you are speaking of?

Yes, yes that's right. `The Albert Bridge', I had two friends, both lived just overlooking the Albert Bridge, and I painted from both their...and concocted pictures. I should think I did at least 25 to 30 paintings, and they were fairly large ones, of the Albert Bridge, and I always said it was a very beautiful bridge, and I... About the first year I came out of the Army there were extremely tough winters, and snow fell after Christmas and went on right until Easter, and it wasn't very pleasant because you see we were still on rationing and that sort of thing, very little food, and things were really very uncomfortable. But for all that, to be free was even more important really. But I did do a whole series of paintings there.

It's quite unusual for you to go back and back and back to something isn't it?

Not really, although I go back now differently; I go back very often to old subjects and I re-paint them, I paint them in different ways. But they are more imaginative pictures, and this was...I suppose that it was absolutely fascinating to me to be able to paint the Albert Bridge, which I have always...well I always was completely absorbed in painting it really.

But, although you might have gone back and treated similar subjects, you had never, as far as we have talked before, done anything like...

Pardon?

When we've talked before I've never had the impression that up till then you had ever done 25 pictures of a same subject.

Oh I don't suppose I had, but even before that, I used to paint the river to some extent, but not quite so concentrated or on such a big scale. I used to go out with a sketch book and do things about that size. But with the Albert Bridge, partly because I had the benefit of being in a room and not being blown to...the whole atmosphere being very uncomfortable, to be in a room and paint, I could paint on a larger scale you see, and that opened up things for me really.

Do you think partly the repetition was again to do with anchoring yourself back into your own work?

Well while I was there, it's like a piece of music really, one saw variations that you could do, and I suppose just being in one particular spot you could do a dozen different ways of doing it, I mean like Monet did you see.

Yes. And presumably doing that subject you had to be very conscious of Whistler.

I wasn't conscious of Whistler very much; I always admired his paintings but, I just sort of forgot everybody and just got on with my own particular thing. Yes Whistler did that sort of painting rather marvellously really, and actually the same place practically; I don't think the Albert Bridge was there in his day, but it might have just been put up, but he never painted as I did, looking at the complete bridge, he might have taken just little bits of it you see. But certainly, I didn't think much about him at that time.

What do you think about someone like Canaletto's treatment of water?

Oh, well I think he can do no wrong for me, they're so beautiful, and if one does think that the water is a little stylized, it is, but what a marvellous style it is, with the...it just looks absolutely right, and I think he was perhaps the greatest painter of all doing that sort of thing really. And, well, in a different sort of way, Constable was too, but... And I somehow felt that I wanted to do something a bit more like Turner, of using one's imagination and superimposing it on the scene in front of one, and that's the sort of approach I've always had really.

But when you were doing this series did you have Monet in mind at all? I mean you've said you really had nobody in mind much.

Well I like Monet, I like Sisley, I like a whole lot of people. When I painted I didn't think of them too much you know. I don't know whether it looks as if I did, but I don't think I did really.

And did this series ever get shown as a group, or were they always split up?

No, no. In those days I used to show at the Leicester Galleries.

You had a show there in '47 didn't you?

Yes, I had two I think there, yes, and then one much later, and they sold very well.

Did you ever sell a picture from having somebody come up while you were painting it, did anything ever come of those encounters?

Oh yes, oh yes. No, I'm sorry, not while I painted it, but I had all sorts of people sort of making remarks about things. No they didn't actually buy anything I don't think as far as I can remember.

And you never had any friendships grow from that sort of encounter, there was never any serious meeting that way?

Not really; some very amusing things, generally from young boys who were very interested in what one was doing but said the most extraordinary things. I remember a chap, a young man who was obviously a public school boy, and he came up and looked at me while I was painting and he said, `Oh very good sir, very good sir.' And so to make a bit of conversation, he had been standing there for some time, I said, `Well, do you paint too?' He said, `Oh dear

no sir, but I practise with the most difficult of all medias, the mapping pen.' (laughs) I can remember that one. And I remember an extraordinary story. There was a terrible murder, I was painting in Putney I think it was, and I saw two little boys sitting watching me paint, and they began to lose interest in my painting and they began talking about the murderer you see, and they said, `You see that place over the other side of the river? That's where he was caught'. And so, the chap said, `Well I don't think he ought to have been caught, he only murdered some women.' And so the other chap said, `Don't you like women?' And so he said, `Well I like my mother.' And so, there was a silence for a little while, and...well it went on like that, it went on for hours, I was fascinated really.

Did you paint the murder ever?

What?

Did you ever paint the murder?

I never painted the murder, no; no it was a particularly horrible one really, a man had enticed numbers of women into his house which must have been terrible, and then murdered them and bricked them up in the wall. Really the most horrible thing, you know.

So there aren't murdered women behind the Weight brick walls in paintings?

No, there are not really. My murders are a bit too gentlemanly I think really.

And, did you ever go out and just sketch, or you always went out to the river and painted straight away?

I mostly painted; occasionally I went out and did a drawing. Really if I were planning a picture I would perhaps do a little drawing and see how I could place it on a canvas and that sort of thing. But all this was only one side of my art, because I was always very keen to paint things from my imagination. But what I do like to do is to accept the foundation, some actual place, and paint my various things happening within the scene. I suppose, I've always liked sort of stories where the writer has chosen an actual place. I mean H.G. Wells when he wrote the, was it `The War of the Worlds', when the inhabitants of Mars suddenly appeared, and he describes these terrible people appearing in a background of Balham with the little houses and that sort of thing. Well that sort of thing is a thing that I like really, and so when I for instance painted `The Betrayal of Christ' I chose a place, the Crystal Palace. You see all those sort of things, I've got a sort of feeling that it's no use painting things, biblical things

with people dressed up in bath towels really, you know; you've got to put some sort of things which people can feel it happened in your street or in your house and something like that you see.

I am fascinated that that's where it is, because I was going to ask you about that, the steps and the vases.

Yes. Well I walked, first of all doing that picture I walked...no, I saw, I think it was in one of the Sunday papers, perhaps the `Observer' or something like that, a picture of the derelict gardens of the Crystal Palace, and there were pictures of the trees drooping and dead in parts and that sort of thing, and I thought, well I might find...because I had in the back of my mind I wanted to paint that, and there are lots of reasons to paint that picture, I wrote about them somewhere or other. And you see the subject matter is marvellous. Jesus is praying with, is it two or three disciples, and suddenly a whole lot of people come along and they are bent on arresting him and charging him with, whatever it was, but...well, and they disturb them, and the disciples turn on these people and they don't stand any chance because there are many...there are only about four disciples. And there is a brief scuffle, and in the scuffle Peter, one of the...draws his sword and cuts off the ear of one of the people. And another thing which is described is that one of the disciples is fighting with somebody else and he loses his shirt in the scuffle, and in the midst of all this Pilot - no I'm sorry, Judas comes up and in order to show them which is Christ, he kissed him. Well, that gave me a most exciting problem. It would have been easy to do on the films, but when you have people that can't talk, they can't...and they are...you've got to show everything by gesture, and...it's an enthralling problem. So that is, in the first instance, why I was interested to paint it. And then the next thing was to put it into a satisfactory setting. It all sounds a bit like the theatre more than anything else, but it's a theatre with tremendous limitations. You can only do it in one moment, you've got to show the whole thing, this complex thing, in one moment. And that's why it fascinated me and that's why I painted it. So I wandered about in these derelict grounds on a summer's day, and it looked absolutely undramatic in every way, but there were things that gave me hints that I could do it. One of the hints was, there was a staircase coming down, and I thought to myself, well that might be a very good place where it could happen; they're coming down the staircase to arrest Christ, and very curiously enough there was one of these great decorative urns which you have for flowers on this, and it looked, it was hanging perilously on one side, and it seemed to point to the fact that there had been a scuffle or something going on there and somebody had fallen against it or something, I don't know. And so those things were things which pointed to the fact that that could be well the place that I was looking for. But of course it was an afternoon like it was here, there was no feeling of drama at all, it was just hot sunshine, people going about with various clothes on,

which might have done, but any rate it wasn't the sort of thing. And you can see it in my book, it's reproduced, you remember it don't you?

Yes indeed.

And that's how it gradually sort of took shape. And of course, I painted, I took a photograph of it to start with, and then I went back and I did a few, I did a drawing of the setting as it was, and with those various things in my memory I began to start this picture. And I went off on my holidays a little while afterwards to the south of France, and one day, very early in the morning there was a thunder storm and the sky was a sort of plum colour, and I remembered that, and somehow I had all these sort of clues, could I bring them together into one coherent thing? So I set to work, and eventually it began to click for me, but it was a difficult thing to do but an enthralling thing really.

How long had you had the idea of it in your mind for? It sounds like it had been there for a while.

Well it had. It came really from in a way, I used to like to go to the cinema and that sort of thing, and then I began comparing the art of the film producer to the painter, and I then thought, has anybody done this sort of thing before, and I soon realised that it had been done before, and it had been done ages before the cinema or anything, in fact it was done by Giotto. And he painted similar biblical scenes, and he did it by gesture in which he is showing the happenings entirely from his characters, and of course with the appropriate backgrounds and that sort of thing. In many ways, I can never understand quite why other people haven't seen that: I suppose they have seen it, I don't know. Always when I read a book about Giotto they talk about all sorts of things but they never seem to talk about the technical things behind it which were quite extraordinary really. To some extent of course Rembrandt too, but somehow it's much clearer to me in Giotto.

Had you see a lot of Giotto when you were in Italy?

I saw all I could, and, yes, I saw perhaps the greatest things in Padua, and I saw the earlier work in Assisi. And one or two of the pictures are incredible really. There's one that gives an illusion of Christ, the resurrection, Christ coming out of the grave. The soldiers are asleep, and in a rather miraculous way he has implied that Christ has crossed the picture and is walking out of the picture. And that is quite extraordinary to me, and the only people that have ever done things approaching that are Giotto - no, what am I talking about? The only that have done things like that, apart from Giotto, Goya, curiously enough, gives the most

wonderful feeling of movement. There's a bullfight, and the bull has run amuck amongst the spectators, and it's chasing them out of the picture; there's absolutely nothing except the painting of the bullring on one side of the picture, there's not a soul in it, and the whole people are crowing out of the picture, out of the way of the bull, and it's an extraordinary picture, and that is pure cinema in a way. And of course in a much gentler way Degas sometimes does odd distributions of figures and that sort of thing that implies movement. But that's only one thing you see. He does it rather wonderfully. There's one particular picture of a repetition of a man, of two children and two men walking out of the picture. But in a way that's all right, but movement is only one of the things, and Giotto seemed to do the whole lot.

I mean it links, doesn't it, to what you were saying you learnt when you were at the Hammersmith School of Art when you were doing a lot, looking at Piero della Francesca, that sort of architectural perspective and everything.

Yes, yes, yes.

Was that one of the first times where you very consciously have drawn on that, or was it really there most of the time?

I don't know when it started with me, but I became, very early on I became rather... I remember having a talk with another student and.....

End of F2546 Side A

F2546 Side B

You were discussing it with a student.

Yes. I remember when my friend said, `What are your aims in painting?' I said, `I would like to produce a certain sort of magic,' and all these things that I've just been telling you about is a sort of magic, to me, to be able to make inanimate sort of figures move, and to imply their movement in some way.

The Crystal Palace is a perfect setting in a way, isn't it, because it's got that sort of framework of a life that used to exist, and an absolute absence as well.

Yes, yes. Absolutely, yes, yes. And, I went into it fairly more than I do in most things, and I implied various things which I saw no harm in doing, although it wasn't quite consciously...there are figures of saints which had...a series of statues of saints and things like that, which sort of implied a sort of biblical thing to some extent, and... I don't know, that picture I've always thought rather an important one from my point of view. I've done other biblical pictures, I did two versions of the Crucifixion for instance.

Yes I wanted to talk about that. Before we get on to that though, from what I remember there's a slightly Nazi feel to the uniforms in that one isn't there.

Yes, yes.

Presumably that was to do with having just come out of the war.

Well when I was brought up, as a little child really, I suppose I was about five or so, and in those days the bogeymen were the Germans, and they used to tell us terrible stories; even children were conscious of the frightful cruelty that they were supposed, or probably did do to helpless people and children and so forth. And so in my early days the monster people were the Germans; they still are really because I can't quite get that out of my mind, those awful helmets, and if I think of the cruelness of war I generally think of the people in that. So I saw no reason why I shouldn't introduce them into that you see. In the picture, if one's talking about clothes and that sort of thing, I choose a sort of nondescript clothing. I mean I did certainly paint these people looking rather like German soldiers, but the average people were just sort of any old period really.

Did you use models at all or were they all imaginary?

No, I can't do it that way. People might criticise me, and I'm sure they do very often, that the drawing is all wrong, but it isn't really wrong for me because it's expressive of a certain thing I want to show, a certain movement, a certain...and sometimes I admit that the drawing is not anatomically always right. You see I'm a funny one about drawing really, because I find a lot of the great drawings of the world are, to me, they don't work at all; I mean a lot of Raphael's drawings, I mean you would think it was perjury or something to criticise him, but there's a picture of a battle, a group of figures, where they look like a lot of ballet dancers to me, and have nothing to do with the battle as I would know it, I mean even an old-fashioned battle. And so I take a lot of liberties really, and I want to... I tell you, Edward Lear for instance very often can convey more of the thing I want to in drawing than Raphael can, but of course I suppose that's all silly, but that's as it appears to me.

But why would you, for instance you used models in `The Silence', didn't you, why would you use them for that?

That's a different thing. You see, I paint a lot of quite different sorts of pictures, and this is a real one, and...

`The Silence'.

Pardon?

`The Silence'.

`The Silence' is a piece of... The other comes more from my imagination of a scene that I have never seen, but this comes from a thing which I was much more familiar with. I invented this picture, `The Betrayal', entirely, it was just as I would imagine it; but this other thing was much closer to my actual knowledge of things. I mean I was always very thrilled with the two-minute silence because it was uncanny, and suddenly, you know, I was in an art school sometimes when November the 11th appeared and suddenly everything quietened down, there was no clatter, there was absolutely nothing, and as I said before the only thing that happened was, in the distance you heard a dog barking because it couldn't think why it was so quiet, and the eeriness of it, and that's what I wanted to paint and so I wanted to paint it as real as I could. And so I chose actual people, and in fact it was three portraits of three unconnected people, because they all had their own special thoughts about that thing, and that was different really to...

But is it also perhaps partly to do with the fact that it's an imaginary.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] .....talking about when you would and wouldn't use a model, and you were saying that 'The Silence' was very much based on reality, and `The Betrayal' imagination. I was thinking, there was another time when you used a model, was `Allegro Strepitoso' in fact, also imaginary. I was just wondering whether there was anything that was in it was to do with the fact that you, in `The Betrayal', although it's imagination it's also based on the story of Christ, which nobody knows whether it's true or not, but it's as if there's another ingredient, because you've got the whole of Christianity to do with them, the figure of Christ.

Well, the answer really is that the, you know that the `Allegro Strepitoso' was one of the very first pictures I painted, of that sort anyway, and it was a painting I did at Goldsmiths' when I was there. And a lot of my...one or two of my teachers were very academic in their approach, and they said, `Now you ought to get drawings for all these people,' you see. And so, I did what I was told. I was never very happy with the results, but somehow it worked, but as soon as I had left the college I hadn't these people to bother about, and I rather discarded them all, who I found, it was more trouble than it was worth, and I thought I could invent figures which would be better for me than the perhaps slightly more academic realistic figures that you could get by a pose. You see actually I think that a lot of those sort of people spoiled their pictures because they didn't trust their imagination sufficiently, and they would do all sorts of...have brilliant ideas, and somehow by the time they had got the right sort of chap, found the right sort of chap or the right sort of girl that would go into their picture, it was never really right at all because one's imagination is so different really. And so I had more or less discarded models entirely in my imaginary work.

It's interesting, because I was thinking the other day, I went past some of those paintings on the railings outside Hyde Park, and because I had been thinking about landscape paintings, because I've been writing about Hamish Fulton and the way he uses words instead of landscapes, and I was thinking it would be almost impossible to have an exciting exhibition at somewhere like the Serpentine of a contemporary landscape artist doing straight landscape pictures, and yet these things on the railings at Hyde Park were technically very good, they looked like the landscapes, but as you were saying, there's just something absolutely dead about them.

Yes, it's strange isn't it really. But I of course like very much if I...but I like to anchor my pictures down on reality, and use figures and natural forms and animals, anything like that, as the imaginary side of the thing. You see you can have one sort of fixed thing, you've got to...I don't say you've got to but some people make up, like Blake made up pictures entirely out of his imagination, and they work marvellously, but for me, I rather like to be anchored down to

something, and build my picture up with a strong foundation of the world we live in. I want to make things look as real as I can. But there it is, I don't... [BREAK IN RECORDING] You look at the whole picture inside.

There's the picture on the front of the Jacobson catalogue.

That is a very realistic scene, and if you walked...no but it's inside and you get the complete picture, somewhere, I don't know where it is, towards the end I think. Here it is.

This is `Primavera'.

It is the `Primavera'. Well, the `Primavera' picture, it really is one of the most wonderful pictures in the world, I think, it's pure loveliness.

The Botticelli.

The Botticelli. And I thought that spring in England is not quite like that. You get these howling winds and you get all sorts of, you know, it's not very comfortable very often, and that was my only slight comment on it here. But of course, the actual landscape, if I could take you there you would say, `Oh yes, those are the very trees,' and all the rest of it you see, and if it were the time of year you would see that the trees were in blossom, and it's all exactly like that. And then, I accept the `Primavera' as being a wonderful character, she's more placid, and she's in Italy of course because they have better weather there and they are sweet and they are lovely, and here she's being whisked along by the wind and her hair's...and scanty clothes are all over the place, and... You see that's the sort of thing that sometimes I attack in a slightly sort of cynical way, but I don't let it worry one too much. But of course the actual movement of the picture is a thing that interests me really, the wind and the figure, and the figure is not quite, she's not quite human, her feet are a foot off the ground, and...

Your figures are often not quite human aren't they.

That's true, that's true, yes. Here they are more human you see.

This is `The Guardian Angel'.

Yes. I like painting a guardian angel; I'm slightly sniffy about guardian angels because I don't think God looks after us too well, but... This man is slightly lustful about them, and again it's

the same theme as my picture with the tiger in it you see; he slightly hesitates to become too obsessional, but, there it is.

But the picture with the tiger is one of the ones you put in the Academy this year isn't it.

Yes, yes. You've seen that?

Yes I saw it here, I haven't been to the Academy yet. And, quite a lot of your figures have this quality of being almost invisible and slightly there.

Yes.

That was one of the questions actually, this is rather jumping and I don't want to jump too far at the moment, but the picture called `The Rendezvous' in the Tate, one of the things that the Curator at the Tate wanted me to ask you is whether all the figures are genuinely there or whether some of them, two of them have a sort of possible [INAUDIBLE].

Well I thought that they were...I thought in a way, they're not quite real those figures, I absolutely admit that, and it's a sort of, perhaps if one of them has just come back and she sort of thinks about themselves on that particular moment in time; it's something in the past. I did think of that really a bit. But you can take it whatever way you like.

Yes. And that one uses very dark colours I think, doesn't it.

Yes.

Was that a change for you at that time?

Pardon?

Was that...there seems slightly to be a change at that time, and you are now using much brighter colours now, aren't you.

Not always. If you can spare a moment I'll take you in and show you my latest picture which is rather dark.

Great. But do you remember what was contributing to those colours in `The Rendezvous'?

I can remember `The Rendezvous' because it fascinated me. Again it was a place, I had just come out of the Army, and I was looking around really to get my imaginative work, my feeling for imagination working again. The place was derelict; it had been left during the war with hardly any, I think it was just about opened, but the trees were all down, and very little had been done there.

It's Holland Park, isn't it?

In Holland Park, yes. And I came upon this particular place where there was a sort of, I don't know what you call it, a sort of piece of architecture, it was Victorian architecture, and it suggested things like cemeteries and that sort of thing a bit to one, and I thought, yes, this is the sort of thing that I want to paint, and I did that really. I painted it...I can't remember whether I painted it all, or whether I painted a little sketch for it, I'm not sure, I can't remember now. But it was a lovely subject, I warmed to that subject, and I painted two or three other pictures there, and there was one called `The Strange Bird', and that was about a boy who, a student at the college who had a love affair with a little Estonian girl, and eventually she went mad and he was...it didn't come to anything very much except a lot of heartbreak on both sides really, but that was what that one was about. But it was the same place, it was in...because I did find the atmosphere there, until they started tidying it up, and now all the magic has gone really, but it's still rather nice there but it's not...

I suppose it's slightly similar to the idea of the Crystal Palace again of it, you know, vestiges of another private life that used to be there.

Yes. But nowadays I seem to go off from doing things of the Bible. But you never saw my Bible things did you? I did about 40 pictures for the Old...between 40 and 50 pictures for the Old Testament, but I could, next time you come, if you want to come again, I can show you those. They're not very well reproduced but I did a whole lot of them.

Right. Just before we move off from this, where was `Primavera' painted?

Well the country is, it's just outside Cambridge, and I go and stay with a friend sometimes and we both go out painting and I painted it there.

And `The Guardian Angel'?

That was not in...that was in West Sussex.

Oh right. And now if we just take a look at the picture of `The Betrayal of Christ' and see if there's anything else we need to say about it that we haven't mentioned.

No. These broken statues were the things I was talking about, that in a way the passing of the ancient world, I wanted to imply the passing of the ancient world and the coming of Christianity. That's not a very original sort of thing because I think that that was used by numerous Italian artists and that sort of thing. But you can see really what a dominant place, the first thing that struck me about this was this urn in a precarious position like that, it was just like that when I came upon it there. And that's the sort of sky that I saw that I... But what I wanted was a thing of contrast, strong contrast like the white marble against the dark sky and the darkness of grass and that sort of thing, and there's the poor chap who has had his ear cut off, and right in the middle of the picture, and yet purposely he is not a dominant figure.

And did you try other compositions or did you get this immediately?

I didn't get it immediately, a certain amount of juggling went on, and the placing of these figures and that sort of thing, you've got a sort of fan-like thing happening there. But a lot of it came really by trial and error until I could get it right really.

And that's gone to York.

That's in the York Gallery, yes, yes.

And perhaps since we are following this thing we could talk about the Crucifixion ones, because they are so different, the two paintings.

Ah yes. This one, I was always rather proud because old Stanley Spencer liked that picture very much.

This one is...

No this one.

Oh, `The Betrayal'.

Yes.

Oh, right. Would you have researched it while you were doing it by the way, would you have gone back and read the Bible and read round it, or not?

I read the Bible, yes, because you had to.

But I mean you obviously knew the story from your childhood.

I went to what was then called a board school, which was the place where all the poorest children went to, and every morning a bit of the Bible was read to us, and everybody said how awful and all this sort of thing. I found it rather interesting really. Of course they only read the bits that I didn't like much, about little children should be seen and not heard and that sort of thing, `Suffer little children to come unto me'. But anyway, it opened up a lot of things, and I think there is some wonderful stories in the Bible really. I don't know how many times I've painted that terrible story of Lot and his wife, and the Old Testament is full of them really, and Susannah and the Elders which I painted. I always paint the rather bawdy ones I'm afraid.

And you dip into the Bible every now and then, or what?

I don't so much now; I would, you know, if I had a job to paint it I would go into as thoroughly as I could. I haven't done so much. What I want to do myself is to create my own legendary things; I mean I would rather have things that mean something to me rather than sort of, taking other people's things. I think, you know, old Wagner was no fool and he wrote his own librettos after he had done things like `Tannhäuser' and that sort of thing, because although they were pretty good in a way, he really got what he wanted when he went to himself.

And you don't have any religious belief now yourself particularly?

Not more than anybody else. I suppose if you get frightened or something like that you immediately say, `Oh God, please help me,' but one is, it seems to be one-way traffic always really.

But you wouldn't have read round, sort of people writing about theology, or...?

No, no, I don't want to have all the things in my imagination all sort of pushed away really; I would rather have it in a rather hazy sort of way really.

And, what about the two Crucifixions?

Well that's the second one, and very very curious, that picture.

That's 1981.

It surprises...yes. It surprises one how things happen. I was sitting in my studio one evening, and there was a few pictures lying about, and half-started pictures, and there was one picture which was upside down, and as I was looking at it, I looked at it for some time, and suddenly it became a crucifixion, and that's how the picture started. And I saw this cross down the middle, and it wasn't quite like that I must admit, but it became, and I thought, well, I would rather like to paint that, and the fact that there was a river running right the way through seemed to me to be an unusual way of painting it. And rather strangely enough, sometimes things happen in a picture which have got no rhyme or reason but they do happen, and I remember somebody looking at the picture and said, `What is that mark running right the way down the cross?' And I said, `I don't know what it is really, I just had to put it there.' And then she said, `I think it's shit.' And I said, `Well, it may well be, I don't know, but...' It's strange isn't it really, I put these things down and I didn't...I wasn't very conscious of it, I just felt it had to be there.

It's an interesting shape that picture.

What?

It's an interesting shape, that picture.

I suppose it is really, yes. The thing that interested me was the shape of it really, like sort of two motifs isn't it, there's a cross, almost crossed out the picture, and then you've got the winding river going up through the bottom of the picture, and the figures don't play a...they just fill in the place interestingly really.

You've got your Nazi helmet there again, haven't you.

That's right. If you turn to the other one.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] You don't see Christ at all. And I thought, in a way I would rather paint not the sufferings of Christ but the effect of the viewers to Christ.

<u>End of F2546 Side B</u>

F2547 Side A

This is the 1959 version; I mean apart from anything else there's 30 years between them isn't there.

I should think so, quite a long time I should think, yes. Again - this is the back of the...and I wanted in a way to have the cross on some curious shape, stuck into stone that's holding...and I remember trying to paint the stone and it became a hand, and somehow, although I started playing to try and get rid of the feeling of the hand which wasn't quite what I wanted at all, somehow or other it seemed to stay in spite of it all, and so eventually I accepted it. And I'm not a sort of mystic sort of person really at all but it did seem to be, it seemed to want to be there, and so I felt I really must accept that really. It's quite an implicit picture in a way, it was...it's quite huge. It was a sketch for a possible decoration at Malmsbury Abbey. Malmsbury was a great church, there's only half of it left, they pulled one half down, and there's a very ugly wall where they've filled it in you see, and they thought they would like to have a large decoration of some sort there, and so they approached Annigoni and he said he would be delighted to do it, but they weren't so delighted when they heard the price that he was going to...so they thought, well they would approach somebody else, and they asked me if I would do a sketch for it. And so I did this very large sketch, it's in the Preston Gallery I think, and I submitted it and the parish saw it all, and I think they were frightened to death with it, so they turned it down, and sometimes one is not at all disappointed if they do turn it down, because I felt that to paint that the size that it would have been, because it was huge, I would probably have walked back, fallen off the scaffolding and I wouldn't be here at this moment, but I don't know. Anyway, it was turned down, and so I eventually sold that picture to the Preston Gallery where it is now. I don't think they keep it very well because it was very dirty when I saw it last, but it could be cleaned I suppose.

I mean what both of these do is bring up the crowds fervour and interest, almost onto the level of the drama of the crucifixion don't they, by...

Yes that's right, yes, yes, yes. There's a lot of work in it.

But it reminds me of sort of scenes you read about when people used to be hung at Tyburn in the Elizabethan times, that sort of public spectacle and enjoyment always.

Yes, yes. Well it's a bit like that sort of thing really. I thought when I was doing the second `Crucifixion', although I accepted much of the original, again the back of the cross and that

sort of thing, I wanted to have it closer to the people, and that they were closer in to the whole scene. This seems a bit remote to me now.

Well it's also, I suppose it concentrates one on the fact that it's the human beings doing the killing, as opposed to any, you know, the aspect of Christ looking up to Heaven and the sort of spiritual side of it.

Yes, yes, yes.

It's the damage in a way.

Yes. I don't know, it's...I look on it as quite an important work really, and I worked on it for quite a while.

And did this ballustrade, is this something that existed or is this imaginary?

It was all imaginary; the whole setting was completely imaginary. That ballustrade thing was a little like the ballustrade I always remember in this park in Fulham, I think it's still there.

And when you're doing a painting like that, you don't have sort of tormented dreams about crucifixions and betrayals and...?

I don't really. If I have dreams they don't seem to be connected with my work; I might have rather unpleasant dreams very often, but they don't seem to have much to do with anything. I can't ever think that I get divine, or the reverse, things happening as a result.

And what was the commission you had for Manchester Cathedral, while we're talking...?

Pardon?

You had a commission from Manchester Cathedral, didn't you?

Yes I did. Is that in that one? [BREAK IN RECORDING] .....thing, and, I don't know, people seem to like it, I don't know why, but, it's a funny old thing really. It may be in that one, I think it is. There it is, yes.

There's a little bit there.

Yes. Difficult to see it. It's in an original Gothic archway, and you can't really get it... I have got a good, better photograph of it at home which is much bigger.

Can you describe it for the tape anyway, and how it evolved? I mean how did the whole commission come about?

Well, there is a fund which pays for murals to be done in public buildings or in churches, or anywhere, public meaning anywhere used by the public, and the architect...this particular cathedral was damaged badly in the war, and there was more damage paid for the particular architect to put it straight, and he did, and he was a member of the Academy and I was a newly-elected member of the Academy, and he wanted me, he thought I was the person to do this picture, and so I submitted a sketch, and to my astonishment they accepted it.

Could you have done anything you wanted, or was there a brief?

Well they wanted either the Sermon on the Mount or Christ and the People. I liked the idea of Christ and the People, and it's Christ in the midst of, really talking to the people, and rather dramatic I think now really. And you see, I don't know how many different little bits there are in it, all these little things which you can't see quite what they are, but they all...all different sizes and very complicated to do it. I can't tell you how many panels. And then at the bottom you've got the seven beatitudes, `Blessed are they that mourn', `Blessed are the peacemakers', and all the other things, I can't remember what they are, but each one is a little panel on its own, like they have in, you know, in the, what do they call them at the bottom of the altar? Anyway, I did those, much in the same way as I did the Seven Deadly Sins.

I was going to go on to that, yes. And you had presumably to go and execute it on the...?

Pardon?

You actually went and painted it in...?

No I didn't. I got all these things cut out in pieces of wood and painted them in my studio, and then went up there and had them put up, and then I worked a bit on them there, but not very much, most of it was done... Providing it has a decent light on it, it doesn't look too bad.

Was it difficult to tell what it would look like when you were working like that, with it in pieces and at a different height?

I did a sketch of it all, and, it is difficult really, but I did...and I've got...I don't know whether I've got any now but I had little bits of them, and built up like a...well, the difficulty in a way was that they were all different sizes; although they look fairly symmetrical there, because it was a very old Gothic thing they didn't worry too much about measurements and that sort of thing.

And do you get a different kind of pleasure from having a work in somewhere like Manchester Cathedral, or from in a gallery, or...?

It doesn't give me a lot of pleasure there, to have it there, but it is a beautiful church. It's not really a cathedral, it's a large parish church, but it has...it's very old and there's a lot of beautiful carvings in the church, and it's rather nice really. It's not a church that takes your breath away at all, but...

And, since we're talking about churches, what did you feel about the Coventry Cathedral, and the work that was done there?

Well, some of it I like very much. I like the stained glass, some of the stained glass very much. I don't like Piper's thing with the great sort of lap, which I can't get away from, you know, the lap of Christ sort of sitting there, I didn't like that too much, but I think it was rather nice. I haven't seen it for so many years that I don't know whether I would like it now or not, but I think some of the glass certainly was rather good, and...

That's Patrick Renton's, isn't it. And do you like Piper's architectural drawings?

Not much, no, no. I have seen a few which I have liked quite a lot really, but he seemed to turn them out by the thousand and they were not all very good. But he's all right really, he's not bad.

And do you wander into churches yourself, going back to what we were talking about?

When I got to a town or something like that I do like going to the church, yes, I do like looking in a church and finding odd things. Some of the buildings, I mean particularly some in Norfolk for instance there are beautiful churches there really.

But presumably you are quite attracted to the story element in stained glass windows, are you?

Well it gives me a certain pleasure to interpret them in my own particular way, and...I can't remember...you know, to interpret, shall we say, `Blessed are the meek' or things about the Pharisees, and...all those sort of things you can work out in pictorial form, something which would mean something to people today, which I found rather intriguing to do. For instance I used, I don't think in this one but in...oh in `The Seven Deadly Sins' I used a lot of teddy boys, you know, half killing each other, and I think there's a similar sort of one there, you can't see it properly but...

In the Manchester Cathedral.

Yes. And, I can't quite tell what they are now. I know I introduced coloured people into it and all sorts of things like that.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

We're just looking at `The Land of Ears'; is there anything you would like to say about that?

What?

Are there things you would like to say about that?

Not much. You see `The Land of Ears', you've got to remember that I painted it just after the war, and, oh some time after the war, but it was the thought of living in a world where people dare not say anything, and these great ears were listening to, for anything that was happening in the world, and the Gestapo and all sorts of things. And that was happening in the upper part you see, in this rather barren country where these ears were flapping about in the wind, always picking up everything. And then the...in the middle is an innocent watchman sitting with his fire, and looking very innocent and that sort of thing, but underneath he is really sitting on a hive of people that are producing propaganda and that sort of thing for the...the underground movements and things you see. It's not the only picture of that sort I've ever painted, but, it was rather good I think really, I don't think it was bad. And it was a picture painted, I was a member of the Artists International Association, and they decided to have an exhibition in which, and invited a lot of artists of whom I was one, for the subject of `What Are We Fighting For?', and that sort of kindled my imagination really.

What colours was it?

Oh, they're very deep, dark, religious...well I don't know, sort of melodramatic if you like, colours, and...very dramatic in a way. But then when I was leaving the College I had got nowhere to go, I had got nowhere to put this huge great picture, and so I cut it in half, and I cut bits out of it; it's all no longer in existence, but little bits of it I showed, and still exist. And then the whole of the bottom part, I think it was that actual one or it might have been the sketch, is now in one of the smaller galleries in the north of England.

Birkenhead.

Birkenhead, yes that's right. So there you are.

Well can we just talk a bit about `The Seven Deadly Sins' which is in the Tate, isn't it, I think.

Yes, it's never shown there, but still, it doesn't matter.

It's rather splendid. Can we go through them because there were things I wanted to find out about each bit.

Well, I can't see them properly. Put it on the table and then I can see better. Well, now where are we? That one is...oh dear, I can't remember what they were called. This one is...

Is it Avarice?

Avarice, that's right.

They're all sitting round a bed of someone who's going to die.

That's right, and they're waiting for him to die you see. This is Lust.

Hold on, I mean when you were thinking about Avarice, was that your immediate picture that came to mind?

It was really, because I did know that even in my own family, when a person, when somebody was dying and they heard that they weren't in the will they were...they said dreadful things about this person you see, and so I chose a death bed you see.

Was this a particular room, or is this an imaginary room?

It's more or less...it was more or less my room. That is my bed, which was a sort of early, this century sort of maple wood bed, and just, it isn't exactly, I don't sleep with my head against the window, but it's very close to the window certainly. It was, it was more or less my bedroom.

And are these avaricious people, people you know?

No.

Is it your death, or not?

No, they're entirely made up, and, because it's anybody's really.

Isn't it quite macabre to use your own bed as a death bed?

(laughs) I never thought of that really. My father died in it, and I suppose I could die in it too, but... This one, `The Setting, now what was that one? Oh it is...no, at the top, what does it say the top one is? No, they're not right, in the right order, are they?

No, it's quite difficult [INAUDIBLE]. Presumably the one of the girl being dragged out of the car is Lust.

Yes, that is Lust.

Oh is this Envy I think, isn't it?

That's Envy, yes.

Oh no, maybe it's not, hang on.

Oh, no.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] .....fish and chip shop round my street.

This is Gluttony we're talking about.

Yes, Gluttony. And this one is Anger, and, now what is that one? That is...oh...

The one of the person being pulled out of a car is presumably Lust, is it Lust, the one...?

Is Lust.

Or Pride.

No it is Lust, no it's Lust. That is Pride where a little car arrives. They've got them all wrong. Pride is...no, Lust was when, it was in the early days when a car stopping in a poor neighbourhood was quite an event, and everybody is looking out of the window at this lady entering her tiny little car, a rather fat lady getting into a rather tiny car.

I thought that was rather brilliant, to have a very unposh car.

That's right, yes. But it was funny really in those days, when very few people had cars really, just after the war.

And going back again to the scene of Anger, I mean was this scene something that immediately suggested itself to you, when you were thinking about anger?

More or less, yes, yes, yes. Yes. Actually this place was the old entrance to Clapham Junction Station. Now what would this one be then? This one would be...Sloth? No that is Sloth, and this woman has let the place go to hell really, and her child has caught alight and she is just lying back in a sort of drunken stupor.

I mean that one is actually a more frightening picture than almost any of the others, isn't it, because of the consequences of it.

Yes, yes it is really. But I mean after all, I suppose they're not all frightening but they are all rather uncomfortable pictures.

But you've introduced a sexual element in that.

What? I don't think there is any sexual element, she is just absolutely collapsed under her drink thing. I mean I admit that she is only half-dressed, and she doesn't worry very much about herself.

Is she based on anybody?

Not really, no, no not really. This is an actual place.

This is the one at the top.

Yes. And it's...is it Pride?

There's a sort of figure, it's a Cupid figure in it isn't it, that one?

That's right, and he is shooting an arrow. I know what it is, it's Envy, and she has passed, you can't see them there because it's too small, an embracing couple outside the door, and this woman is walking past envious of the couple you see.

And was that based on any scene that you had seen, or...?

Oh no, it's so, you know, envy is everywhere isn't it really.

And so that this one of somebody being pulled out of the car is presumably Lust, it's a sort of rape going on, isn't it?

That's right, yes, yes that's right. He's pulling her into the car. How they could both be in the car at the same time I don't quite know, it's one of those teeny little cars really.

And when you were working on this, did you do a sketch? I mean obviously you got each one individually and then you've got the way they work together, and the arrangement; I mean how did all the whole composition come together?

The composition came really through various...they didn't necessarily...necessarily in any order, but they, because they are all different sizes, they're not the same size exactly, and it wasn't my original intention to have them in the sign of the cross, but then somebody suggested to me, why not make them in the sign of the cross? So in a way they had to fall out more or less into the shape that is there, that this square one must be the centre-piece there because it's the only squarish picture, and so it works out. It doesn't necessarily, it was not necessary to have them in any order.

And is this a piece you are particularly pleased with?

Pardon?

Is this a painting you are particularly pleased with?

I don't know. I was commissioned to do it.

By whom?

That I never found out. You may think it's rather mysterious, but a solicitor man who had collected my pictures said that a client of his had asked somebody to paint The Seven Deadly Sins, and would I do it, and he assured me that this woman would pay me, and she was a very nice woman and that sort of thing. And so I did two paintings, and I asked him if he would like to show them to her and see if it was the sort of thing that she would like to have, because if she was a very pious woman she might not like these particularly. And she sent word back, she was delighted with them, and you carry on. And so I went on, and it took some fair time to do them. They were not things I did every day, but you know, they were going on for about 18 months. Of course it was very difficult to get just a telling thing which, the telling situation that I felt was just right. So, it took quite a time. And then, I had finished them, and I said to him, would he like to bring the lady round to see them, and he came around by himself, and he said anything that he said he knew that she would like. So, I never saw her, and then he gave me a cheque for them soon after it was done, and again I said I would like to know so much what she felt about it, and the next time she...the next time I asked him, she hadn't appeared, he said, `I'm afraid she died'. Whether she existed and it was he that had commissioned me I don't know, so there's a mystery about that, I don't know.

That is strange. And it's now in the Tate, isn't it?

Well it's on...there again, there's a mystery about that, because they wanted to give it to the Fitzwilliam, and he said there was a quarrel about it.

This is the solicitor is it?

Yes. And he said, `It doesn't look as if they are going to accept it.' And so, he then rang me up and said, `Do you know anywhere that might have it?' and I said, `Well possibly the Tate might have it, I don't know, why don't you ring them up?' And so they said yes they would accept it. So whoever owned it said, well we'll let you have it on loan, and although, several times the Tate have said they would like to have it, it's still there on loan as far as I know, and they never show it because, I think they prefer to show their own things really. So that's the story of that one. But, I enjoyed painting it, because it was an interesting thing to do; it wasn't easy.

[END OF SESSION]

End of F2547 Side A

F2547 Side B

[Interview with Carel Weight, August the 20th 1991.]

.....time we were walking to the station and you told me a rather bizarre story about going into a second-hand bookshop and finding a copy of the book about you, and making a contact with the girl at the sales desk.

Well, it was really a rather remarkable thing. You see so many sort of amateur artists show me their work, and you would think that they were, you know, a great artist, and they turn out always to be a frightful disappointment. And I, oh I suppose it's about, over six months ago now, I went into a shop, a remaindered bookshop in Fulham, I go there a bit because it's a place you can sometimes pick up rather good art picture books, which I always rather like having, and they are generally very much reduced prices, and looking through the various odds and ends that there were there, I saw a copy of my own book written by Mervyn Levy, and I'm always giving those books away and I'm always short of them, and when I saw it was less than half price I thought, well, this can't be missed, so I took it up to the girl at the counter and I said I'll have this. And she said, `Oh, do you like Carel Weight?' And so I said, `Well, sometimes.' (laughs) And so, then she said, `Oh, he's my hero.' And I felt slightly sort of knocked off my perch a bit, and so I quickly changed the subject and...oh no, I said...oh well, I had to admit that I was the chap you see. And then I changed the subject, and I said, `Oh, do you paint?' And she said, `Yes, would you like to see them?' And so I thought, well, I'll see them next time I come into the shop or something like that, or perhaps I won't see them at all, but I said, `Oh yes, it would give me great pleasure'. And she reached under the counter and she brought a great pile of her pictures up you see, and to my absolute astonishment I thought they had got a real sort of personality there, and although, there was lots to criticise, because I gathered that she, she had never been to an art school, although she had done an art course in one of the universities or...and she...

She had done an art history course?

What?

You mean she had done an art history course?

A sort of art history course which also included a little bit of practical work. And she said, `It's the one thing, a great passion that I've got, I just like painting all the time,' and she said, `I go home every night and I just draw and paint right into the night,' you see. So I was

extremely sort of impressed with these pictures, and so I said, `Well you ought to have gone to an art school, you know, really. It's very courageous in a way that you should do this in your moment, but you ought to have an opportunity of being able to put in full-time work on it.' And so she said she would like to. So, I have a certain sort of interest in the City & Guilds School, and so I rang up a friend who is a teacher there and I said, `Look, there is this girl, I think she is very good, would you see if we could put her, if you could find room for her?' And so, I said, `Well she must come round to you, you must be the judge of these things.' And so I arranged a meeting between them, and they got on very well, and she went back to the school, and tried to get her into the school, but the great snag was that although the head teacher there would like to have had her, there was no money, and she couldn't exist if...they would give her the place but she wouldn't have any money to exist on. And so, that seemed to be out. So I said, `Well, it doesn't matter, go on painting as you are, and if you would like to bring pictures round from time to time, that will be fine.' So, she came round sometimes, and I criticised them as well as I could.

When somebody does bring a painting round that you think is good, and they really do want you to tell them what you think, I mean what actually can you ever say to anybody?

Well you can say a lot really. You can...I mean I think you can say, well, you need not take any notice of what I say, but from my point of view the picture would be improved if you could make your statement clearer, and if you want to say something in your picture then it should be, well, like a writer really, only you're using a different media. And then, there are all sorts of other things you can tell them. This girl for instance was making things terribly difficult for herself because nobody had really told her that if she wants to paint on hardboard, don't paint on the wrong side of hardboard, and just simple little things like that which can make your, can be endless trouble until you find out these things. I don't think that you would ever do much harm to a person if you were trying to be constructive to them. I mean they could say, `Well, that's not the thing I want to do at all,' and you say, `Well you had better do it your way then'. But, I'm often...well with this girl, she seems very grateful that one can help her in these sorts of ways. I think it's a lot of rubbish when people say, `Oh you'll spoil their wonderful, their wonderful originality the moment another...' Well it does sometimes, there are teachers who very often try and get people to paint exactly like they do, and great painters who I don't think are very good teachers. I mean Kokoschka for instance, who I think is a wonderful, was a wonderful artist, but, he liked teaching, and his great aim was to get them to paint as much like Kokoschka as possible. But my own feeling is that what one is trying to do is to preserve for them that which is unique in their work, but at the same time trying to help them to...that lots of things are getting in the way of really making them be able to express themselves.

And when you say, you know, if they're trying to make a statement with the painting there might be a better way of doing it, does that nearly always mean simplifying?

Well it depends on what you mean by simplify. I think...I think it probably is an important point, but there are some people that like to paint pictures which are extremely complex, just the same as you get writers that, it's so complex that you lose the thread, unless you are willing to put a tremendous lot into them. It's a bit like that in painting. But it is also quite a good thing to be able to show work by various artists who could say a tremendous lot, like Giotto for instance, in a very simple way, I think that is really very possible, but, there are all sorts of things. You see if a person, like me for instance, has spent all their life thinking about painting, there are odd things which might interest somebody coming along that would find...I know I picked up a lot from my teachers, and they weren't particularly wonderful artists or anything like that, but had this great period of their lives which they had been thinking of nothing else.

What's the name of the girl for a start?

Oh, Sarah Goodier, GOODIER.

Right. And what was it about those first paintings that you saw, what quality was it that you liked?

Well it's the same sort of thing as those pictures that are up there. They were...you see, she was trying, her aim was to earn enough money so that she could do her painting, and so she went on working; in a way perhaps she made a mistake in leaving the bookshop, but she got so absolutely bored stiff with just sorting out books all day long, and she was the one person in the shop, and she had to deal with customers and also bring order to chaos, because great masses of books came in all day long and she had to put them away and put them in the right places and so on. And she said she got to a state that she wanted to throw books at everybody that came in. And so she gave up the job. And then she found it not easy to find another job. So then somebody suggested, well why don't you have a job, take a job, they are always wanting nice looking girls and things in night clubs, sort of hostess-cum-what-not you see. And so she took a job in a Chinese, a nightclub specialising in looking after Chinese, and - no, I'm sorry, more Japanese I think they were. And she said they were...it was awfully boring, also, but at least she could have her days to herself and the light. And curiously enough the Japanese men who went there were not over amorous, they were rather keener to be able to get the right pronunciation of words and that sort of thing you see. So that went on

for a bit, and then she got rather bored with that and so she thought she would try other places. Well other places that she went of a similar type were really not so...they were to her a bit embarrassing, because first of all they had to sort of try to get the customers to drink as much champagne as they could, and she got a slight rake-off I think of all the bottles, and also they had to go about partially-dressed, and she didn't like that too much. And then she had...then, the worst of these things was that the work finished about 3 or 4 in the morning, and she had to dash in order to get one of those all-night buses, and so there was a lot of...it wasn't too easy. [BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....still doing this, the nightclub?

No she doesn't work now, she's on the dole, but she's painting. And she has got a boyfriend, did I tell you, and he's not...they're trying to get him off cocaine, and she's, I mean she is trying to do this, but it's not very easy because every now and again he gets this terrible desire for a bout and he is not too careful about taking all her money and whatever she has, to buy more cocaine. But, I don't know whether she will ever get much out of that one really, but...

The tape can't see these pictures that we're looking at, the three, so can you describe them a bit, and say what sort of qualities you liked about them.

Well you see, before she took on these bookshop things, she was in the midst of a lot of young people, and they were all sorts, and lots of them were very very hard drinkers, and she used to see the same group of people, and they became figures in the back of her mind you see. And all these people in this picture were, I don't say all of them but a lot of them, are the actual people. She told me stories about the young man with the rather frightening jersey with a monster on it, he is a painter and he earned a living by painting these rather gruesome animals on. And nearly all of these people, they were real to her, they are not figments of her imagination, and that I think gives these pictures a sort of intensity which a lot of people can't reach really. And although my academic friends might say, well they're rather badly drawn, or they would find fault with them, I'm very very much more interested in the qualities that she has in her work than the qualities she hasn't got in them. But they all, nearly all these people, she could tell you their life story more or less; well, really quite a number of them.

And are these typical colours? I mean it's sort of quite rich dark colours at night time.

Did you see her pictures in the...?

I haven't been there yet.

You haven't, yes.

I've been in seclusion.

Well there are two paintings there which are rather similar to these really, and I think very lyrical and rather beautiful really.

And the three little ones here you said were originally part of one big painting.

Yes.

So when she brought the big painting to you, what did you feel about it?

I thought it was lovely. I thought it was a little bit chaotic, and just...I did say to her, well, it might be possible to make three pictures out of this, and I just showed her how there were three pictures which were complete entities in themselves you see, and she thought that was a good idea and she accepted that as an idea. But I was rather surprised really when she came along and brought these three pictures to show me, as I didn't think she would...I wasn't advising her to do it, I said you could do this if you wanted. And so...no, all these various people she comes in contact with, and the story, she tells them very vividly and how she met this chap who takes the cocaine, waiting for one of these midnight buses that never come along, and he was there and they got talking, and eventually a friendship... And then, she was attracted to him and thought he was an interesting person, but it was a sore blow to her when she went back to his house and he stole all her money, at least had borrowed the money, and she never got it back, and she only found out afterwards that it all went on cocaine.

How old is she?

Well she's early twenties, I would think about 24.

And is she a Londoner?

No, her family are down in Devonshire somewhere, and she came up to London, I don't know, but...

I mean for example it must be very different talking to her about her work than it was talking to, say, Peter Blake about his, or Malcolm Moreley about his.

Well I wouldn't want to because they've got their own things that they do.

But you taught them, didn't you.

I taught them, yes, but even in those days they were...I felt in a way that... I was very interested in Peter Blake's work as a student, but he was very much an entertainer himself really, I mean he had a sort...I'm sorry, he had a sort of knowledge of where he wanted, an idea of where he wanted to go, and when he left art school he liked painting rather modern children, and rather sort of, which were on the verge of pop things, and wearing badges and all that sort of thing. He always rather liked to be `with it' very much. Then he won a scholarship and he went, instead of going to Rome or anywhere like that he made a scholarship last a long time; he went around places like Holland and Belgium in particular, and got very interested in fairgrounds and the sort of art of the fairground, and that very much started him off, and he made a considerable success. He discovered something which in a way was, I suppose, the alternative of the girl who found these people, strange people. From her point of view they were all rather strange to her, because she came from a rather sort of middle-class sort of family and they fascinated her, and Blake found his way in a very conscious way, I mean he felt that he must do something which was unusual and so forth, and he showed I think considerable originality in choosing to go and use this scholarship in that sort of way.

And can you remember him actually developing during the time he was at the College, can you remember any changes that took place?

Oh yes, he developed very quickly. He was very very keen on life around him, and in no time at all he became friendly with boxers and sporting people, and I always remember, when he came back from his scholarship and we gave him a job on the staff, I always remember him bringing the members of the Fulham Football Club round, and he had a great feeling for football, boxing, wrestling and all that sort of thing, not that he ever did it himself, but he was fascinated by all those people.

But there was quite...the sort of turn of the century in France, quite a lot of the painters were keen on sport, and cycling and boxing and things like that.

There was, but I don't think that...I think that came at an earlier time, because after all, Vlaminck for instance was a champion cyclist.

Yes, didn't he meet Derain in that way by...?

What?

I think he and Derain met by cycling or something didn't they?

Yes, that's right, mm.

But I mean with Peter Blake, was it sort of natural interest or would he actually have been modelling himself on somebody in the past?

I don't think...I think he was finding his own way, I really do; I think that the early work of his I think was very original. My own feeling is that, although I see a lot of Peter, but I feel that he's a disappointment to me, it seems to have petered out, and the work that he did at the College was very remarkable I think, and it was some of the best work which was done. But, I don't see anything... There's a little painting that he sent to this show of mine of a nude which seems to me just very dull, I don't know why that should be.

Do you think he trapped himself in a style too early?

I think that is a danger, I think you can get entrapped and you can't get out. But, I may be wrong because I think he's fairly affluent, I think he sells his pictures and that sort of thing, but they're nothing like as good as... He did two paintings which I have a very clear picture of, and I don't know if you know his work very well but one, I set a subject for the whole... In the summer recess, in order to try and get them to produce what I called a major work for their final year, I gave them a sort of subject. I didn't absolutely insist that they should paint this subject, but it was a sort of thing that they could build` up and do it in any way that they particularly wanted to. And I gave the Entry into Jerusalem, and he painted absolutely a smashing picture. It had very little to do with the actual Entry into Jerusalem as we know it, but he got an old map and he put a lot of children standing. It was a most beautiful picture, and it was perhaps the best picture he ever painted. At the same time he painted a self-portrait which is quite well remembered now, as himself with all these children's badges and things all over his coat. That seemed to me to be one of the highest peaks of his work. But just after he left college he was still doing some very interesting things, but of recent years I've been rather disappointed with them.

When he bought all these footballers into the College, did they mix, how did it work?

Well, they were a bit awe-inspired because, they were terribly nice chaps, and he took them round and he bought them drinks, and all the rest of it, and I think he enjoyed it, and I think they enjoyed it too. One or two chaps got very...one or two of the footballers got really rather interested, and one particular chap, I can't remember his name now, quite a...he played in the first team, and we had quiet conversations, and he used to send me tickets for the home matches at Fulham, which I went to.

Are you quite keen on sport?

Oh, I don't know, I was never very good at school at sport, but I...I liked watching football. I used to think, if I had been working hard on pictures and that sort of thing I would go off to somewhere like Fulham which was a convenient place, and it's a lovely ground, but I'm afraid they're going to lose it now, it was a lovely ground, because it's on the river and you could watch the geese fly over, and there wasn't all the.....

End of F2547 Side B

F2548 Side A

I used to watch cricket too.

What, you would actually go to the Oval or something?

Yes, or Lord's. I used to think Lord's was such a beautiful ground.

And, the Peter Blake that's in the Tate which is, you know, the little green door and then all the collage around it, it looks like a sort of magic shop.

Oh yes.

I mean did you like that sort of work?

I don't think I did like it very much, no, it wasn't one of my favourite pictures of his.

And I mean, what did you feel about pop art itself?

Well, I think it was a very interesting...and I thought it, to what extent it was original I'm never quite sure, because it was working in America too. But it was really interesting to get a group of artists, of students, sort of exploring from the beginnings of an art movement. And there were about five of them, five or six of them, and they each took a sort of aspect, and none of them seemed to copy or get much from the other. You see, there were two things happened when I was at the College - I'm going back a little bit. I believe that in a school like the College it was unique that an art movement should sort of nourish itself and develop at a student level, and it had happened some years before, and it collapsed eventually but it wasn't before they did...and that was the Kitchen Sink school, and that, it was a great pity that it did, because there were a lot of very good students, just as good in a way as the pop people, and the pop came in for all the success, and it was short-lived.

Did you go to that comparatively recent exhibition in Cork Street?

Yes, yes I did. Well I knew all the pictures, they had all been done at the College.

How did you think it stood up?

I thought that some of them were marvellous, very good. I mean, Bratby when he was painting those pictures are absolutely remarkable, and his work I'm afraid went off later, but I always said to him that I thought that some of his portraits were as good as Kokoschka, and I think they were. And there were other people, there was the very, rather poetic sort of, Middleditch, and the vitality of Jack Smith, and Coker.

What about Derek Greaves?

And Derek Greaves.

Did you like his work?

I liked it very much, when...I don't like his work very much now, but I liked...I thought they were all a very interesting lot really. And then...

Presumably the atmosphere at the College at that point was completely different from during Blake's era. What was it like then at the College?

Well these...you've got to remember that it was fairly early on, the war had been over not too long really, and I don't think, I don't know...some of those chaps had done...they hadn't been actually at war but they had done military service which went on for quite a time after, and so they were very serious, and I think it was...they were very very keen to find their way, but in comparison with the pop people, the pop people on the whole were younger and they developed. I think, one person who was never really a pop painter but I think contributed very much to inspire the other pop people was Ron Kitaj, and he was older than the others and he had been in the army and only just missed having to serve at Korea; he was about to go when the war stopped. But he had quite a...and so he was a very mature man, and he was also rather an intellectual, he read a lot, and he came to England - I don't know why I'm telling you all this because I don't think it's much to do with what you want in fact.

No, I'm very interested actually.

He came to England, I think he was a bit sick of the States at that time, and he wanted to take up...you see they had a grant, a GI grant that they could go to a university and study any subjects that they wanted to, but when he wanted to come to England, it was very difficult for him because there was no university that he could attach himself to that had an art department in those days. Well it wasn't quite true because at Oxford there was the Ruskin School, but it wasn't considered university status you see. But anyway, because he was allowed to go there,

he settled there, and the drawing master at Oxford, who was a friend of mine, wrote to me and said, `We've got some very interesting students from America who were GIs and have come over, and one in particular seems to me to be a very good painter indeed,' would I possibly come down to Oxford and have a look at them and see if you think that they would be the sort of people that you want. I went down and I saw Kitaj's work, and I was very impressed with it. And so...

Can you remember what you actually saw on that trip, can you remember the paintings?

I remember very well. Very academic - well not really very academic but they were all to do with life drawing and life painting. And they weren't, gave little evidence of invention, but his drawings themselves were unusual and quite different to most things being done in the life rooms in those days.

What made them different?

Well it's very difficult to say, but they were not like an ordinary life drawing that you see. I mean they had...he used to look at the model and often do very bad drawings, but he was searching for things all the time, and it wasn't just the business of going into a life room and just doing it because the teacher told him really, he was using his brains I think. Anyway he came...I suggested that he should put in for the College and he got in, and he was a very friendly sort of a character and soon became friends of this group of people, and I think that he had a great deal to do with the way that they developed themselves, although he himself was not particularly interested in pop work at all. Any rate he became a great friend of Hockney and they became, and they are still very great friends. Now where do we go from there?

Did you like Joe Tilson's work?

What?

Did you like Joe Tilson's work at this stage, or not?

I never liked Joe Tilson very much, I thought he was a very sort of supercilious sort of chap, but I...yes, I think he was very clever. He was so keen to get into the right circles all the time, and that irritated me rather, but he's all right, and I see quite a lot of him.

Have you seen his recent work?

Not really. I've seen things he sends to the Academy.

And what do you think of those? The big sort of Greek pieces and...

Well, they seem superficial to me, but I mean, I don't know, I can't be a judge on everybody's work.

But is teaching, well as students at that early stage, was teaching Peter Blake an entirely different matter from teaching David Hockney and teaching Kitaj?

Well yes, but you must remember we're not teaching; in a university you don't teach, and we are a post-graduate school and we don't sort of say, `You've got the leg too long' or something like that; they've got to do a lot of finding out things for themselves, and they can come to you if they want to, but one doesn't teach.

But how would you define your role, just to sort of be there really? I mean what is...?

No, it isn't altogether that really. I walk round, I used to walk round and chat to people, and often ask them what they're doing and why they're doing it, and that sort of thing. And they may say, `Well I'm not very clear what I am doing, and what do you think about...do you think that there's any end to this particular thing that I'm doing?' And then you try and say something constructive to them really.

But was Hockney very very different from all the others?

No, he wasn't at all. He was a very human sort of character, and one couldn't help liking him, and I always remember, I ought to have a statue put up for me or something because I was the first living person to see Hockney as a blond. He was a brunette. And I one day was walking rather early in the morning in the College, and coming out of the gents was this glorious golden-haired figure. I gasped, and it was quite a surprise. But any rate, unlike most blonds he remains blond to this day.

Did you ever have any desire to dye your hair pink or anything?

Well it's rather difficult for me isn't it really.

Presumably you had more hair once.

Oh yes. No I never did, no. We didn't do those things, you know, we were very uninventive really.

But do you wish you had?

No, no.

You haven't got any latent desire to do it?

I'm very...no. And then of course, you go into the Army and they're very strict about you, your hair has to be tidy, because that's the way that you can avoid getting too many lice in it and...

And did the pictures that Hockney painted, like the two boys in the shower and the whole sort of homosexual part, did that play much of a role in the College? Because it's quite a brave thing to do really, isn't it?

Well I don't think that anybody...we did have all sorts of people painting what you call brave pictures, and...I don't know really, was it brave? I don't know. I've never heard of anybody being reprimanded because they were painting obscene pictures or anything.

I wasn't meaning from the obscenity point of view, I was meaning that they are quite...it's brave in the sense that it's revealing something quite private. I mean it wouldn't necessarily have to be a sexual thing, but in a sense, you know some of those paintings by Bonnard of his domestic life, I suppose I'm making a parallel with writing in a way, you can write very objectively about somebody else, and somebody else's life...

Yes, yes.

And it's very different from writing something that's autobiographical.

Yes.

And those Hockneys, some of those Hockney paintings have got a similar quality, and I mean brave in that sense, not in...

Yes they have, yes they have. But in...as everybody seems to be doing that now, perhaps he was a great pioneer although I don't think he was particularly because many other people were doing that sort of thing. But it wasn't that he was outrageous or anything like that really, but he was a damn good painter really and a very imaginative artist I think. And I think again, I think that he was doing some of his best work at the College.

And two questions entirely incidental but that have come out of what we were saying. When you were talking about football I suddenly remembered that Rousseau painting of `The Football Players'.

Yes.

Do you like that?

Yes, I love all Rousseau's pictures, I think they're absolutely delightful really, and I think that picture of the lion in the storm in the National Gallery is a beautiful picture; I wouldn't mind having that more than any other modern picture in the National.

And secondly, when we were talking about Sarah's boyfriend, have you ever taken drugs, were drugs part of your life at all?

Pardon?

Have you ever taken drugs?

No, never. Have you?

No, but were you ever tempted?

Not a bit, no; it didn't seem to interest me very much. But I was in the College when all that frightful thing came up and all the students were constantly being charged with taking drugs and often having drugs planted onto them, and I found myself having to go and speak up for various students who I was quite sure that were perfectly innocent anyway. And it was rather hell really, it was very nasty.

And did you spend much time socialising with them, or did you keep a sort of barrier?

Oh we socialised a great deal, yes, yes we did.

And nearly always in the College, or what?

And a person like Johnny Minton for instance was a great socialiser and he used to organise parties and we used to go to these places, and we became... It I think was a very...it was a very unusually friendly atmosphere with everybody pretty well. I mean some people wanted to avoid social contact, well they were perfectly able to do it, but many students became very great friends of staff and that sort of thing.

And at that sort of period, was the College quite enclosed or did you feel that the life of London was feeding in as well? Because it was an exciting period in theory, wasn't it.

Well it was, but of course you've got to remember that a lot of the students came straight to London, and it must have been a terrific experience for them, because as you say it was a very exciting period, and some of them have come from places where they had hardly been to the other county towns and then they suddenly found themselves, and then they had to find digs, and they got into frightful messes very often, and half a dozen students would take a large flat somewhere or other, and then they found they couldn't live with each other and so some went off, and then the survivors found themselves having to pay about £500 a week to keep the place going, and in fact they were owing vast sums and got into terrible messes.

And would they come to you with that sort of problem?

No, not...well we were...yes we had to deal a bit with that, but luckily there were people that looked after the sort of social side of the thing to some extent. But, yes. And then we had very often girls who really couldn't take it all, and they were having nervous breakdowns and that sort of thing, and that was difficult.

And did you have endless girls getting pregnant?

Pardon?

Did you have endless girls getting pregnant and wanting help in that direction?

On the whole I would think it wasn't as bad as it could have been, but...

I mean, there's a lot of labelling that goes on about the Sixties and the Seventies, isn't there, and it's very hard to sort of really remember what it was like. I mean what was it for you?

Well, it wasn't the Sixties and Seventies so much as the Fifties, the Fifties and Sixties I think really, I think. Then we had a shattering blow of abstract expressionism from America, and anything went you see, and people used to pour pitch on the floor and ride over it with bicycles and that sort of thing you see. And while I...I thought it was absolutely nonsensical really from my point of view, but I didn't do anything about it because I thought, well perhaps they will grow out of this and they will realise that there is much more urgency, and perhaps they may even admit that this hadn't led anywhere. But I suddenly realised that we were part of the building of the Victoria & Albert Museum, and when I saw the danger of the whole of the collection going up in smoke, I had to stop it, because, on the whole it wasn't our policy to stop things but I had to stop it there.

How do you stop it?

Just, I said well this can't go on, and I can't have the place endangered, and I stopped it.

Did you teach David Tremlett at all?

What?

Did you ever teach Tremlett?

Yes I did, yes.

But he was quite a difficult student wasn't he, I seem to think, at that time.

Who was that?

David Tremlett.

I don't know him, David...?

Tremlett.

I can't remember.

I thought he did go to the Royal College but perhaps I'm wrong.

Well he may have done but...

I've got a feeling he left.

I can't say that I remember everybody, and there were a lot of curious people.

And can we just quickly talk about the show at the Arts Club at the moment. How did that come about?

Well it came about because they are always looking for exhibitions and so forth, and somebody said, `Oh well Carel Weight's known a hell of a lot of people in his time, why don't we have a...'. They asked me if I would have a show, and I said no I won't, I'm fed up with shows, and so...it would have meant having to borrow an infinite number of pictures, and the poor unfortunate people who have got pictures, they have to lend enough without having a show at the Arts Club really. And so, somebody suggested, well what about `The Friends of Carel Weight' which, they thought that was a good idea, and then I thought, well that's fairly easy to do. It has its snags of course because I've got loads of friends, and I can only have a small number in the gallery you see. I think it's about, under a hundred pictures you see, and if you have two from everybody. And so there are a whole lot of people that one would like to have shown which, one just couldn't get them all in. And so I began to think, well I'm going to lose a lot of my friends. (laughs) But anyway, I don't think anybody took it too seriously. It's a show in which a mixture of students, of staff of places like the College, and just people that I could get hold of fairly easily, it's not more than that.

Is there anything in it that you really love particularly?

I loved? I think love's a bit optimistic, but there are a lot of pictures I thought were very nice pictures, mm.

Anything in particular?

Well I like this girl's things, and I liked...there was a girl, another girl who has had an awful life really, she went off her rocker and she has been constantly in and out of the Maudsley, and she sent two little watercolours, and they were, I thought, very sweet works and I thought they were very nice, it gave me a lot of pleasure to see. And then I had two people that had died fairly recently, Ruskin Spear and Robert Buhler, they are represented. And, what I thought really, although I don't think there are any enormous masterpieces or anything like

that there, I felt that they had done their best to make it a good show, and they sent good works and they had thought about them.

So it was up to the person you invited to choose what they put in; you didn't go around and say, `I want you to show this, this and this'?

No, no it's up to them entirely. There wasn't a single picture which I was really disappointed with.

And it didn't have to be new work, it could have been anything they wanted?

I left that to them. I put in myself...one thing, I had to put a limitation of size, and I put a picture, a squarish picture, a picture which I had sold, and I knew this chap would lend it so, it's called `The Blue Fairy', and one of the things was, I rather wanted to see it again after a long period and so I asked him and he sent it along and it was nice to have it, you know.

What's the story behind that painting?

I went for a holiday in a part of West Sussex, and there's a, what do you call those things, they build...it's...there is a word for it. Over rather flooded land they build a temporary sort of way across it. Do you know what I mean? Have you not seen them?

What are they made of?

Wood. Sort of little footbridge in a way across...

That's not what a Bailey bridge is, is it?

No no no, no no nothing like that, no it's only just a thing that a farmer might put up if some of his land gets flooded in the winter.

You mean like putting a plank across a little river.

Don't they call it a causeway? I think they do, I think it's a causeway. Anyway it doesn't matter. Any rate, I found a place, and I thought, well this is a wonderful place for painting somebody chasing somebody else, because it came round and went like that, in two directions you see. And I painted a picture which I showed in the Academy, I sold it to the chap who is the director of Sotheby's, you know, Lord...

Gowrie.

Lord Gowrie, yes, and this other painting was one of the preliminary paintings for it. But instead of making it a chase, this was of a little girl being chased by a venomous man, this is a man seeing, to great surprise, a blue fairy who looked very cold, because she's in the nude, or he is in the nude, and he has got wings rather like a dragonfly. And it's just a...nothing very much, just, you know.....

End of F2548 Side A

F2548 Side B

The setting was authentic, but I mean the blue fairy idea came out of nowhere, did it?

Yes, more or less, more or less.

And that picture that you're talking about, that went into the Academy, is that the one that Gowrie talks about in the beginning of his foreword to your catalogue for the Bernard Jacobson?

Probably, yes, yes I haven't read it for a long time. Yes I expect it is.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

And did you, since we've mentioned it, that foreword to the Bernard Jacobson catalogue that Gowrie did, were you happy with it? Presumably you were, otherwise it wouldn't have been in there.

Oh it was all right. Old...Lord Gowrie had to get in a bit about me putting in witches in pictures; well I don't see why I shouldn't put witches in the pictures, but anyway there it was, he didn't like that. After all if you write about a chap you've got to take it all, and so, I didn't say anything.

And what did you feel about Jacobson referring to you as a saint?

He didn't think so shortly afterwards, because we had a bitter quarrel. (laughs) But, I quite like Jacobson; he's a terrible old rogue really but he can...and somebody told some lies about me, saying dreadful things about his party that he threw on my behalf, and he was furious about it. We made it up afterwards, we're all right now.

Will you show there again do you think?

What?

Are you likely to show there again?

No. I don't think I shall get pictures together really. People always want pictures and I haven't got anything to show really. I don't particularly want to have another show. Things

that always a bit irritate me, and Jacobson's no worse than the others, but it's a bit gruelling really, if you...if I could go down to one of these dealers and...there's a picture I took to Jacobson not long ago, it's a picture [INAUDIBLE], and I thought it was a good one, and I thought, well, just try and mend any ill-feeling, and I said, `Would you like this?' `Oh,' he said, `I like that very much Carel, I would like to have that.' And so I said, `Well, what would you like to give me for it?' And he said, `I'll give you 2,000 for it.' So, I said, `Well that's a bit on the low side isn't it?' And so we haggled, and I hate haggling, and he gave me 2,500. Well I know he got at least 25,000 for it, and you see, that irritates me. And he would be quite reasonable in a way, he will say, `Well you know it will cost me half a million to have a place in Cork Street,' or wherever he is now. `And then I've got to have all these beautiful receptionists and all that sort of thing, and I've got to ask a huge sum,' which is perfectly true but it still irritates me. And, you see I can go to a little gallery who don't have to pay large...and I can get a better price for my pictures really. I know he could perhaps, some time in his life he might give me a show in America, but I don't care whether I have a show in America or not really.

Do you find, because the American sense of humour is very different to ours, I would imagine the American response, I mean I know it's silly to generalise but that they might have a totally different response to your paintings than an English person.

Thye might do, yes, yes might do. Well I've always found Americans absolutely charming and seem to like my pictures.

Perhaps we could talk about some of the ones that Bernard Jacobson has at the moment. There's one called `The Village Road', which is...

What?

`The Village Road' that was painted in 1955 and was also called `After Rains', I think.

`After Rain'. You see they give them all sorts of funny titles. That picture I did call `After The Rains', and it wasn't '55, it was much later.

Right.

And it was a walk across Wimbledon Common, and it must have been in the early Seventies, and the thing that attracted me was the pools of water and people walking, picking their way through this...it had very heavy rains, and that's why I painted it really, this road that led right

across some houses, and... But that's all I would say about it, and I wanted it to have a certain sort of eeriness about it, and I think the people do suggest that really, they're a little apprehensive about what might happen. Next please.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

That's another one again.

That one interested me from the point of view of the composition. It actually exists, that place, almost exactly as it was.

We're talking now about `The Signpost'.

`The Signpost' one yes.

Where was that painted?

In West Sussex, on the road between Petworth and Chichester.

I went to Petworth the other day; you have presumably been there, to the house?

Yes.

What do you think of it?

The house is lovely. Did you go over it? Mm. But they don't, you know, it's a bit gloomy but it's...it's immortal because, that Turner used to go and stay there, and he painted those wonderful little paintings of the interiors, you've seen those of course. Beautiful.

And what do you think of the staircase, the mural thing?

It's a long time since I was there. I don't remember anything particularly about it, except that it was very grand. You know, I feel the ghost of Turner all the time when I'm there. He was a wonderful chap, Lord Egremont, who, he used to entertain all the artists of the period, but Turner was his special favourite, and Constable went down there too, and he wrote a...Constable was a very good writer, wrote a wonderful description of the house as he knew it.

It was interesting, because he was also involved in science and medicine wasn't he, and there was that very stimulating cross-over [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, mm. Yes. He was very easy-going; I mean, I suppose he was so popular with the artists, because he was very relaxed, and he slept with all his servants and they all loved him, and... I can't remember, I wish I could remember the actual phrase that Constable made about him, something about the very...cattles are more civilised there than anywhere else in the world, something like that.

It's quite a bleak building in terms of the wall and everything, isn't it.

Mm, it is, yes, yes.

Is that wall something that attracts you? Because it could be an element in one of your pictures almost.

Could have been, but I never...I know the present Lord Egremont who is a very nice man, but I never go there, and... The grounds are so gorgeous really.

Is there anything more we should say about `The Signpost'? I mean what about the figures in it?

Well it's all...there's more geometry in it than most of my pictures, and I can't describe it very well without showing you, but the signposts are pointing up each direction, and people are being distributed throughout the picture. It's...I don't...I think I did a better picture of the sketch of it, the sketch I thought was better than the finished picture, but it did say more or less what I wanted it to say.

Where is the sketch now, do you know?

Yes, one of my ex-students bought it from me cheap.

I seem to think there's quite a striking perpendicular telegraph pole in it as well.

Pardon?

You've got a telegraph pole in it as well, sort of being quite a striking...

Yes I have, yes, which leads the way up the road. That goes to a little village just at the top of the road.

And, the one that I thought worked terribly well was this one called `The Monk', and I wondered what the story behind that was.

That was in Cambridge, I would go and stay there with an ex-College..no, with an ex-Slade School person who I had known, I met her first when she was in the ATS during the war, and she is ill now but I used to make a point in going down every year, spend a week with her, and there was a particular place just outside Cambridge, this field, and I had been fascinated with it, and it figures in another picture, give me the book for a moment, I think it's in here, the same...oh it is in here, isn't it.

`The Monk' is in there, yes.

`The Monk' is in here, yes. And I'm not sure whether the other one isn't too. [BREAK IN RECORDING] But both these places are of the same scene as `The Monk'. There's `The Monk'.

Right.

By curious coincidence, because they didn't know this, they've put them altogether. That's another one...

Sorry, what's the title of that? `The Cricketer'.

What? `The Cricketer', yes, yes. He's a sinister cricketer.

Yes I was going to ask you about that.

I think it's...no, he is more than that, he is, I think he's probably, he has terrified a girl, the little girl, who has run back to her mother.

Does he have any relationship to the boy in `The Silence'?

Pardon?

Does he have any connection with the boy in `The Silence'?

The boy in what?

In `The Silence', the one at the Academy, the Remembrance Day one.

No, no not at all. No these were all figments of my imagination. But in every case, you see it's the same...it's the same pathway. That's in the winter.

This is `The Monk'.

`The Monk'. And this I think is...

`The Cricketer'.

Pardon?

I was just putting on tape that we're now looking at `The Cricketer'.

Yes, it's I think spring, and this is winter again, which...

What's the title of that one?

`Young People in a Landscape', Grantchester it is. But you see that is the same, almost the same view of the pathway going to the road down there. So...

So what is the story behind `The Monk' itself? I mean it's a very strange...

There is no story about it, it's just a vision. Oh, only that, if you like, Grantchester is, you know, the sort of lovely church and it's on the Thames...no, not on the Thames, on the Cam, but...

But I mean, the monk is a sort of ghostly figure but he's got a real book and a real rosary.

Well he's semi, semi. Perhaps his...he is semi-transparent but the book, being a real book, the holy script, is real you see.

And what about the other figure?

He is just a person that has seen this ghostly...and is rather worried and put out, as you might be.

And one of the other ones I wanted to ask about was the picture called `The Ghost Wheels The Barrow', the little girl pushing the...

Yes. Well, it was a subject that I thought suited me very well. It's a fairly early one. [BREAK IN RECORDING] Do you know the North End Road in Fulham?

Yes, a very long road isn't it?

Well it's not very long, but it's a market, and you're supposed to be able to get the fruit and vegetables cheaper there than anywhere else in London; whether that's true or whether it was a myth that stayed... Anyway, half-way down the street there's a house, a 17th century house which, you don't see it normally because there's hoardings in front of it, and it's a place where, it's the headquarters of a place that sells antiques. And that house has always fascinated me, and I often thought, well I would rather like to paint a picture about a ghost round about there. So I did a little painting, and I remembered the song, you know, of `The ghost wheels the barrow, through streets broad and narrow, crying "cockles and mussels, alive, alive-o."' And so, I did that first little painting. And then, somebody saw this who was an editor of a paper at the time, a sort of magazine thing, and said, `Well, would you like to do one for me?' And he said, `Well I could let you do four little paintings if you like.' And so I did, I took each line, and `The Ghost Wheels the Barrow' was the first one, `Through Streets Broad and Narrow', and there were four subjects, and one was a close-up, one, so forth. And so, that was it, and then the four pictures were bought, and they were mounted together. They were bought by a friend, and I don't know whether he is alive or dead. He was a man who had no end of terrible accidents, and the last time I heard of him an icicle had fallen on his head like a, well, like a sword, and done him some terrible concussion or something like that, and I haven't heard, and I've tried to ring him up several times and never got him, he may be dead I think, I don't know. And that's the story.

This one that Bernard Jacobson has is a quarter of that series.

Pardon?

The picture that Bernard Jacobson has, `The Ghost Wheels the Barrow' is one of those four then, is it?

It might not be, because I did those as a separate thing, and I'm not at all sure that I didn't do two or three others, I may have done, but I haven't seen that picture. I ought to go and see my friend Margaret, she can show me them there, but I haven't been round lately.

And, in that area there was one that is called `Putney', and I think the date was 1953-8, and it was similar to...

The date, what was it?

1953-8, `Putney', a sort of street scene that was slightly like the scene I think in `The Day of Doom', one like that. And you've got a trio of factory chimneys on the skyline and some other chimneys in it as well, and it's mainly a street scene with cyclists and quite a lot of passers-by, I think.

A fight going on?

No, a street scene.

Oh I see.

Cyclists and passers-by.

Oh is that the one...

And a yellow removal van, or a yellow van of some kind in it.

Really? I can't...I haven't seen these pictures you see.

And what about, one that is in there is this one called Edwin...is it `Edwin La Delle's Cottage'?

Yes, yes.

Why is that, is that...?

Well he is dead now, and that was in Kent. Yes, it's way down towards the coast in Kent. He had this rather nice little cottage which had an orchard in it, and every tree had a different apple which was intriguing. Nowadays people would think that there are only about two

apples in the world; there are hundreds of different types of apples, but they've all been suppressed now.

And he was somebody you knew?

He was the head of the school of engraving at the College, and a good friend of mine, but he died very tragically quite young.

And did you do other paintings in that area, or was that just a one-off?

I did do, yes I did. I think that's about the only one in this book. I never know when half these things were done really. Awful isn't it. Well, have you got anything else to.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

OK, one which, presumably there is something to say, there was one called `A Scene from an Unwritten Opera' that I found rather intriguing.

Well, I think the title is more intriguing than the... Well, I was wandering about in West Dean, which is, you know, a very famous place really, and I always rather like to nose around in odd corners and that sort of thing, and I found a little sort of building which was very lonely and looked un-cared for, and there was smoke coming out of some refuse which was being burnt, and I came back the next day and it was still burning and went on, and I thought, well, I would rather like to paint that. And then, I began to think about what sort of people would have lived here, and I painted these four, was it four, I think four figures, and there's one rather fat man, and I thought, he looks like a tenor, and so, and then I thought of it, well, it could be a piece of a Verdi opera if he ever came to England, and so that's more or less how it happened.

If I remember it rightly, two of the figures are actually holding the middle figure.

That's right. And there's a girl, or woman, walking off on the right-hand side of the picture. See what a brilliant memory I've got. And I think that the fat man is furious because the woman, who is his wife, has been unfaithful to him. And that seems to be operatic enough for anybody. And so, that's how it came about.

Right, because it's very intriguing. I wasn't sure whether they were gripping him in, you know, trying to arrest him almost, or whether...

They're trying to dissuade him from doing her any hard, that's the thing. And she has got the bluest eyes any of my characters have ever been.

I've written down, `With striking blue eyes looking shocked, very mysterious'.

That's right.

And there was a shape in it that I found very strange in that, a sort of central shape in the path, that I've written down, `humping up into a yellow triangle, and black'.

I think that was where the fire was coming out, was it? There was a...I think it was an incinerator there, and old Victorian incinerator, and they burnt everything that was burnable there, hence that I saw that smoke coming out from time to time.

Do you know when you did that?

Not more than three years ago.

Oh, right.

And I won some money at one of the, a prize, I don't know what it was for. It wasn't a lot of money.

And then, the other one that really intrigued me more than any of them was this one called `A Memory of the Same Walk With Another Person'.

Well, I thought that was rather a good idea really. Sometimes one is going along the road with somebody that you didn't care two figs about, and then one thinks of the wonderful time when you went with your loved one or something, or some wonderful character on wonderful moments, and there were all these things, almost mocking you as you went along, because it wasn't the same. That's what that one was about.

But I wasn't sure whether the, well I suppose you've just answered me, I wasn't sure whether the imaginary figure was a younger version of the person the man was with, or whether it was somebody completely different. Because I wasn't sure whether it was saying...

Well no, it wasn't, no. No it wasn't anything about old age or anything like that, it was about, that he was with some unsympathetic person, and these two little figures in the...mm, that was that one. Has he still got that one?

Yes, well he had a couple of months ago anyway. I mean, are you someone who gets quite depressed comparing the present with the past?

I used to be, I used to get very depressed. I don't know whether I am quite so much now, I've got hard-hearted in my time but I used to be rather upset when I passed places that reminded me of places. I don't know.

I will just ask you one more.

All right.

`Pygmalion'.

`Pygmalion'. Well, it happened in the garden next-door.

To here?

Mm. And, you know the story of Pygmalion, don't you, yes. And there's a statue in the garden, it's not a particularly beautiful statue, but it was enough to...that the chap has done this statue, and...I can't remember, are there three figures in it, can you tell me?

Two figures by the girl, it says in my notes.

Yes.

End of F2548 Side B

F2549 Side A

Is it all right? Is it in?

Yes.

I believe, as far as I can remember, that there is the sculptor and his wife there, and he is only interested in the statue, I think.

And so it was really a comment on his neglect of her.

It wasn't particularly...it was...that was one of the things that had happened. But...yes, I suppose that is true, yes, yes.

And, is there an arch over the statue next-door, or did you make that up? Made by the foliage?

There is an archway there, and it's very like that, and if it wasn't so late in the evening I would have taken you in and showed you the exact spot. It's about three years ago since it was painted, three or four years ago, and it may be changed slightly now, I don't know. I go in there very often so, I think it's more or less the same.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....relieving his feelings against a tree.

It's really the woman that made the impression on me. I suppose he is; perhaps I was too polite to look.

No this is a man.

No it's a woman with a rucksack of some kind.

Ah, I don't remember that one.

Right. So what's this one with a man relieving himself?

Oh that's one that I did in Sussex, and there's a car, a van broken down or something, and people are standing about, and one chap is relieving his feelings there, and there's a pathway that goes right up a hill in front.

And is that something you witnessed, or what?

No I invented that one, it's very common. It's always very difficult, isn't it, to relieve one's feelings on these places, because there's always somebody coming round the corner. Not that one should worry very much. A terrible thing happened to my mother. She really, nature called in a no uncertain way and she just wanted to relieve herself, and so, she was walking along a road with my father and she said, `You walk on, you walk on,' and so he walked on, and then suddenly a whole mass of cyclists all came round, and it was so awful from her point of view because she, all the long journey back she thought that these were all men that had seen her relieving her feelings.

[END OF SESSION]

[Interview with Carel Weight on January the 8th 1992 at his studio.]

.....August, and you were about to go away to stay in Kent I think with a student, did you say?

Yes. Well I went away for one week only, and I enjoyed it very much because this chap, my ex-student, is a very nice person and he puts himself out so much to make me happy and so forth, but almost the first walk we did was designed to please me, and it had quite the reverse effect. About, a few weeks before, a chap had come to my studio whom I...I met him about once before, didn't really know him, didn't like him very much, but he span a huge tale about, oh he would give his front teeth or his eyes or his, I don't know what, if only he had a picture of mine, but the trouble was that he had no money to pay my colossal prices you see. And so I thought, oh well, the best thing to do is to let him have one at any price he likes, and then I can get rid of him quickly. Well, I sold him quite a presentable sort of picture which wasn't bad, and off he went saying, `Oh you're the kindest man, I shall have this picture always in front of me'. So off he went, I thought, well any rate I've pleased this chap, he won't come back. And so, my friend said, `Oh would you like to go into the art gallery in Tunbridge Wells, it's a dealer's gallery down there, and they often have interesting things, and they sometimes have a picture of yours.' So I went there, and the first picture I saw there, for a price five times about the amount that he paid for it, and there it was, and so that annoyed me very much.

So was he the dealer, or he had sold it to the dealer?

No no, he had sold it to the dealer.

Did you go in and talk to the dealer about it?

I went in, I wasn't going to say anything about it, it made me slightly ridiculous and so forth, and so I just didn't say anything, but it annoyed me.

What was the picture?

It was a landscape of a church, curiously enough in another part of Kent not very far away, a lovely old church, in which I had painted a few ghosts and the usual stuff you see. So that was that. But that's only half the story. When I got back, almost the first person that rang me up was this chap, and so I said...now this proves what an absolute idiot I am really, I said, `Don't tell me, don't tell me, I know,' and I thought, I would let him off telling a lot of lies, so I said, `I went to Tunbridge Wells and there was the picture, and offered for a price very much in advance of anything that we had ever discussed'. And he said, `Oh, I don't know how I can face you after all that; I did honestly, I was absolutely honest with you, but the fact was, I got back home and I found I hadn't any money at all, so the only thing I could do was to sell your lovely, lovely picture.' And he said this, and he laid it on very thickly, and I was almost weeping myself. (laughs) And then he said to me, `Do you think you would ever paint a portrait of me?' And so, I said, `Well I might sometime, yes, well possibly, yes.' I didn't like the look of him but I thought he had got an interesting face, and he's one of these young men trying to look thoroughly grown-up, and grew long hair down to his shoulders, and a real sort of, that sort of chap you see. I thought, well he would make a good painting, and I said, `All right, come along and I'll paint you.' And, I'm so ashamed really, this ought not to be recorded; I painted the picture in about nine sittings, ten sittings, something like that, and then he said, `Well, you can have all the money I've got'. And I said, `Well, how much is that?' `Well, £250,' he said, `is all I've got.' So, I said, `You don't want it anyway.' He said, `It will always remind me of this rotten thing I did.' So, and I said, `All right, here you are,' and he gave me £250 in odd little coins, and off he went. And, not more than a month later I get a call from my friend who said, `Well I went into that gallery, and they've got a lovely portrait of a man there.' And so I said, `Don't tell me, but you had better tell me, how much were they...how much were they selling it for?' He said, `Somewhere in the region of about 4,000.' And so, that's the story. You know, one feels such a fool about it all really.

Did it not occur to him that when he got home the first time and found he had no money he could have come back to you and said, `I'm sorry, can I have my money back, here is your picture?'

(laughs) Well, it didn't really occur to me very much; I would have been pleased to have it back, because I mean it was... But there it was, and just...so that's my grumble, one of my grumbles since I've last seen you.

Do you have his name and address?

I haven't even got that, I didn't want to know it, I don't want to know anything about him. But if he speaks on the telephone I'll say I don't want to know. But, he comes from the north of England, I know that much. But, there he is. Now let's get on with the work.

Having done a portrait like that, would you ever, you know, obviously keep his figure in memory, would you ever use it in another picture, would it crop up again if you had done it once?

I might if I wanted to paint Judas or somebody, perhaps he might be a very fitting sort of chap.

I should think there are quite a lot of candidates for that.

What?

There must be quite a lot of candidates for that, aren't there?

No, no I...I generally think well of people until they prove otherwise.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Did you do any painting while you were in Kent?

Yes I did. I didn't do a lot, well I was only there for a week, and I came back with four pictures, none of them were quite complete, I had to finish them here, and I was quite pleased. It was very hot, and it's a very strange place, this place, which is not in Tunbridge Wells itself, it's about a mile outside, and there are a huge lot of rocks, how they got there, God knows, but these great big massive rocks, and I painted two pictures of the rocks. And in fact, yes there

were two, and then I painted a thing... He lived looking down on a sort of hollow, which was rather nice, and although, not really beautiful, surrounded by little houses, but something appealed to me and I liked it very much, and that was one of the pictures I did. And then I did a smaller version of it, and two pictures of the rocks. So it wasn't unproductive really. And then, he and his friend had a car, and they took me out and showed me things of interest, and we went to a lovely church which had, the glass by, you know the glass man.....[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Who is the glass by?

What?

Who is the glass by?

It was by Chagall, and it was quite lovely I thought. And just in this very small, simple, but very beautiful little church, and it seemed to wed itself perfectly really. And, I think if you look behind there you will see a postcard, look, just there.

Oh right. I was going to say, is it very blue this window.

It gives you no idea at all, because that was not the best piece really. It was quite lovely.

Do you like his work in general, is he an artist...?

Chagall?

Mm.

Yes. I think that, we had this great Chagall exhibition, and he died while it was on, in the Academy you know, and, I never met him, but his wife came over, he wasn't well or he would have come over. But I had to entertain his wife, and so, that was nice, because she spoke perfect English, and during the war she kept a hat shop in Sloane Street. But really, a very nice person. Yes, I like his work, particularly the early work.

Did you learn anything from her about him?

Not a lot, no. We just talked about rather day-to-day things, and...she told me he was a very happy man, which I quite believe. I can't remember anything very much else, not really, but I did like her very much.

Can you remember when you first came across his work, do you know when that was?

I think the first, I saw reproductions in art books and things. The first one I saw was the one in the Tate, which I've always loved, do you know the one, `The Poet's Dream', it's one of my favourite Chagalls really. But, he is quite a favourite painter of mine.

And when you are somewhere like Kent, when you were, say, painting the rocks, do you do sketches beforehand or do you just...?

No, I haven't time to do it if I'm going to do...I just do paintings direct on a canvas you see. I don't take out very large canvases, in fact I take out a very small...you see that little easel on legs here?

Yes, oh right.

Well that is the thing that I take, and it will only take about a two-foot high, or under two feet canvas, you know, that sort of size.

Right.

And it has great advantages. You see, if you think of it, Constable painted even much smaller pictures than that, and then he might work up some of them in a grand manner afterwards, but most of the paintings direct from nature were painted very quickly. And his paintings were often no bigger than four inches by three or something like that, which is very tiny really. Nature doesn't stay still and so it's much better to paint small pictures direct from nature I think.

So you would go and do a relatively small picture of the rocks in a day, and then when you did your larger one, was that back in the studio, or...?

I did, yes, this is more or less the idea, although it takes me longer than a day. You see, if you are painting in the sunlight you can only paint for about two to three hours and then all the shadows are going round and it becomes a different picture, so you very often have to take two or three days to do the thing you see.

But in England you can't rely on the light being the same the next morning, can you?

No you can't, no, and you've got to be pretty smart to know just the right moment to do it. But you know, Corot said, he said that, `When I was young I prayed for the clouds to stay still.' And he said, `Now I'm old, I'm delighted they don't.' Because he had found a way of doing it you see.

And do you feel the same?

Pardon?

Do you feel the same?

Yes, yes I do very much. It is...of course it's very tantalising if there's a thing that you just must want to try and get down and it changes before your eyes; the sun comes right round and makes the object that was bathed in sunlight just a black object.

How good a visual memory do you have?

Not particularly good. I ought to have trained it better really. I don't know. It's better to go back and look at it a lot of times than rely too much on your memory.

Or invention presumably.

Well invention is a different matter really; invention comes entirely from you and it's building up something which you put down on the canvas.

But presumably there are moments when those two combine.

Oh yes, yes yes there are. There can be no hard and fast rules about these things, you just have to grab while the grabbing is good for any particular reason really.

And this place in Kent, was it somewhere you had been before, was it known?

No.

So it was all new ground.

I had never been there before. I was rather staggered with these huge great rocks. It reminded me of the Auvergne, you know, I went for a holiday there once, and it was an area which had been affected hundreds of years, thousands of years before, by a tremendous volcanic eruption, and there were all these great rocks thrown up into different places, and the architecture, I mean the natural development was absolutely staggering. And they very often took advantage of these extraordinary-shaped rocks and things, and they often built a monastery on top of the rock or something like that, and it all looked so much like Walt Disney, and made you laugh really.

And where exactly are the rocks in Kent, are they near to Tunbridge, is that...?

Yes, they're within about a mile from the middle of the town, it's just an outlying little village just outside.

Do you remember the name?

Not awfully, no.

And, apart from that time in Kent were you in England until you went to Ireland in February? You didn't go away again?

Yes, yes I didn't go away or anything at all, I just worked on various things. I had a picture back from the Academy which wasn't sold, and I didn't think it would sell somehow. I quite liked it at the time, but when I saw it there I wasn't awfully happy. And so, one of the things I did was to almost entirely re-paint it.

Which one was it?

It was one in the first room, which, I think I called it something like `The On-coming Storm', and although I didn't change the mood of the picture, I made considerable alterations to the various figures in it, and I spent a fair time doing that, and you can see it because it is here.

And were the alterations to do with the form of the picture, or were they to do with the mood of the picture?

A little to do with the form of the picture I think really, because it seemed to me that the picture was awkward, the shapes in it were awkward to me. There was a large amount of

foreground which I kept thinking, well the obvious thing to do is to cut about a foot and a half off the bottom. And then I thought, well, although...I never like really, well only on very rare occasions, doing any surgeon's work on a picture, and I thought, well I would rather like to solve it some other way, and so I introduced a large dark figure right in the front of the picture which changed the look of it, but not, it didn't change the mood I don't think. Any rate that was one of the things I did.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Put the light on and you can see it a bit better.

Right.

I think it's got more tense, and I did in fact include more figures. I wanted it to be humming with things.

These weren't here before, were they?

Well, no, they are all sort of...they are in a way subordinated, but in a way to give more sort of feeling of tenseness and so forth.

But you've introduced a splendid drumming cat.

(laughs) Yes. Well I thought I had to do something like that.

And this is a wonderful looking creature, whatever it is.

Well they're playing various instruments. There's a cat with a drum.

And an angel; is this influenced by Christmas, or not?

I don't think so, no, I don't think so. I had more or less finished it just about, just before Christmas, but...no it was really all about the storm. And this dark woman there is new.

She looks extremely sad.

Well, yes, she does, doesn't she. And that is another figure that's come into it.

The boy in the brown tunic.

Yes. And things. But it is considerably different now, and I think, I hope I have solved the problem of the front of the picture.

What's this mark here, what was there before?

Well that was just patches of green, of grass being slightly blown, but I may well introduce it, not just in that patch but bring it into the rest, I should think. So there one is.

And when you began to put in the large new figure, did you know in your mind what she would look like, and the fact that it would be a woman and not a man?

No I somehow did know that it was going to be a woman, but I had no idea what she was going to turn out to look like quite, and gradually, half done... When you put a person in like that, and you are just feeling your way with it, it grows, it grows sort of, in a rather magical way, if you know what I mean, and then you see something and then you say, well I think, yes, I think dark eyes will go well with that, and so forth, and then I must get a sort of rather, well you said sad, but I rather thought a worried look really. But, there it is.

And at what point did you know she was going to be a sort of three-quarter length figure? I mean where did you start, did you begin with the head and know that she was going to be that scale, or what?

Well I had to gently get the figure... You see, I'm governed a little bit by making the landscape within the bounds of actuality as we know it. I mean, I think she is roughly about the size that I wanted her in relation to the other figures, and if I had have put...the arrangement of the other things, the foliage and this figure wafted in the air and that sort of thing, are about, they are all about right, and I've got all those things which will direct me towards where, and the sort of size of the figure in front.

And was this larger flying figure in the top right-hand corner, was she in there before, or is she new?

She was there, but I think I painted her up and made her stand out a little more clearly.

Because that sort of draws everybody together, doesn't it, there's a sort of change between the real people and the unreal people.

Yes, that's right, yes. And you don't escape even the sky really, because all these figures have been wafted up.

And the other thing that's very disorientating about it is the fact that on each side of the painting the people are leaning in different directions, aren't they.

That's right, yes, yes, yes. You see the thing is that although the clouds are coming along, they don't quite know what the hell to do, that's what I thought really.

But it's a wonderful sort of rhythm of colours as well, curves round.

So that took a fair time to do. I'm now doing another picture in the next room which is really not in a state much to see it, but...that's right, put the light on. This I'm calling `Two Women'.

Wonderful colours, that one.

Well I don't know, but, it's only half done yet. But what I very often do like is the opposition of the building up of a sort of actual scene, what is actually happening, and have these two...is this girl left in tears, and the other one is walking away? The man of course is a sort of pivot on which it all sort of radiates you see.

End of F2549 Side A

F2549 Side B

.....different, but of course this figure doesn't exist, only her head exists at the moment.

And her wonderful hat. But this figure on the left, the woman, she's much more naturalistic than your figures often are, isn't she?

Yes it is really. And the chap, this is done you see when I was in Ireland, and it was...I did...I can show you...just a moment, I'll show you an old sketch which I didn't do on the spot but I did it to clear my own mind up about it.

So when would you have done this then?

I did that when I came back.

Right, from memory?

Well from memory, and also, I had a photograph of it, a little snap of it, I don't know whether...yes.

Oh right, so the man was actually there, or a man was.

Yes, he was the chap that...but I didn't make any attempt to get it like him, because I didn't necessarily want it like him.

But it's a very interesting sort of feeling of being trapped in between the gateposts isn't it.

Yes, yes it is. There he is, and he's a sort of pivot there. But you see, I have more or less accepted this bit of a gate here in front, which in a way, it gives one a continuous feeling of parallels going across there, and being broken by the figures and...

And actually it's one thing I wanted to ask you about, was the process you go through. Having done the sketch, you've then put on top of the sketch a piece of transparent paper and marked it up. Can you explain that?

Well it's very easy really, because you see, this is just what...I don't suppose you do it any more at school, but in geography you would be given a map and they say, well now enlarge it, it's only a little map, you want to get much more into it, so you put these as guidelines, so you

copy it on the small scale and you copy it. You see here, there are these things, which are gradually disappearing as the painting gets done, and so they are guidelines to getting the proportion right, which is very important.

Right. So in other words, on your transparent piece of paper you draw a grid...

Yes.

And then you, on your canvas or board...

Yes, but it must be in absolutely the same proportion.

Right. So first you mark up the same grid on the blank board...

That's right.

And then you are basically transferring the image using those reference points.

You copy every little bit as closely as you can.

Right. And, you are working on board, are you?

I'm working on board on this one, yes.

And is that what you normally do?

No, no it isn't, but I had this board which was about the right size. And I have no great preference on what I should use, it's absolutely what is convenient to use. I'm perfectly happy painting on either. You see, by the way, then going back to the picture that we were talking about there...

The Royal Academy one.

That picture that you've seen before.

Yes. What's that one called?

That's called `The Conflict Between Grown-ups And The Children'. But you do see that it is in fact exactly the same place as the one outside. If you don't believe me, come and compare it. Take it out, or I'll take it out.

Better, in case I drop it.
Am I going to be throttled at any moment?

No that's fine.

Can you see?

Oh right, gosh yes, I wouldn't have worked it out though.

It's the same place exactly, there's the tree and there's the road coming down.

Where is it then?

It's in Barnes. I don't know if you know Barnes but there is a big pub at a crossroads, and you go behind the pub, and suddenly, if you walk along, any distance along here, particularly on a weekday, it becomes a country place, and there's no sign of any houses round, it's just... And this road leads, a winding pathway down to the river.

So is this the one you've made up with the railing going on forever which makes it more frightening?

Well there...yes, it's all, you see, different. I mean this was done some months earlier, and this was perfectly right for this sort of picture. I felt I wanted to paint a picture...do you know these wonderful, two or three early pictures of Bruegel which paints a whole mass of, there's one called `Children's Games', they're all...and he did and then there are ones about proverbs, and I thought of this a little bit like that, but not terribly, but any rate a bit like that.

But does this actually exist, this blue fence that you've put in the second one we're talking about?

Yes, but you see that is, if you look, it's a wire gauze fence, and it takes a blue colour reflected, you see, and it's, from the point of view of the harmony of the colour, I found it rather fascinating, the blue in opposition to the green grass you see.

But the difference between the two particularly is that that one has an enclosed point, doesn't it, this one, because it comes across here. It almost acts as a shelter.

It comes out at right-angles.

Yes.

And I didn't do that because I didn't see any particular...I wanted...I didn't particularly want it. I wanted in this one a feeling that it goes right the way back with nothing to hinder it.

Right.

But this I accepted more or less what was there. And as a matter of fact it's quite useful in that picture because it rather throws, or keeps the interest inside this front.

It's interesting what a difference it makes.

Mm. But it is quite fun in a way to take an object, take a motif for a picture and then weave it into different sorts of pictures without necessarily changing it fundamentally you see.

Would you have gone back to the site when you did this second picture, or would you have done it from memory?

I went back to it a second time, and...you see I chose a spot considerably closer in so that this wire thing played a more important structure, structurally, than it did there.

It's like a barrier there, isn't it.

Yes.

And what determines where you actually sign your name? Because your signature is very prominent, and it's often in quite bright colours isn't it. And then this first one we're talking about, it's right up in the sky and in the portrait of you and Nancy Carline it's right down in the left-hand corner.

Well, I never take much notice of signatures in pictures. My one hope is to keep it fairly innocuous really. Everybody asks you to sign a picture, so one has more or less got to do that if you sell, so that they always...if it's not done, you have to sign it. My early pictures some

of them are not signed, and this one I think I have signed haven't I? But, yes, you see, but I think it's very lost down there. Can you see?

No I can't.

Oh isn't it there?

I don't think so. Maybe it was in this corner and you had to take it out, when you put the new figure in.

That's strange. Well it means that I'll have to do it again. I thought I'd signed it. Well, that's one extra little job I've got. I don't think there's anything much else in here.

Well there's the one of the dog.

Pardon?

There's one of a dog I saw.

A dog? Oh yes, well now that is the place where I was down there, that was one, the smallest picture I did there.

This is the rocky place in Kent.

What?

This is the rocky place in Kent, is it?

Yes, this is the rocky place, with these great big rocks all over the place. There's another picture that I painted rather larger than that, and I call that `Man Teasing Dog'.

And the man and the dog weren't there at all, you've just introduced them?

No, no. But it was the sort of place, it was the sort of general place that children and all sorts of people go on a hot afternoon, and they sit down and take sandwiches and... It's not a very Englishy looking place, is it, you might well think to yourself...

American or something.

Yes, well it could be American, yes it could, yes.

But also, I mean it looks like absolutely no-man's-land in a strange way, doesn't it, it looks completely unidentifiable.

Yes. Yes well they are, this is a wonderful place really for children, and they can climb up these big rocks and don't...although I suppose they would come a nasty cropper if they fell down, but at the same time, it doesn't look awfully dangerous and they can...I suppose they could fall off that rock up there or something, but... Any rate it's much used by them.

And what about this one?

Well this is just, this is in Sussex, and I did it just before, well while I was...and it's just figures in a landscape, and it's just a sort of, a composition in which the landscape is held in a way together by the figures, their sharp accents. When I saw this, the thing that I thought would make the design of interest and exciting was the feeling of going in to the picture and the perspective leading one right the way through. But then I thought, well, I wanted something a bit more than that, and so I introduced the discordant element of three people all in rather dark, strong contrast to the rest of the picture.

Part of the compulsion is the fact that the boy is looking towards the girl and vice versa, isn't it, it's the fact you don't know what their relationship is, whether they are total strangers or...they're caught together.

Well you can take all that, yes, and this old bloke there finding it rather difficult to get about.

Has two sticks. But the three figures are sort in counterbalance with the three main tree trunks, aren't they.

That's right, yes, yes that's right.

And they're very supple, the tree trunks, as well.

Yes. A picture of this sort is sometimes a devil to paint, and it did take a bit of trouble to do it. Any rate there it is.

It's very clever, because it partly captures that silence that you get in woods, and yet because the trees all look as though they might move in the wind and the people are obviously in motion, it's got both those aspects.

That's right. I don't think I've got anything else to show you here at this moment, but if you come back I've got a number of pictures, a lot of people wanted various pictures for Christmas exhibitions and that sort of thing, and I lent them, and so there about eight pictures out, and most of them which you haven't seen I don't think.

And have you got things, people waiting for commissions at the moment?

I've got several people wanting portraits done, and I did, I've just done a portrait which I've just taken out to the framers. Next door, who, did you go next-door with me?

Yes.

You did, didn't you, you saw that they have quite a lot of my things. And the lady, Mrs Valentine, looks on me as the sort of Velasquez of their family, and they always want somebody painted. Well this time, I had painted the youngest - the eldest girl, who was a girl with the violin, do you remember?

Josephine.

Josephine, yes. Well Josephine has got married and she's just having a baby, and before she was going to have the baby I was asked to do another painting of her, which I did, and then they said, `Oh well you must paint her husband,' and so, I wasn't awfully keen but I said, all right, and he turned out to be a very nice chap and he sat very well and we became good friends, and it all went quite smoothly. I finished it on, no it wasn't Christmas Day, it was on Boxing Day, and let the paint dry, put some varnish on and sent it off. But I've got two or three other people who want me to do portraits but I think I shall have a little pause for a bit.

Because you don't mind doing portraits if you can do lots of things in between, or you would always rather not do portraits?

Yes. I wouldn't want to do them all the time at all. I think you can make a lot of money if you've got the... I can tell you a little bit about this other portrait which was an earlier work. This picture is a portrait of the family of Lord Lowther - Lord Lambton, sorry, and I went up to a huge ugly Victorian house on the borders of Scotland. And first of all he wanted to get

me up there to paint a picture of all his uncles and relatives who lived up there, and I got up there, I didn't feel at all happy about the subject, and then, he met me on the station and he looked very worried about it, he said, `None of my uncles want to sit'. So I secretly felt rather pleased, and said, `Oh don't worry about that, I shall go back to town, I've got lots of work to do at home.' And so, he said, `No no no, I've got you here now, I think you had better paint all my children.' And I thought, oh God! And so, he drove me to this house, which isn't a house he lived in, but it was slightly depressing but it had some wonderful things in it really, and so I chose this room, although I was rather horrified with the wallpaper, and that wallpaper drove me up the wall I can tell you. And so, it was a devil of a job, it was a very hot summer and the children, the last thing they wanted to do was to pose, and so it was difficult. And to paint them all, I wanted to get back to London as soon as I could because I wasn't very happy; I mean he was very kind in a way and courteous, but I found in the evenings it was very difficult to find anything much to talk to him about, and so, I was rather relieved when he said, `I've got a friend of mine coming down,' and so, he said...he was telling the children, `Now I want you to call this lady friend of mine Aunt Fifi'. And so, Aunt Fifi arrived, and she turned out to be a real sort of loud sort of lady, and she was obviously a tart you see, and she just stayed the night and then went off. And then, about a night or so afterwards he said, `Oh children, I've got a friend of mine coming along, and I want you to call her Aunt Elise.' And so, this went on. Well it pleased me in a way, because he got fully occupied and he could go off with her, and so I was freer in the evenings.

He didn't offer you the same service?

What?

He didn't offer you the same service.

No. (laughs) No. And, then...he was all right really, but I found it a bit of a strain. And I painted the thing in a fortnight, which I think is pretty good going really. I didn't finish it all, I had to take it back to town and I had to paint...of course this sort of thing I found was so...

The wallpaper.

Boring to do really. Yes.

And did the children not like each other? You've painted them all very separately.

They were different ages, and I don't think they...I think they tolerated each other, and both the elder girls were absolutely delightful really, and very very nice, and this one had a lot of vitality.

The little one in the blue striped dress.

Yes. Well they were all quite nice girls. But the difficulty really was to paint this little boy, who was barely two, and the only thing I could think of was to get somebody, and they got the nurse to come and sit while she read some of her favourite nursery rhymes you see. And, well he never sat for one second, and what I had to do was to watch and watch and watch, which I found that, there was a time when they would come back and repose back for a few seconds and then you would get a little bit of the nose in and that sort of thing you see. But that didn't turn out too badly, and it was quite like them.

So presumably you had the children in one by one to sit; you didn't...?

Yes. Occasionally I used to get a couple posing. I mean it was quite nice to have this one...

The little stripy girl.

While that one was sitting there. Yes.

The middle girl.

They were very good really I must say, and fairly co-operative. I used to have to say, `Well now, if you sit very very still I'll let you ride twice round the estate,' because they all liked riding their little horses or donkeys or something like that. I felt rather sorry for them because they had to sit on a beautiful day. But the whole, I was just as interested really in the various things in the rooms which were...you know, you recognise these pictures on the walls for instance, and this was an English 17th century, highly, tremendously ornate table, and all that I liked painting very much.

Did he choose it to be in this room, or did you?

I chose this room, he gave me a free... You see one thing I had to do was to find a room where the light was fairly constant, and so it was a fairly north light. There were some nice things. I mean that Japanese screen there was rather a beautiful thing.

It must have been very hard to do, and you've got this wonderful reflection in it.

Yes, that's right, yes. No that's not in that, but in the grand piano there.

Oh right, the piano behind, right.

Afterwards I thought, well, if I had have arranged it and made it into a thing called `The Concert' I could have extended the picture along and had a person playing the piano and they would be all listening to it; it would not be quite true because I don't think they were very musical, but any rate it would have made a motif for the picture, and it could have been quite nice that really.

How did the commission come about?

Oh, I don't know really. He had heard of me or something, I never... You know he left England in disgrace, he was, I don't know, he was a Minister for the air or something in those days, and it was then discovered that, various things had disappeared from the...from secret things, and so it made them all very very...security had to be very very tight, and although they had got nothing really against him, except that they knew that his morals were not terribly all that they should have been, and he was one of the people that got asked to leave.

When did you...

What?

Sorry.

When did what?

When did you do the painting?

Don't ask me about dates.

Roughly.

Somewhere about 1960, something like that.

So he was still in his height at that point.

Pardon?

He was in his heyday at that point, he wasn't anywhere near disgrace?

Oh yes, oh he was full of hey! (laughs)

And how did the children react to these `aunts'?

Oh they just took it. They liked their father I think, the father was probably quite a good father to them, and he used to tell them ghost stories at night.

And did any of them show any interest in painting, and in you?

I don't think so, I've lost touch with them. But the eldest one often appears on the box, and she gives talks about strange houses in England, and she is also a very good photographer.

Is she called Lucinda or something?

Lucinda, that's right, yes.

That's very intriguing.

I never met her, because she had already got married before all this lot had appeared.

Oh so she's not the eldest child here?

No no, no, no. This girl was the second, and she was the next, and then she was the next one. I think they were...they weren't twins but there was a very short time between them.

And why has it come back to you at the moment?

Well, because, I think he has decided that he never wanted to come back to England, he's abroad, so he was selling up all his estates and things, and this came up, and it didn't fetch a very big sum, and a friend of mine who seems to like my work, he thought, well...I said, well there are very few...I had done a few composite portraits but none with five in it, as many as five, and it is, I thought, well it's a tolerably good painting, if you can get it cheap I should, and so he did, and he got it, and then he said could he leave it with me and would I give it a

little clean, which I've done, and it is, I was very pleased with it really, because it's in a good state.

There's actually six in it, not five.

Pardon?

Six people in it.

Six are there? Yes, there are six, that's right.

And would you do sketches before you did this composition, or what?

No I did it all straight on the canvas.

And I mean you must be very aware of being in a tradition when you do something like this, of portraits of stately home families and everything.

Mm. Yes, well I did do several...I've never done anybody quite like this really. I always rather avoided doing them, to be absolutely honest. But I have painted things like, I painted the, what was he, the President of the Society of the, what do they call them? Well they're the people that are, all have enormous companies and that sort of thing.

You mean financiers and people like that?

Those sort of people, yes, yes.

Magnates?

What?

Magnates.

Yes, but that's not what they call themselves. I think it's the something of directors, the...

Oh the COI...no.

Yes, something like that, yes. The Institute of Directors I think it is.

Right.

Yes. And I painted, oh I painted a lot of people like that, and a lot of businessmen. I always fought shy of painting royalty; I could have painted the Duke of Edinburgh, I didn't particularly want to so I cried off. One of the most terrible jobs that were ever offered to me, which I turned down flat, was to paint the House of Lords in action, which I thought I couldn't bear. I went up to look at it, and I thought, well this is not for me.

End of F2549 Side B

F2550 Side A

How did the recording with the Duke of Edinburgh come up?

Oh, I was asked if I would do a painting by I think some society of which he was president or something, and so, I said no thank you.

Did you consider it? Did you nearly do it?

Did I...? No, I don't think so. I knew him, and I got on reasonably well with him, but he, one thing I didn't like about him, he had to tell you everything, and you could never answer, well you could answer back I suppose, but it seemed all rather difficult.

Would he tell you things about your own painting?

No, no no no, no, we didn't talk about painting, I just met him at dinners and things you see.

What, at the RA, that sort of thing?

That sort of thing, yes, yes.

And what was the commission about the House of Lords? I was going to ask you about that.

Would I paint, and I can't remember who it came from, but would I paint...I think it may have been the House of Lords themselves who would like a picture of... You've seen the sort of things, a mass of people in this wonderful building, everybody absolutely recognisable, and none of them anything like them really, and I thought, no, that's not for me.

And again, did you consider that one?

Not very seriously.

And one of the other portraits I was going to ask you about was the one of Gombrich.

Yes.

How did that one come about?

Well that came from...well it came from, who was it? One of the chief equerries to the Queen who said that, wondered whether I would consider doing a drawing of one of the OMs, and that was because the Queen wanted a portrait drawing to a certain size to go in an album or something like that you see. And she gave me about four or five people that they hadn't got drawings of, and would I choose one of them, and I at once chose Gombrich because not only do I...I like him very much, he's got a great sort of sense of humour, and is a very learned chap, and I don't as a rule like art historians very much but I do like him. And so I suggested I should do him, and that's how it happened, and I was very pleased. I did the drawing in about two days, two mornings, and he sat well and we talked about hundreds of subjects, I read some of his books which helped, and that was it. I think it was rather successful really.

Did you paint him here?

What?

Did he come here?

No, I did it in the Academy, because he lives right in the north of England, and it was convenient really. He met me half-way.

And, what do you feel about the royal family?

(laughs) I'm very for the Queen, I like her very much.

Why?

Well, I went to Windsor and spent the night there, and she made one tremendously at home, and I found she was awfully easy to talk to, and she took me all round the royal collection.

How did that invitation happen?

Pardon?

How did that invitation come about?

It just came through the post, they asked me if I would like to make up a small party to stay. And then, it was rather curious because I was still at the College, and I was rather, I felt that it was rather nice to be asked, and then, I suddenly looked at the invitation card, and it said the

1st of April, and I thought, now, there must be a lot of people at the College who would think it would be great fun to make me dress up and go to Windsor, and be told that it didn't exist you see. And so I began to not believe it at all. And, of course I didn't do the obvious thing and try to get somebody at Buckingham Palace, and so this was quite a worry to me for quite a long time. Eventually I did ring up and it was quite all right.

And was there anything in her collection there that really stands out in your memory?

Oh yes, there were my own pictures, which was, I thought, a very nice thing that she did. She had got a couple of watercolours of mine or something like that, I don't think very much, but...

Can you remember which they are, can you describe them?

I can't really. I saw them there. And she did something which I thought was very nice, she brought me into the, with these other people, into the library, and above the books there were some wonderful drawings, Leonardos and Holbeins and all sorts of things, and as I was walking round I thought, God, that looks a bit funny, I wonder what that picture is up there. It was mine! So, no, she was very nice really. And she, after dinner we walked round the...she said, `I'm going to take you right round the royal collection,' and I had noticed that the time was about 9 o'clock or something like that, and so we started our walk. Most of the people were as old as me, perhaps one or two ladies who had got rather bad feet and didn't like walking too far, and she was just like one of those dogs that sort of, you know, got all the sheep into pens and that sort of thing, she wouldn't allow anybody to lag behind, she said, `Come along, come along, we haven't got much time, come on'. And I was absolutely fascinated, but they couldn't have been awfully fascinated really, and their poor feet must have been worrying them a lot.

Did you come into contact with Anthony Blunt at all?

I knew Anthony Blunt, I used to sometimes invite him to do lectures, and he wasn't a very nice character I don't think.

What was he like?

Oh, he was a very cold man, and I don't think I saw the best of him really, and I got him, I said to him, would he give a lecture or a series of lectures on Poussin and Raphael, and he said he would, and it was the one flop that I ever organised, because he talked, and I'm sure he

got all his dates right, but it was a terrible bore, it was a terrible bore to art students I think. They all complained. And so, after he had done those I didn't ask him again.

Do you think it's because he didn't really have much interest in communicating his knowledge to anyone else?

I think that he wasn't on the same wavelength as practising art students really. And I think that they would have liked to have known much more of the practical side, and all he would be interested in saying, that, you know, he painted...they painted this or that in 1491, and that...it was completely humourless.

Presumably he actually wouldn't have known about the practical side.

What?

Presumably he wouldn't have known about the practical side, he was probably...

Oh no he wouldn't have known anything, no. But he was the one person, I mean in comparison with Kenneth Clark, was amazing really, because Clark could hold you absolutely fascinated with the whole thing, and you were sorry that the time had gone so quickly.

And were you surprised when he was revealed to have been a spy?

Pardon?

Were you surprised when Blunt was revealed to have been a spy?

I suppose I was, but you know, I shouldn't have been too surprised because there was a great faction in the early days, an anti-communist thing at all costs, and they would rather join in them in... Chamberlain was one of those people that would rather join in with Germany any day, than to think there was any chance of communism coming to England. Anyway they were probably, they were right in a way, because we wouldn't have liked Joe Stalin very much I don't think. But any rate, shall we go and sit down now?

Can we just go back in here just for a minute.

Oh yes.

How often do you do the little preliminary sketches like the one you showed me? I mean have you got...?

What?

Have you got hundreds of little preliminary sketches, like the one you showed me for this, or are they only very occasional?

I find that those on the whole are very saleable.

The sketches?

Yes. Because, you know, they're within the pockets of certain people, and I do sell them pretty easily. Well, I don't do too badly at all, but... And I don't often, you know, I don't do them as a rule; I do them just to clarify an idea, and the possibility of making a picture out of them. They're done for that entirely really, not to make a little picture because people can't afford to buy big ones.

Yes. But you don't, you almost never sort of sketch or...?

Pardon?

You almost never do sketching or drawing then?

I don't do very many drawings; I do, I've done a lot of drawing in my time, but these days I find it's better to really work in the media which you're going to finish your picture do you see. But, given odd bits of information, I do. Those are just notes, and are really not particularly ones I want to show.

Can we just talk about the materials you are using, and the things that are around in the studio. What exactly are you using?

Well this is my palette that I'm using for this picture, and it's all over the shop as you see. I mean, one gets rather careless of putting out colours, because one is anxious to paint rapidly, and you just pick a few and you push it down there, and... But what a more methodical artist would do would be to have his paints arranged according to the colours, with certain colours that you can mix easily from there. I don't really, I would like to do that, and sometimes I feel

I ought to do it and sometimes I enjoy doing it, and I'm very lazy to put out things like that. But on the other hand, one does it almost impulsively, I must have a little more red, put it down you see, and so it gets into a bit of a mess. But you see, in all my palettes there is this well of clean colour which I am most particular about, almost as a surgeon might really. I think that's all one can say.

So that's a sort of patch of white presumably which helps you clarify what the other colours...?

It doesn't, no, it's not necessary. But these, which is all building material, I find cheap and nice to use, and palettes get rather out of hand after a bit and...

Yes, but I mean, surely you were talking about this little white piece that you keep clear of the other colours.

Yes. Well it's only that it's not got a lot of messy colours that you pick up by accident you see. It's a little bit like an operating theatre, but white isn't necessarily the best colour to use. It's all right really.

And you are using oil paint in tubes.

Oh yes, yes always.

And did you use oils from the very beginning and throughout?

Yes. I always use oil painting, there are certain reasons for that. I think that it's the best pigments really for my particular thing, because you can pull it about, it's got great elasticity, and it's... The character of colours is interesting in a way, because you see a lot of the colours haven't got all the same density at all. Some colours are very translucent and almost like jam or something like that, strawberry jam, that sort of, you can see through it and so forth; and other colours are very opaque and thick chalky colours. And the joy of really being able to balance these things together and get it working is very great. And that's not to say that, watercolours also have this sort of charm, but this is, you see you tend to paint the dark - the whites and the colours that turn out light, thickly, and the dark colours very thinly, like you see there, you've got this colour which is just very very lightly painted, and here you've got thick paint you see. And it goes to make a variety of different sorts of opposing pigments.

And when do you use varnish and glazes?

Well, you very often, for instance if one wants to slightly darken, I decide to turn this into a darker girl than she is there, I could put, could mix a little dark colour of perhaps a black or a grey or something like that, and put a very, a wash of colour over it, and that's a glaze. Because the colour, some of this colour will show through, but it will still be a face, but it will be just a shade darker, that's why you use that, and it dries very rapidly. And then there's a thing called scumble, which is a thick paint which you can scumble on, and it breaks...you can break...you can put quite thick colour just washed on, a little unevenly; some of that for instance is a sort of scumble. But anyway...

When would you use this knife rather than a brush?

Well it's just to clean, that's to clean the paint up when you've made a mess on...you just take the brush and clean it up.

So you would never use it actually on the piece itself?

I could do, but...and people like Van Gogh used a knife to paint with. It's a thing that some people like to do, and it's quite a recognised way of painting, but it's... I mean a chap like Bratby, you know Bratby do you? He uses a palette-knife and fingers and all sorts of things to put the paint on, and he...

And what about this huge range of brushes that you've got?

Oh well, they are just mostly little ones you see, because I do find myself using a tremendous lot of small brushes in comparison with very few big brushes, it's just a thing that I do. But there are some, that's a hog hair brush, and it's a very nice... Some of the best brushes, I think, come from China, and they brought some into the country, and they were very, I think, lovely brushes, and not much dearer than the English ones, but I think it cut the English market down so much they eventually didn't import any more, which was rather sad. Now let's go and sit down.

Right.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....away from the subject. Did you see the Alan Bennett play on the television about Anthony Blunt, `A Question of Attribution'?

Yes I did, yes. I thought it was really rather good in a way. When he was delivering lectures to his students I thought it was not very good, because I never heard him make a joke of any sort, and he seemed... I think one felt a certain sympathy for him, at least I did. You see, I think I said upstairs that, these chaps who were coming out of university, beginning of the war, and the time of the Spanish War and that sort of thing, they took very much the attitude, an attitude of thinking that well, let Hitler go on doing all his various things, and we would much sooner have that than anything from Russia, and a lot of...well, a lot of the young men in those days joined the republican armies in the Spanish Civil War, and they didn't all by any means fight on the side of the Spanish people, but were trying to preserve a feeling that Spain must remain a godly country, and particularly the Catholic ones really. And so they were fighting on both sides really, and so, I suppose he got very much involved. Not that he ever did any fighting as far as I know in his life, did he? Was he in the Army at all? I don't think he was.

I mean it's hard, I suppose because of the kind of man that comes over it's hard to think that he cared passionately about the people and socialism in that sense.

No, well he didn't, but worse than ever he looked on...and he was right in a way, of thinking that a person like Stalin was an ogre and a frightful man, which he was.

But, if you hadn't known who the Alan Bennett play was based on, would you have recognised Blunt in it?

I think I would, yes, I think he did appear to be rather like... I fell for the Queen in it, I thought the person who played the Queen was lovely.

And, while we're on that sort of area of life, why were you given the CBE and what did it mean to you?

Well, I gather that I got it really because one had done something a bit unusual at the Royal College, I should think that was the main reason really. I don't know, they just said for services to art, whatever that means I don't know.

And were you glad to have it, or was it irrelevant, or, what?

I was glad to have it, yes I was quite pleased. I mean I felt it was a sort of honour, a sort of recognition which was very pleasant, I thought. There are very few people when it comes to

the crunch who turn things like that down, amongst artists, although there are very few given, in painters and that sort of thing. There is a certain sort of normal procedure that the President of the Royal Academy gets a title, and that's been going ever since, well ever since George III, and nobody in that long space of time that I know of ever refused it. So, to be Head of the Painting at the Royal College was a pleasant enough thing, but it is also nice that many of them used to get knighthoods too, in the olden days, but now they've more or less... I think I'm the last one, as far as I know, that has had a title, well an honour, coming from the professorship.

And, since we've gone back into the College, you mentioned at one point that you took a group of students to Venice. Did you quite often take students on trips, or not?

I used to go, when there was any money about. We used to assess what we had got at the end of the term, the end of the College year, and then we would take, not third-year students as a rule, but second-year, and it was a very pleasant thing to do. I only did it about twice really, because I liked the staff also to go if they wanted to, and I think I went only twice.

Both to Venice or Venice and somewhere else?

I went, the first year I went to Florence and Siena, and I took a rotten lot of students, they didn't seem to be at all interested.

Do you remember who they were?

I don't remember them now, no. I mean they weren't all...but they didn't seem very interested; all they wanted to do was to sit in cafes and...

So did you find, did you just go off on your own, or did you try and kick them into action?

I tried to, first of all I tried to organise them and took them round, and they went round, looking with grim faces, and so eventually I said, `Well perhaps you had better go off and find what you want to see,' and they were delighted, and so, I had a lot of money which I distributed amongst them, and I said, `Well you'll have to cope with this and get home as you want to'. That worked perfectly well, they were perfectly happy, and I went off with Leonard Rosoman, I was doing it with Leonard Rosoman, and we went off to a place he knew of outside Siena, and I did a week's painting there.

Ah, so that is one of the pictures I wanted to ask you about, the one in the Tate Gallery, it must be from that period, is it, from that holiday?

I think it was probably, yes, I think it was.

Called `Siennese Landscape' and it's dated 1960, '63.

Yes that's right, yes.

Ah, well, I wanted to ask you about that, because, do you remember it quite well? It's...

Fairly well.

It's a woman...

Yes.

And when I was looking, which is a while ago in fact now, but I was looking at it with Judy Collins at the Tate, and she was saying it was almost like two separate paintings, because there's the sky and a haystack, and then there's the woman walking in a sort of shadow, and she wondered whether the woman existed and whether you knew her and whether she was a widow or what, what her story was.

She didn't exist, it was entirely a figure that I invented. That's right. I went down to the Tate the other day, and they are showing my `Orovida' there.

Oh good, because you said they never show anything.

I know, well they have put that up, and they wanted me to go and see the lion, did you see the lion there? That was being, supposed to be renovated but it was all right, and not much renovation, but they are going to show that.

The `Allegro Strepitoso'?

That's right.

Oh right, oh good. So what was it like being with Leonard Rosoman in Italy?

Well, he's absolutely wonderful working, and we both went off in different directions, and we worked there. It was, an English person owned a chateau, well, whatever you call it, a palazzo or something, on the top of a hill. It was very untidy, but it was where all the sort of dons and people used to go and stay, and.....

End of F2550 Side A

F2550 Side B

You were saying it was cheap and very pleasant.

Yes. The husband there was an Italian, a very, quite a well-known philosopher, and he used to write notes all day. And the interesting thing was, to me, that he dispensed with a lot of his writing, and used it as toilet paper in the loo, and so you sat there, and you got immersed in, if you could read it, which I found very difficult, Italian, very very extraordinary statements which he either, probably discarded, but any rate, it was a very odd place to go for intellectual pursuits I thought.

And did you do a series of paintings that are linked with the one that's in the Tate, or were they all quite distinct?

No, I just painted the things round there, and I can't remember quite what I did paint, but, and that picture was actually reduced from, I made it a smaller picture, because I thought it was a bit, well, it didn't seem to work as it was. I never quite know why they bought that one particularly, but still, it was their business, not mine.

And did you put the figure in it at the start, when you were in Italy, or did you add her later?

No, I...there is a better one of a figure coming down a road; well I don't know where that is now, I sold it but I don't know where it is. It's difficult to adapt yourself to a new country if you're just there for a week, and that in a way was a thing that I learned to do when I was a war artist, because they would perhaps fly you out to a place and say well, we'll call for you tomorrow evening or something like that, and you had got to somehow do something.

And was Leonard Rosoman convivial company?

Oh he's an old friend. Yes, we always get on very well together. Yes, he was quite a friend. Do you know him?

Not really, what's he like?

He's amusing, but slightly boring at the same time. I admire his paintings, and he's one of the people that hasn't really had the recognition he should have had, I think. I think, because his art lies rather close between painting and illustration, he is not generally accepted by the, I don't know whether he's got anything in the Tate at all, but he seemed to be passed over to a

certain... He did get an OBE, and he well deserved it, but somehow or other, he was a very good member of my staff, he really cared about the students and worried about them, he was a great worrier. And I would have been much poorer if I didn't have him with me all the time.

Did he teach in a different way to the way you taught?

I wouldn't have thought so very different, although he was...he first of course made a name for himself during the war when he was in the fire service, and did some very exciting pictures I think of his experiences in...I remember one with a great wall falling down, which I thought was smashing, and some of those war things were amongst the best things he ever did I think really, and particularly the things in the fire service. He then went out to various places as a war artist. I can't remember all the places he went to, but he was used fairly actively. And then he went off, when the war was over he took a job in Edinburgh and stayed up there for some considerable time, teaching in the Edinburgh College. And more recently he has been on the governing board of the Imperial War Museum.

And did you met him at the time of the Royal College, or had you known him already by then?

I can't remember whether I actually met him... I think I met him just before then really.

But you recruited him to the College, did you?

What?

You recruited him to the College, did you?

Approve of him?

Recruited him.

I think I did, I think I did. I believe so, I'm not quite sure.

And, what about the trip to Venice, did you take some more bubbly students to Venice, than to Siena, or was it a similar trip?

No, we did that trip together, with these students who we tried to...they were just a rather passive sort of lot, and they...

Didn't you take a different lot to Venice?

Oh yes, they would have been different, yes, yes. Oh the Venice one was an unofficial one, and I nearly got the sack over that. I think it was Alastair Grant, who was then running the department of print-makers, of print-making, he said a friend of his had got a plane going out to Venice, I think this is right, I'm not quite sure, it's a bit of a long time ago, and would I like to send my students; it's going out empty and would I... And I said yes, of course I would, I would like to send them out, a great opportunity. And so, he was going to send some of his students and I was sending most of my second year. And then, I fell very foul of Robin Darwin, who said, `You didn't ask my permission.' Well it was rather difficult because he wasn't about, and I had to make a decision straight away, and we had a great war, and he reprimanded me in no uncertain way, and I pleaded that I was fully justified because it was a wonderful opportunity to send students who probably would not be able to get out. So, it went on and on, and he was a dreadful man to quarrel with because when you thought you had completely settled the thing and full justified, then he would try and find something else to quarrel about, and it went on for ages, until I got so fed up with it I went along to see him and said, `Look I'm afraid I can't work with you any longer, I'm going to get out'. And he turned to me and said, `Oh Carel, that would never do. Whatever...' He said, `You musn't take it seriously, this is just...this is just my way of doing things, but on no account must you take it seriously.' And so I stayed, but, and then he improved after that.

But you meant you really would have left, you were serious?

I was...yes I was boiling with fury about it really.

He was quite a sort of frightening man, wasn't he?

He was very frightening to a lot of people, yes, yes, but he was a very good friend to me really on the whole, but was often very difficult. Have another biscuit, I've plenty more outside.

Then what happened, did you go with the students in this plane? Do you remember which students went?

That one was one I didn't in fact go out with, but I went on another trip with Roger de Grey and Leonard Rosoman.

And who were the students, can you remember?

What?

Can you remember who the students were?

I can't remember much about them now.

But were they more interested than the lot you had taken to Siena?

Never went to Vienna.

No, Siena.

Oh Siena. I think they were much better, mm.

And can you remember where you took them?

Well I planned more or less to see all the sights there, and we went to various islands round and so forth. No it was a sort of, I knew my way about there and I was able to take them really. It wasn't so long that one could settle down and do lots of work there, we didn't have that much money.

But if you were suddenly taken to Venice now, and you were allowed to see three things, what would you go to?

I don't know really, it's all so marvellous. We would go naturally to the, what's the gallery called there? Marvellous gallery. Any rate, that would be one of the places. I suppose...it would be difficult really, I just don't know what I would particularly choose. I would go to see as much as I could.

And, the other day I was talking to Norman Ackroyd.

Oh yes.

Who was speaking of you in glowing terms, and about the Royal College days, and I wondered what your memories of him were at that stage.

Well he was not...he was a chap I always liked, and I thought he would...he's an extraordinarily clever technician, and works very hard and a very sort of virtuous chap really in every way. I was very pleased that he was there, but he was not in my School, and it was nice to see him at that sort of thing. But, I don't awfully like his work, it all looks a bit too photographic for my liking. Do you like it?

I like some of the watercolours actually, yes, very much.

His watercolours, no I was thinking about his prints.

He said that you actually discovered, because of something he had sent in to the Academy that he had painted, and bothered to go, even though he wasn't in your lot, bothered to go at the weekend to his studio and actually introduce him to the Piccadilly Gallery, and that started him off.

I think it was, I didn't know that but I was closely in touch with the Piccadilly Gallery, and I sent a lot of people down there that I thought was good. I greatly admire him, I was delighted when he was elected fairly recently to the Academy, because not only that, he is such a useful person in the Schools and that sort of thing, and a great worker really.

Have you taught in the Schools, the Academy Schools?

No, but I have gone and given the odd lecture. No, I keep right away from that, because I like them to run the thing as they want to run it really.

What sort of things would you lecture on?

What?

What would you lecture on?

I think I lectured, the last time I lectured just about my own work, which... I don't want to go into a lot of talking about the Academy Schools; I think that it's not going through a very happy time at the moment, but, anyway, it will probably snap out of it really.

And can we just go back to, we never really talked about where you went in Ireland this February.

I can't give you the names of the places, but I...

Surely it wasn't this February, it was quite recently wasn't it?

It was this November.

Right.

A very great friend of mine who is a solicitor, and he is one of these people that I think secretly feels he ought to be an artist of some sort. He is a clever musician, and he is of Irish extraction, and he loves particularly the south part of Ireland, and in the summer he took his wife and children, and they found a house in a very beautiful part of the southern part of Ireland, quite, not very far from Cork, but right on the coast, and it was very cheap I gather. It was nothing of a house really, but it was a nice place so that he could take his children and they would be near the sea and that sort of thing. So he bought it, and they had a wonderful heatwave, they moved in while he was there, and a wonderful heatwave, a lovely holiday. And when he came back he said would I like to go down there, he said he had got a week off in November, would I like to go. And I said, `Well what about the weather?' He said, `Oh, it will be wonderful because there's the gulf stream and it never gets really cold.' Well that wasn't quite true, because when we got down there it was bitterly cold, winds were blowing, and it was really difficult to keep an easel up or anything like that. And I spent a week there, and I did not a lot of work really; I did two pictures. And it was terribly uncomfortable. He had bought the cheapest old beds and they were terrible, and the wind whistled round, and it was really... But it was quite jolly in many ways, because he decided that he wanted to buy a Jewish - no, an Irish, various Irish instruments, and then he got friendly with a group, and we went down to pubs and he played with the group, and he enjoyed that very much. And, I like Ireland, and I had been to a place with Edward Bawden one year very close to where we were, and, I do like it enormously, but it wasn't a good time to go, and it was very cold in the evenings, and very uncomfortable really.

And did you do work stemming from it when you got back, or it was really impossible?

Well that picture is one of the things I did there.

Which one?

The one with the two women, and the man at the gate.

Oh that, the picture we were looking at, was Ireland.

And that place, the white house, is where, the place that he bought.

Oh right. It looks as if it might be quite cold even in the picture.

Well it was really. But I thoroughly enjoyed being there, he was a very good companion. And I went with him about a year ago to another place that, he didn't buy this place but this was in...what is the coast along, by Weymouth? Thomas Hardy, it's...

Lyme Regis and round there?

Well round there, yes, that's right.

Portland Bill and places like that.

That's right, yes. I went with him for a holiday there, we took a little hut, and it was very cheap, and he had a car and we did our stuff there, which was very pleasant really. And then I did those paintings, do you remember the one of the two people walking in opposite directions?

Oh, yes, saying ' away from the sea' or [INAUDIBLE].

Walking down to the sea, `The Way to the Sea', yes. I did that there, and several other things. It was only for a week.

Did you ever paint Lulworth Cove with that amazing rock?

I never did, no, but I did paint Golden Cap, which you can see from there.

And do you at the moment have in your head a series of paintings that you are itching to get on and do, or do you really work at one...?

No, I do work more or less one at a time, but sometimes I have more than one going at the same time, and I have got planned in my head, whether they will ever really work out I don't know, three pictures, and they are all places in London. There's one in Keswick Road, going down towards the station, that I thought I might like to do. And, I don't know, I expect perhaps one or two of them will get going.

And do you ever do a thing that some people do when they write letters in their heads, having written it in their head they never actually get round to putting it on paper because they feel as though they've done it; do you ever paint like that?

Not very much I would say, because it's not quite like writing. Writing you can be definite about, you can say, `I think you were a bloody what-not for doing this and that, and so forth,' and you can get that off your chest and it's lovely, but you never quite know with a picture, you don't know whether it's going to come off, or whether, perhaps it will need something else, or sometimes it will, the idea will develop and it will be...it may almost get out of hand, and it wants a lot of playing about with. It's not as definite, anything like, as writing the average letter.

And do your pictures quite often come out of another picture, that while you are working on one you suddenly see a way of using it in a different way, rather like the two we were looking at that are in the same place in Barnes?

Yes. Yes, yes, yes, that's right. You find that they are moveable, and you are God in a way, you can put them where you want to, and...I suppose... With writing it's all sense isn't it, you want to say something, or you wouldn't be writing, would you? I mean I think writing is rather a difficult one. If you are composing poetry it is closer to painting really.

But, I mean as an adolescent, when I was painting at school I used to see in my head exactly what I wanted to do, and of course it would bear no relation whatever to what I could manage on the page, and therefore ultimately I stopped. But do you...I mean obviously you are in a completely different league, but is it still always like that for everybody, that they can never actually put down what they see in their heads, or do you not...?

I think I would feel much that if I saw it clearly in my head I perhaps wouldn't want to paint it. I think it's better that the thing should grow organically inside you, and that you've only got a vague idea to start with and gradually it begins to take form, I think so.

And can we now go right back, can you tell me about your 1951 mural for the Festival of Britain?

Not very much because I can't remember very much. Misha Black who was with Hugh Casson in organising the country pavilion there, and it had a number of artists who I got to know afterwards who were working there, and one was Leonard Rosoman who did some very

charming things, was a very good decorator. And they suddenly decided that there was a wall that wanted some sort of decoration on it, and they came to me at the last moment to do this. It wasn't a very large mural, and as they wanted it in a hurry I looked around. And they said they would like a harvest scene, and I had been sent by Shell-Mex to do a painting in Devonshire of a landmark, it was a castle on a hill which in fact wasn't a castle at all, it was a sort of folly, and I went...it was rather nice, as a young artist it was rather nice to be commissioned and given money for expenses, and you could go off. You weren't terribly well paid for the job but it was like having a holiday at somebody else's expense. And I went there, and I never quite knew about this place, I had never seen it before, and it was the harvest time, and I painted this tower in the midst of them bringing in the harvest, and it was quite a nice little picture, and I thought, well I'll make this the sort of basis of this large work. And I could just about get it into the studio, because it was a long, narrow thing really. And I did a, I think I did a sketch for it, I must have done but God knows what happened to the sketch, I don't know. But I painted it rather quickly because it was wanted rather quickly, and I didn't think it looked too bad, and they brought it down and they seemed to like it. Curiously enough, the whole of the action of farming had changed since the war, and you see I did the sketch before the war, and instead of being like a painting by Hennel[ph] with crowds of people bringing the corn in and that sort of thing, which was the sort of thing I painted you see, then, by the end of the war we had become so mechanised that all the people had disappeared, a few machines were all that you would see really. Any rate I painted this thing which was really an anachronism for this time, but nobody seemed to notice that except me afterwards when I... Any rate, it was quite liked, and it wasn't in a very prominent place there anyway. And then after the war all the...I think all the people said, well we've got all these pictures and we don't know what to do with them, and mine was eventually presented to a big school somewhere in East London, and many years afterwards somebody told me that they had seen it there, and I went down to see it, and it was a poor ruin of a picture really because it had been very much battered about and, still, I didn't mind it too much, and it was put in a great, to decorate a great big room, and it didn't look too bad. Any rate I've never been back; I made all sorts of suggestions that people could repair the damage and that sort of thing, but I wasn't going to do it myself.

And as far as you know it's still there?

I'm not sure, I'm not sure, I can't even remember where it was.

And what did you feel about the Festival in general, did you enjoy it?

I think I did, yes, I think I did. It wasn't a thing that I went to every day or anything like that, it was all right, yes, it was quite good.

But did you think it was quite important in terms of giving commissions to artists and putting the public in front of works of art they might not otherwise have seen?

Yes, but it was a comparatively few people that benefited really. And very few young artists were asked to do anything really, I suppose, but...

And do you have memories of the mural that Bawden and Ravilious did at Morley College that got destroyed in the bombing?

No, I know them very well from photographs and things like that, because one of them was badly, well was destroyed in the Blitz. I thought they were very fanciful and rather exciting really; rather precious but...

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Can you tell me about the Coronation scene you did outside Buckingham Palace?

Well, I found...we were all allotted.....

End of F2550 Side B

F2551 Side A

You were saying that each artist was allotted a certain place for the coronation.

On the...yes, on the procession, the route that the procession took. And I was just outside Buckingham Palace. We had to arrive at about 5 in the morning, because of the crowds and so forth, and all the buses and things had stopped. I had then just moved to Putney and I was living in Portinscale Road, which is the next road around there, and it was a bitterly cold day, a bitter wind, and the prospects were anything but favourable for it really. And bursts of rain, and we arrived, I arrived there at about half-past 7, having gone by train, and we had to be in our places by a certain time, I don't know, about two or three hours before it started. I took with me a sketch-book, some paper, and that was about all. And it got colder and colder, and I thought I was getting a chill, it was really, I couldn't get warm, and then icy cold rain came down. And then eventually the procession started, and there was, the person who led the procession was done by somebody with a great sense of humour I think, sent in a carriage Queen Salotti[ph]. Queen Salotti[ph] was the queen of one of the countless islands in the Pacific, who was immensely fat, and she had as a sort of equerry a little, tiny little black man. And I know that the story goes that when they passed, when the procession passed where Noël Coward was, his friend said, `Who is that amazing little man with the Queen?' And he said, `Oh I think that's probably her lunch.' (laughs) But she was a colourful individual and she got a tremendous ovation because she was the first one to come out, and then it gradually built up, and the climax of course was the Queen. And I took a photograph of the carriage as it went by, and with the guards and that sort of thing. And then we had an eternal wait after this, with the crowning and the rest of it you see happening, and eventually she came back, and by this time I was shivering, really shivering, I couldn't stop shivering, and I think everybody was like that, it was really a dreadful day, and I was so pleased when it was all over and I could get out, and it was very difficult to wend one's way, I made a roundabout way to the tube station and came home and went straight to bed with a hot whisky.

But it must have been quite a responsibility having to produce a picture after that, wasn't it?

To what?

To do a painting of the coronation, I mean it's a sort of very public commission, isn't it.

Public one. Well, all these various people were asked to show their pictures; I don't know where they were shown but they were shown, and whether I went to it or not I can't remember. But I thought I did rather a good one myself, but it may not have been.

And is that all in the Queen's collection, did they all go to the royal...?

No, I think that they went to embassies abroad, and that sort of thing really; I don't suppose I shall ever see them. I think I've got a photograph of it somewhere.

Do you have photographs of most of your work, or not?

No, I've given it up now, I don't bother, but I used to get... I've got a very good photographer who is a delightful man who was an assistant teaching at the College in the film and television...no, I'm sorry, the...yes, the photographic department there, and I go to him when I want something particularly.

One picture I particularly wanted to talk to you about was the one in the Tate called `The Dogs'.

`The Dogs'.

Which I love. I was fascinated by a lot of things in it, but I wondered if you could just tell me about it.

Well, the dogs, dog racing was quite a thing in the Fifties and so forth, and I wasn't really very interested, but I went to various dog racing things with a chap named John Skeaping, who was a sculptor, a marvellous raconteur and a wonderful character. And he was one of those people who was cursed with too much talent; he had amazing talents, he was a good sculptor, a wonderful drawer of animals, he could paint, he was a marvellous raconteur, and - I don't know why I'm telling you all this because it has very little bearing on what I... But he was also a steward at the dog racing and he used to take the whole of the staff there and we used to back things for minimal sums, and I sometimes won £5 or something like that. But I didn't think it was anything to watch because greyhound racing was so, it was over in about half a minute or less, and it wasn't at all exciting, I didn't think. But it did, I got rather interested in where...and I used to watch all the types coming out of... You see twilight, it was rather interesting, and that was...this was the place in Wandsworth, a piece of wasteland which had been turned into a dog racing thing and you saw all these chaps coming out at twilight, and I thought it was a great pictorial event for one, and I went down several nights and watched them all coming out. And, I had a bit of fun in a way, because at that time cars were not very easy to come by, and suddenly they decided to sell all the London taxis which were very archaic and falling to pieces you see, because they had had very little first-aid

attention since the war, and so you could buy a taxi for about £70 or something like that. And of course that was a great thing for all my friends who, they felt rather lost without...it was difficult to buy cars really. So the taxi in the...is Ruskin Spear's taxi, and if you look at it carefully I think you will probably see that it could be recognisable: I don't know because I haven't looked at the picture for a long time.

I was going to ask you if the number plate was significant.

It was his number plate, yes it was his number plate.

BYK 719.

Was it? Oh good Lord!

I had a feeling it was going to be significant.

Yes, that's right. Fancy you remembering that, that's wonderful. I haven't seen that picture for a long time. They put it up for show for a short time, and I was feeling not very well at the time and so I thought, well I'll go the week after but they had taken it down, but it had only been up about a couple of weeks or so.

Because I was very struck by the lovely pink and blue, I mean it's almost like an impressionist painting, the colours that you've got there.

Yes, yes.

And there's also not a woman in sight and not a dog in sight.

That's right, no that's quite true. But it was quite like those things, but...no, I suppose that dog racing goes on quite a lot, but not everybody goes to them as they used to then.

And then there's lovely things, like those little Woodbine adverts and the cafe and everything.

That's right, yes, yes. And those little huts. Yes, yes. The war you see hadn't at all...I don't know when I painted that picture, I suppose it's...give me that...oh here it is.

I suppose it's '55-56.

'55-56, yes, well that would be about the right time you see.

But it's also, without...

And there still a lot of the bomb damaged places were still...and I don't quite know whether the dog racing place was built on a site which had been, where places had been destroyed; now there's a park there, and it's all disappeared.

Oh right. Because there's also that sort of aspect of a great stream of people; it's almost like a modern version of Dante, you know, or something like that, or Eliot's lot coming over London Bridge.

Yes, yes.

And I mean, it's also obviously slightly something like Frith's `Derby Day', something of that nature.

Yes, it's a bit like that, it's that sort of shape, mm.

But I mean were you consciously making it like that, or...?

No I hadn't thought of Frith's `Derby Day' but it's a picture I always like.

Because it's also actually, I mean it happens to be a piece...

I'll tell you where that picture fails, and I think that with Frith it's the same in various things he painted; `Ramsgate Sands' was another great picture with masses of people, and he also...I think the best one he did was the one of the Paddington Station, which is a rather wonderful picture really, but there's everything happening, and it's as though it's a scene in a play, and if you look at all the people that he uses they're all posed and there, it's not natural really.

But do you think that's a better picture, are you saying?

It's his best, but they all suffer a bit from that really.

So why do you think yours fails?

No I didn't say it did, but, I ought to say it did, but...

Oh you were saying that `Derby Day' fails?

What?

You were saying that `Derby Day' fails?

I think for the same reason, yes. I think that they, all the people are like actors. But I think, quite apart from that, that's only a thing, I think there are wonderful bits of painting in them, and... He was one of the very first artists to use photographs you know. I'm not sure Turner didn't, and some of the late pictures, there's one particular picture I think it's possible he may have, well seen, you know, things like vapour, a picture...not so much the speed, light and speed or whatever it's called, not so much that one, but some of those marvellous late works which are just sort of mists and things. I would have thought he must have been slightly inspired. You must remember of course there was no colour photography in those days.

No. But your picture of `The Dogs' is also inadvertently quite a piece of social documentation of those times and that atmosphere.

Well it was of course, yes, yes, yes.

But that sort's of inadvertent really.

Yes.

I mean it must be your most crowded picture isn't it, in terms of people, figures?

I would think so. I did paint another one, not so many people in it though, which is in the gallery at Carlisle, and it's people coming out of a factory, a similar sort of idea on a smaller scale, and that I did about that time or just...I think, yes, it must have been shortly after I had come out of the Army, perhaps a little before this one.

But it's not the sort of thing you would ever do now, is it?

I might really if I saw just the right subject to do. I generally now paint figures, or at least people, in which I use many fewer people, two or three people in a picture rather than a hundred, but it wouldn't...I mean I wouldn't be against doing it if I saw just the right subject.

Right. And the other Tate picture I wanted to talk to you about is the one of Clapham Junction, which is quite sort of futuristic of sort of boys running.

Yes, well you...that's a sort of, almost a sort of document, moral document if you like, because there were always people breaking into places, and particularly getting into the station and climbing over walls and that sort of thing really. And there is that...if you walk from my house, and if you walk down towards the Clapham Junction Station, you walk downhill, at least you cross the bridge, a very large bridge which has all the trains running out, because they go off in about four different directions, and you come to a rather weird piece of architecture with the station on the top of a rising with goods places and that sort of thing, and it goes up like that, and a road comes by the side and goes downhill, and so you've got, you're looking up and you're looking down at the same time, and at the bottom is a big shop which is called Arding & Hobbs, which is a famous shop in the distance. And it was really the architectural, or the geographical if you like, the thing that there was sort of rather strange planes there, things going down and then this going up that way. I always rather like things in opposition to each other. And if you, you would find that, you would have no difficulty in finding exactly where I painted it all those, well quite a number of years ago, it hasn't changed that much, although that originally, when you went up, was the main entrance to the station at that time, but now it isn't.

And the boys running, they were just made up, were they?

They were made up, yes. A subject like the chase is a subject that fascinates me really, I like it very much; I like the moving figures in a static setting, and I painted frightened girls and frightened...all sorts of subjects. I once painted a similar subject in Fulham of a number of boys running away from a policeman, or two policemen, and, what was it called? I can't remember. I showed it in the Academy, and sold it on the first day, and the man wrote to me and said, `I am so very very happy to be able to acquire your picture, because it is a subject of a thing that changed my life'. And I couldn't think how it could have changed his life, I didn't like to ask him how it changed his life.

Depends which one of them he was.

And, he might have been one of these boys you see, being chased by the thing, I don't know, I didn't think it was nice to ask really. So then he followed that up by saying, would I have any objection if he used the picture, because he wanted to produce it in a book, and so I said, well, I said if it has no sort of commercial... No, he said, `I want to use it as a sort of religious script in a book.' I thought he must be completely dotty, but...(laughs) Anyway, I wrote and

said, well, if it's not for a commercial thing, I would of course waive the copyright you see. And so he thanked me for that, and I never heard from him again, although I did have a show, I'm not sure whether I had it in my retrospective show or not.

The Academy one?

At the Academy, yes, I'm not sure, it may well have been in that, but I certainly had it in my earliest show, which was in Reading. And he borrowed it and he never got in touch with me again or anything like that, but it was a very strange thing really, I never got to the bottom of it really. It's similar in subject, it's rather a better picture than this one in the Tate, I don't like that picture too much.

And what was it like seeing all your work together at that retrospective at the RA?

It was rather exciting really, and you see, your memory plays very funny tricks on one really. For one thing, size of pictures; sometimes you think that a picture is much bigger than it is, and sometimes it's the other way round. And certainly it was of great interest to me, and I picked more or less the pictures that I wanted, but I did make a few mistakes and I was sorry that I had certain pictures and not others.

What were the mistakes do you think?

Well I got a bit confused with the titles of pictures, and I mistook one picture for another one, and I was disappointed I wasn't getting this... It was only in about half a dozen cases that they weren't quite the ones that I would have liked to have had. One or two I was disappointed with.

Because you had remembered them as being better?

I thought they were better, yes, yes, yes.

And could you see ways in which your work had changed that you hadn't been aware of until you saw them all together?

I was surprised that the reverse was true, that there seemed to be not much change, and I suddenly painted a picture similar to one that I had painted thirty years before, something like that.

With no memory of the other one?

A vague memory, but you know, it was rather strange to go back to the same sort of subject really.

And had the way you used colour changed?

I would think, not a lot really. Certain of the rather sort of heavy sort of sunsetty pictures played more prominence in the later ones than they did, although I did one or two pictures, my shipwreck picture for instance has a very sort of melodramatic sort of quality about it. But I've always been, I've always liked that sort of evening, I've said that before haven't I to you; I mean this picture here for instance is very my sort of picture.

`The Presence'.

Yes. And, I'm always slightly excited when I go out for a walk or something like that at night and see the shapes of the trees taking on shapes of wild beasts and that sort of thing; all that is rather stimulating I think really.

Are you quite a nocturnal creature?

No, I don't think so. I'm a twilight, but not...fading light, I suppose, creature really.

And one picture that I find extremely mysterious is the one that the RA has called `Departing Angel.

Well that of course is the Annunciation, but is an annunciation in my own personal terms because I did it in my garden. And the little girl who is sitting there, who is the Virgin, she has just been told by the departing angel that she is going to have a baby and the baby is going to be Jesus, and she is terrified, it's too much for the little thing. And that is the main thing about it, that she's sitting there, gripping I think onto her chair, not expecting this at all.

And what would make you think about that? I mean it's much more, again as we've said before about your paintings, a lot of them are getting inside women's heads.

Well, I suppose...I don't know whether they... I like women and I like having, finding out about them, and what they...how they... I don't suppose they're so much different to men in

many ways, but they do react, I mean, and they do show things like fear perhaps more readily than men as a rule.

Do they interest you more than men psychologically?

Pardon?

Do they interest you more than men in terms of psychology then?

Well I like both the sexes really from that point of view, really, I mean everybody on their own merit really. I suppose one has a lot of sympathy for a lot of women really. I don't like a lot of things about human society, and I don't like the feeling that women are so much tied up really in lots of different ways, to men really; I mean men have much much greater freedom don't they, and I feel rather sympathetic about that in a way. I think they are finding their own... But then, they very often flop at the wrong moment, or... I don't know.

And, linked to the RA picture I would have thought is this one which I also find very intriguing, called `Thoughts of Girlhood'.

Oh yes, yes, yes.

How did that one come about? I'm just going to turn the tape over.

End of F2551 Side A

F2551 Side B

That is a slightly fictitious sort of a thing, although it was based on the... That is my garden, as it was, and next-door to the garden was an old persons' home, I think I've told you this before.

No.

Have I not? No. And I used to see these old dears, and their lives, which were quite interesting in a way. Some of them were a little funny in the head, and they used to, when they were brought their daily meal, and they didn't like it, this person in particular was rather belligerent and she used to throw the plates and things out of the window and cause quite a commotion using frightful language. And she was a real character, hated, she had hated rivals in this place you see. But there was something very lively about her in spite of this really, and I generally... So I said, `Would you like to come and pose for me?' `Oh you don't want me in the nude, do you?' `No,' I said, `no, nothing like that; just come and sit in the garden and just be yourself, and I'll pay you.' And so I arranged to pay her, I don't know what the going rate was but it was a lot of money to her. And so I sat her down there, and I had said to her, well, `Do you ever think about your life?' `Oh yes, yes I do.' And, `Do you think about when you were a girl?' And gradually I thought, well this is a subject that I would like to paint, and so, it's a mixture you see of, a mixture of extreme realism and fantasy, but I invented this other figure there as a figure, a ghostly figure walking by, and that's what she's thinking you see. And that's more or less how the picture was portrayed. It was very carefully, I did construct it with all these objects and things placed as I wanted them, but the figure of the ghost came in last, and it would either come off or it wouldn't come off, and I put it in and I think it did come off, so it was all right. You see, there's quite a lot of things like rhythms of these which builds up. It is a fairly complex thing, but it is geometric in a way, in a sort of way.

It's a very tender picture.

I liked it very much. Is the other one in this book too, the other version of her? I don't think it probably is, because I think, I don't think I would have had two pictures rather similar in the...

What, `The Departing Angel' picture?

No no, no, no the other one I was thinking of, a rather similar one of her, the same woman in the garden there, but I don't think it is, no.

And one more which, I'm not sure if I've seen, one called `Her Brother's Ghost', 1960.

`Her Brother's Ghost'.

It's owned by someone called Christopher Hill, does that make sense to you?

Christopher Hill makes no...no, he must have been the person who bought it.

Yes.

But, the place, there was a chap named Bernard Hailstone, who was a student with me, and he asked me to go and stay a weekend with him, and he lived in a place in Kent which had a large tower, or, I can't remember the name of it now. A very strange, it was once part of a rather grand estate and somehow, I think the house was burnt down and they were just little shacks and bungalows put round and he had one of these places. And I found the garden itself was rather exciting and so forth, and anything could happen, and I entirely invented the thing of the two children in front. It's just a ghost story really.

I can't remember where I saw that.

It's not in that book is it, really, no.

I don't think so, no. And the other one that seemed linked in a way which may be is in here is the one called `The Fallen Woman'.

`The Fallen Woman', yes, yes, yes.

It's another, I wondered what the story was behind that. I'm not sure if I've got it here.

I don't think it's in that book, is it?

No, I can't remember where it is, but...

I can tell you all about `The Fallen Woman' picture, which is a rather strange thing. In my house I had an ex-prostitute who wanted to give it all up and so forth, and she is still living in

my house after many many years, and she is...one day I brought the fallen woman back... To start the story in a proper way, in the College one day a woman came in and said, `Have you got any work for me?' And she had a rather extraordinary head, but what rather fascinated me was her voice, it was a very sweet, cultivated voice, and she was obviously down on her luck completely. And so I said, `Well look, I haven't any work for you in the College, but I'll give you some, if you would like to come to my house I'll perhaps use you as a model in the garden or something.' And she came, and she posed well. There was something I didn't awfully like about her, but... And she came always dressed in a very curious semi, what shall I say? Semi clerical thing. She wore a little head-dress and a sort of purple, more a gown than a coat. And when I posed her and so forth, and I had finished the morning's painting, this other girl came out, she said, `My God! Do you know who you've got there?' I said, `No.' `She is Sister Gemma, she is the biggest bitch I've ever known.' So I said, `Oh, how so? How do you know her?' She said, well, she evidently ran a home for fallen women, and she was so awful to them, and there was a terrible scandal because she never gave them enough food, and one of the women there died of malnutrition. It sounds pure Dickens, doesn't it, but this only happened in the Fifties. And so, she said, `She's a terrible bitch.' And then they discovered that she had been doing this, and she was sort of defrocked and she was given the sack. And so, I suppose she looked around to see what she could do, and she thought, well the best thing to do would be to become a model, and certainly that was a very wise decision really because I painted her about five times, not always in the garden but... So, I never liked her much, and of course the story that I heard made me rather dislike her even more, but she was all right, she did her job thoroughly well, and I painted her. And she had this rather tortured look about her. And so, at the end of this thing I said, `Well I can't use you any more, but if you go back to the College I'm sure that they will give you a job, I'll tell them to give you a job,' which I did. And she became a very sort of popular model; they all liked seeing all these wrinkles and that sort of thing, they thought she was like a Rembrandt: she was rather. And one day, she was always posing in the same sort of clothes, and one day I found her posing in the nude, and that was a staggerer to me, and I didn't say anything at all to her but... Then she continued not only at the College but in all the other schools, became quite a famous figure. I don't think they knew much about her previous life.

So, linking the title to your picture, `The Fallen Woman' was deeply [INAUDIBLE].

That's right. I thought it was bit cruel, but I thought on the other hand, she would never see it, so that would be that.

A wonderful story. And how did the prostitute come to be in your house?

Well that's another sort of story which has nothing to do with art really. It's simply that one was rather sorry for her, and one had a spare room in the house, and she has stayed ever since, and she has been an awful trial at times, but she's all right, she's quite harmless and quite nice really.

How long has she been there?

Oh a long time, many years, since the Fifties.

Wow!

Mm. She's a sort of fixture. She's not much use, I mean if she were even to clean up the place or something like that it would be something, but she's nearly always ill. A complete neurotic wreck really.

And she didn't ever get any other career going, she's just really done nothing?

She couldn't really, she is, as I said, a nervous wreck really.

Are you the sort of person who collects lame ducks?

No, not as a rule, I couldn't cope with any more.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Shut it off if you think it's going to be a lot of rubbish.

You were saying somebody is writing a book about you.

Well, yes, this chap glories in my name, and his name is Mr Weight.

Spelt the same way?

Spelt the same way. And he has been writing to me over the years saying that he thought that we were relatives in some sort of way. And he proceeded, he seemed absolutely fascinated, because he proceeded to go to enormous trouble to work out a family tree. And although you wouldn't think there are too many Weights in the world, he found millions of Weights, and don't know whether he is related to me or whether he is not related. He turns out to be a very

quiet man. And then I wrote to him politely and said, I really never had the aunt Jemima that you spoke of so well, and I thought, well I'm gradually getting free of him. But he continued to write, and he sent me charts of how the family could well have been his family and that sort of thing. Well I'm not very keen on my father's side of the family, which I thought were a lot of awful people really. But quite apart from that, he suddenly disclosed to me that he was writing a book about me.

So he hadn't asked you?

No, but I suppose I could have protested, I don't want...I don't mind, he might well do that as looking out his silly ideas of family trees, I don't know. But, he's a very gentle, quiet man, and he seems to think that I'm some important character, and he is going to make it his life's work to write this book, and so he shares all this sort of thing with you. I mean you're not doing any writing or anything like that of course, but I mean, he is collecting as much material as he can too.

So has he come to talk to you?

What?

Has he come to talk to you?

He comes to talk to me from time to time, yes. He's a lecturer, he lectures on, oh, you know, famous buildings and all the rest of it really. And, oh, he went so far as to buy one of my pictures, the one of Holborn, and he bought it for quite a sum of money, quite a fair price I think, although it wasn't...they weren't fetching the prices that they fetched later, but then, he was struck by bad luck, his wife decided to divorce him, and he had to find some money for her, and so he had to sell the picture, which he did very reluctantly because that picture meant a tremendous lot to him. And so he came along to see me, here, and I said to him, `Well it's very nice of you, taking all this interest in me I must say, but I don't know why you're doing it, but still, if you want to do it, I'll help you where I can.' And I said, `Well look, here's a little parting present.' And so I took one of these lithographs, and by sheer chance, I didn't know about this thing, I gave him the lithograph of his picture. And the tears welled into his eyes. I didn't know what had happened, I thought he was going barmy or something, but it was the same picture, and he thought there was an act of God or something like that, that I should present him with a reproduction of his long, forever lost picture. So, then he goes on, and then he writes me things which, I don't think this thing will ever be published. He is thorough, and I suppose his lecturing made him fairly thorough, and he has found out, you

know, a lot about me. He has got no idea about painting very much, and I can't see anybody reading... He's very thorough, and he has got no end of material. He has gone to see all the people, I suppose people that you've seen, I suppose, a lot of them too, I mean Brandler and Hudson Lyons and all these people, and...

Who is Hudson Lyons?

Hudson Lyons is a terrible man, I've saved you from him because he's a terrible little man. He's older than I am, and he runs a gallery in a village called Wonersh, which is quite close, just beyond Guildford. And he is one of the very few really successful art dealers that I know really on a small scale. He has got a little gallery in Wonersh, which is a tiny little place right in the middle of the stockbrokers' belt, and he invites all the most snobbish people to come along. And even through the recession he thinks if he doesn't sell about £40-50,000 worth of pictures at a go he has done badly. He has got nothing else to live for, and certainly his wife doesn't help, but to make a success of this thing, and he only thinks in terms of selling pictures. Terrible man, a snob, very ruthless in many ways, very unkind to, if I send him down a poor student and he thinks he is poor or she hasn't...he will snub her, or him. There is not much to be said for him.

How did you fall into his grasp?

Well I've known him for years. It's a terribly long story. This is the story of my life actually. It comes from, his first wife, who suddenly, who was an unsuccessful ballet dancer who suddenly decided that she must get a public of some sort, so she was going to become an artist, and she went to the Leicester Galleries and said, `Do you know an artist who can teach me to paint?' This was in the days when I could do with a bit of money. But she went to a chap named R.O. Dunlop, who is a good painter, a nice man in a way, he's Irish, but he rather fell for her, and having chased her round the studio several times, I gather unsuccessfully, I don't know, but anyway, she came back to Brown at the Leicester Galleries, `You sent a terrible sex maniac to me. Haven't you got somebody that really is a safe person to...?' So they sent me as... And so, she was more trouble than she was worth really, because, but she had talent, and in no time at all she was painting her pictures and she was having exhibitions, and she was really on the top of the world. And so, she had this little husband of hers in the background, who was a toy...a seller, a sort of merchant who sold toys, and he was very much in the background, and she was the great art lady in the district. And then she suddenly, although she was doing very well with her paintings, she wasn't selling them quick enough so she thought she would have her own gallery. So in her house in Wonersh she had two stables which she had very cleverly placed and built a studio, built the studio against where the two

stables were, and in fact it made quite a nice little gallery. So she started it off, and she gave her dear art teacher as a mark of goodwill the first exhibition, and I said, oh well, I don't mind her showing them, so, it was an immediate success. And then she died of cancer after some years, and I thought that's the end of that one. Not a bit of it. Out of the woodwork he came, and he made an even greater success than his wife did, although he knows nothing about pictures, but he has the proper sort of jargon saying, `Oh come on old chap, you ought to have some decent pictures in your house, make people really think that you are out of the top drawer, which we know you're not,' sort of thing. And he persuaded all the local people to buy pictures, and expensive pictures, and they're still doing it. That's the story in a nutshell. But I won't tell you the thousand and one terrible episodes that happened during that time.

You can tell me one or two.

No I won't. I'm fed up with him, he's a terrible man really. But he does, he said to me, `You know Carel, we've never had an exhibition when we haven't sold pictures of yours.' It's perfectly true. The last time I didn't expect to sell anything, I sent two mingy little pictures, sold them both.

So you send him every couple of years or something?

No no no no. He has four exhibitions a year.

Of your work?

Not of my work, no, mixed exhibitions, but he always gets me to send something down.

And you don't dislike him so much you won't send them?

Well you know, then he does the poor chap, poor old artist. `You know Carel, I'm older than you,' which he is, he's about 90. `I've got nothing else to live for. I'll die if I don't go on selling pictures to these poor benighted rich people.' And so it goes on. But, all this has nothing much to do with that thing really.

End of F2551 Side B

F2552 Side A

I wondered if you would tell me about the books you've done, `The Go-between' and The Oxford University Press Bible ones, wasn't it?

Yes.

How did they come about, and how did you approach them? Because they must have been quite different from your other works.

Well I was always a friend of Edward Bawden, and knew him from the very first day I went to Goldsmiths' College as a student, and it was his first day, his first day of being on the teaching staff, and we both sat opposite each other, looking at each other, wondering who these terrible people were. And then he came to the College, and he was an amusing man really; a lot of people disliked him intensely because he had a sharp tongue and would very often say very unkind things to people, but from my point of view I found him amusing, and in fact I have occasionally gone and stayed with him, and certainly, I went for various holidays with him, I went for three consecutive, three years to Ireland with him, and I also went with him and John Nash to various summer excursions. It's rather nice going away with other painters sometimes. And so, I got to know him pretty well. And, he was very...he became very famous very soon in his life, and he was publishing things and.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

You were saying that Bawden became famous very early on.

Yes, he had things, books published about him, and he was rather thought of as one of the younger, really very promising people. He was immensely versatile, he designed not only textiles, and he worked in all sorts of different medias, and was often asked by manufacturers to do textiles, and all this in addition to his watercolours which were his, he considered his perhaps most important thing. Well, he was at the College in the School of Design, and we all thought he would be better off in the Painting School, but we couldn't get a transfer for him and so he had to stay there. But anyway, he had done a lot of things for the Oxford University Press, and he went to them with a scheme to produce, to do an illustrated Bible by contemporary artists. It should be a team of artists, because it would be so big to do that, I don't know quite, I can't remember quite how many artists were chosen to do these things. Have you ever seen the book?

No.

Well you ought to really, I could bring them along if you came along sometime.

Oh that might be better, and then we could talk actually with the book.

It might well be. But he chose a lot of, well, it was he and I suppose under the cover of Oxford University Press, they chose a few students, and I mean it was rather formidable lists of people from Henry Moore to people like Hockney and, well, and people who were still at the College as students. But it wasn't to be done like the French might have done it, a wonderful produced book; it was a cheap book, and it was sold, I don't know how many volumes, there were about, oh, half a dozen volumes, and they were sold at £3 a volume I think it was, or even under that. Consequently the quality of the books were not wonderful, they were a bit ordinary; the illustrations never came out quite as well as one would want. But it's an amazing production really, and with all its shortcomings, I think you can't get a copy of it for love nor money now, and I think if one has got a tame second-hand book merchant, I mean if he can get you a lot they are well worth having.

What bits were you given to illustrate, or could you choose?

It was more or less not...we were distributed with things, and so we didn't always get the easy things to do. Sometimes we had a Book of Proverbs or something like that, and you had got to make something of them. But they were pushed onto us to do these things, and not all of them were at all successful but one did what one could. I did...oh, I had some good ones to do; I had Kings, the Second Book of Kings, and I did the Book of Joshua, several of the philosophical Books. In all I suppose I did about, nearly 50 drawings.

Major.

Pardon?

It was a major undertaking.

A major undertaking. I suppose Bawden, because he was the instigator, chose, he did even more, I should think he did about 70. Bratby did some; I think Johnnie Minton did them, or I'm not quite sure, I can't remember, he may not have done because he may have died just about the time that they were being done, I can't remember. But a whole lot of, it was a sort of mixed bag. John...of course, when you are dealing with the great, you will have your

disappointments, because Henry Moore cried off at the last moment, and we got an ex-student, which was the downfall of the whole thing. He was given, by sheer chance, the, what's the first Book in the Bible?

Genesis.

He was given Genesis, and he did things like the Song of Solomon, and they were beautiful drawings, but they had hoped that they were going to mass-produce these in America, but when they saw his drawings, they had nude people in it, and they were making love and all that sort of thing, and how could we have a Bible like that? And the sales in America were nil, and that put the...made the whole thing a flop.

Do you think Henry Moore was opting out of facing how to do it without that problem, or do you think he was just busy and didn't bother?

I think he didn't bother; I think he was...like so many people, they get a bit spoilt really, and anyway it meant a lot of work for him.

But presumably you all worked totally separately, you were just given a brief of what the size was.

They gave us certain limitations. You could use a couple, I think one extra colour, or one colour or something, so they were more or less black and white, emphasised if you wanted to with some little bit of colour, or you disregarded colour entirely.

And how did you go about working on it? Because it must have been quite different from anything you had done.

Well they supplied a certain sort of paper which was really an equivalent, an easy equivalent, of doing lithography, and they looked like lithographs. It was all made very simple for one, and I didn't find anybody got into any great technical difficulties. But the trouble in a way was, I think they printed it on rather common paper, and the things didn't come out crystal clear, and some of it was unsatisfactory.

[END OF SESSION]

[Interview with Carel Weight at his studio on the 15th of January 1992.]

.....number 2.

This is the Oxford Illustrated Bible.

It has got two sets of my work in it. One is about, what's the chap, Joshua, and the other is the First Book of Kings, so there are about 40 drawings in this one. And that celebrated picture is the fall of...

Jericho.

Jericho. And they blow the trumpets and the walls fall in.

And, it must have been quite difficult doing these, because you knew you were dealing with images that people had imagined themselves, because everybody knows the story.

Yes, yes. Well I tried to keep entirely the sort of personal thing, that I suppose the reason. You see this book is not beautifully produced, but it's not supposed to be a table book at all, and, I think it's quite good. But the unfortunate thing is that the drawings have lost a fair amount, they're not clear as they were. You will find Joshua, the first Book there. There's a little drawing of mine.

Who is Brian Wildsmith, I can't remember?

Pardon?

Who is Brian Wildsmith, I can't remember?

He's an illustrator, a professional illustrator, and he had got, when they couldn't find somebody, a painter or...he was suggested, and they're a little bit commonplace I think really, but I may be wrong.

So were you collaborating in choosing which bit each of you did?

Not a bit, no. No, we were given, I was given the first half of the Book, and...have you ever read Joshua?

I don't believe I have, no.

No, well, it's horrible, it really is horrible. How they seem to, you know, it's bloodthirsty and really beastly.

So how did you go about it? Did you work from the beginning to the end, or did you read it all endlessly, or what happened?

No, I just read it chapter by chapter, and followed it that way really. It's a story really, it's entirely a narrative sort of thing.

And you then worked chronologically through it?

Yes. First it starts with God showing Moses the Promised...no, no...I can't remember now. But they're showing, he's showing the Promised Land, which he is never allowed to go into because he's been a naughty boy.

So you've got a sort of pointing finger like the Sistine Chapel.

God is saying, `There it is', you see, there it all is, and you're not going there.

And what are you actually working in, what is this?

Oh, just a little tiny brush, and wash, just black sort of drawing ink.

And in theory could you have used any materials, or were you asked to work with this?

Oh, they wouldn't mind, any material really, and you will find if you look through the book that all sorts of people have chosen totally different things, and some people have done...yes, some people have done drawings in soft pencil.

And did you decide to use wash very early on, or did you experiment with other things?

Well it's a convenient way of working, and for me it was all right. That's, you know, where the two spies go to a house of a harlot, and then the guards come out to look for them, and there they are up in the...

It's very interesting to see, because it's so unlike a lot of your other work. I mean obviously there are links, but...

Well there is a sort of link.

It's very intriguing to see the different kinds of...

This is what I imagined the great trek across the desert was like.

It's lovely. And you were allowed a total free rein if you wanted to take up a whole double spread like that, and...?

Well I submitted them, and then they more or less worked it as they wanted; I had very little say in that, I just gave the drawings.

And this parade of people, did you use any reference materials for that or did you just make it up, or...?

Made it all up, mm.

And what about the landscape?

That was, well, I've no idea what the landscape was, but it's a sort of barren sort of place, and it's what I thought it was like really. I did no research, that would have upset me to and made it look a bit photographic I suppose. And that's an angel that appears to Joshua.

And again, things like the tents, you were just allowed to make up Carel Weight-type tents, you didn't...?

Yes, they're just modern tents. I mean I just let my, things that I would imagine more than anything else; nothing authentic about them.

And how long would it take you to do something like this, the one with the tent?

I started off, and I found it took me a few days to do them, but towards the end I could do one or even two a day.

And did you find that you got really gripped by it, and sort of...?

I did in certain ways, yes. The actual pieces of architecture falling are pieces of a Mediaeval Italian place in Perugia, only that I remembered what they were like and I thought they would do as well as anything.

It's a battle scene.

It reminds me of something, and I was trying to work out what.

I don't know really. If you read the narrative it describes a part of the battle.

And presumably again, I mean you had witnessed battles in Greece and places, hadn't you?

Ah but it was so different. And that's throwing over the sort of bodies after a battle, into water.

Actually it was quite appropriate to give you a sort of Book with quite a bit of horror in it, because there's always lurking horror in the paintings, isn't there?

I suppose so. And the other one is, they're all...it's worthwhile looking at some of the others, but... These I think are rather tame.

Did you know Edward Ardizonne?

Yes, Ted.

What was he like?

Oh, a very comfortable fat man. I used to go away with him at weekends and that sort of thing. I never really took to him very much. He had a great conversation...most of his conversation was about wine, of which was a past master. This is the...

This is you again?

Pardon?

This is more of you, is it?

This is more of me, yes. It's the death of David, King David.

And once you had started on it, did they go quite well, or did you reject lots and have to re-do them, or...?

No I just did them, I don't think I rejected any of them, I just did them straight like that.

And do you think, when you were doing work like this, you were referring back to things you had done at art school, and it was a sort of continuation of that sort of work? Because it must have been quite a break in style at this stage.

Yes. I mean it was nothing really to do with art as it was at that time, I just went back to my own imagination, and what I thought, I pictured it you see.

And how did you feel about, I mean although you were free to interpret it any way you wanted, you were actually limited by somebody else's story, whereas when you are painting in imagination now, you don't have to be constrained in any way.

No, that's quite true, that's quite true.

Was this a stimulus or was it an irritation, or...?

Oh I just forgot all the, all that I had found out really, and just tried to illustrate the story in a straightforward way.

And is...I was going to say, is Kings is a kinder kind of story book; looking at the illustrations it's not. We're looking at someone running a sword through a body.

Yes, yes.

Presumably you were picking the dramatic scenes obviously.

I was just illustrating the story, nothing more than this really.

But it was up to you to pick which bits in the story you would do?

I could do that, yes, not that I [INAUDIBLE]. That's the story, you know, of the two women who are claiming the same baby, and then...

Solomon.

Solomon. He said, oh, `I'm having enough of this row, we'll cut the child into two bits and you can have each a bit of it,' you see. One of them who is absolutely frantic comes to try and stop him, but then he says, `Well give it to her, she's obviously the right mother,' you see.

You don't have any children, do you?

No.

Did you ever want any?

No. Are you...do you want a large family?

Not at the rate it's going, no.

Some of these pictures, you see, because that's a tiny little one it doesn't mean to say the original is. They are all more or less the same sort of size, but they cut them down to suit the page very often you see.

And did you feel on the whole happy with that, or did you feel quite frustrated?

Yes, although occasionally one felt one could well feature the...I quite like that one of the building of the temples and...

I love this one having a rest while the others are all pushing. But you weren't, you know, they didn't talk to you about the design of the book as a whole at all?

No, nobody knows what it was like.

Too many people. Did you think the actual text affected you much, I mean did it live with you afterwards?

No, I tried to keep as close to it as I could, without necessarily wanting to put them in the right clothes.

I meant sort of in a spiritual way really, didn't you think reading the Bible again in that way had any affect on you?

Well this isn't particularly spiritual, it's just jolly good stories really.

What's this one?

That's poor old Solomon being beset by his wives and concubines.

You use quite a lot of tiles in them, in this one and then in some of the others.

Yes I did, yes, yes. That one I rather like actually, it's a person coming on an old man in a cave, it's so sad.

And did it make you want to do more book illustration?

No. No I had had enough of them afterwards.

That lion is a Carel Weight sort of character anyway isn't he.

That's right, yes, yes.

I mean did you try and bring in things that were already yours so to speak, or did you not...it doesn't look as if you did.

I don't think I did very much, no, I just...I tried to illustrate it as sort of simply as I could. They're destroying the old gods and...

Did it give you nightmares doing this?

No, no, no.

That's total Carel Weight, isn't it, somebody running down a windswept path.

Yes. It was raining like hell.

And that, it's almost becoming Carel Weight pictures, getting in paths, and meetings.

That was rather based, the landscape was slightly based on a very hilly part of the south of France.

So this is I Kings 19 we're talking about. And was that one of the places you went to with Mary and Julian Trevelyan?

I think it was.

So in fact, I mean you did paintings in that area too, so the source would be the same as the other work really.

Yes, but Julian was not at all...he never did anything much like anything either, he was a rather imaginative sort of a chap really.

No, but I was talking about your own painting. This could conceivably be a Carel Weight painting, couldn't it, much more than a lot of them.

Could be, could be, yes. In fact I'm not sure that I didn't take the actual landscape direct from a painting, I think I did.

This also links in, we said at one point that you would have quite liked to have, you were quite intrigued by the art of film-making, and that you were trying to get that feeling into some of the pictures.

Yes, yes.

And in a way illustrating stories has got a similar quality.

Yes. This is a chap being stoned to death.

But you see I can imagine you saying that about one of your paintings actually. I mean it's not usually quite so specific but it's very linked, isn't it.

Yes, yes, yes.

End of F2552 Side A

F2552 Side B

And these wonderful headdresses you've got them in, are they entirely made up then?

All made up, yes. That's...somebody else goes on from there.

What do you think about the Bawden ones?

Bawden? I always found him a bit commercial somehow, but, he's very prolific in...and they're sometimes rather comic. He did more than any of us I think.

It was his idea though, wasn't it?

Yes.

I think I did 60 drawings in all, and he must have done about 100 I should think. But I'll show you the Cyril Reason shall I?

Yes, it would be interesting just to see it. I'm not sure whether it is in this book or...

And does it give you pleasure that you're...

What?

Do you get some pleasure for being in a book? I mean it was a different form for you, did you like the fact that your work's in there?

Yes, I did. I was rather disappointed in many ways, because the printing wasn't that wonderful. You see my crucifixion, which in a way is a little like the one, the large version of mine with his curious hand out.

This is in Isaiah.

Mm. It's not...it's a prophesy that it's going to happen.

So it's using that same vertical, and the crowd opposite.

It is rather similar. I actually based it on that picture which I had done. You see, there it is.

Right. And you've got the same Carel Weightiness there.

Oh, yes, yes. The same sort of idea, looking...

And when you're basing it on a similar idea, is it as exciting because you're trying to achieve something different, or is it slightly sort of more...?

Well, you start off with a theme, and you may take it from a certain thing, and then it develops into something that is rather different.

I love the way he's wearing a suit.

Yes, yes.

And did doing these give you any ideas for paintings?

I think it did, yes it did occasionally, I did some paintings...these soldiers.

But did you like the fact that they were a sequence as well?

Yes, yes it was...I wanted in a way to give a feeling that it had all come in from the same source, and that the...well I even went to some trouble to make the people look recognisable, you know, if it was a theme on one or several people.

What about this one with the elephant and the chaps with bowler hats and cigarettes?

I can't very much remember what it's all about, but... Do you know, I can't remember, I'll have to read it all up again now.

I can't ask you to do that.

It's the Lord appearing.

And had anything like this been...I can't remember now, I'm sure we talked about it, been in...had you had books in your childhood that were at all like this?

Well not...yes, I've seen some... You see I revolted against all these holy books even when I was young, because they were so sort of goody-goody, and the same sort of good people and bad people, and it made me feel quite sick even in those days. I don't like the Holy Book illustrations in sort of period, the 19th century and the early 20th century.

I mean, of the Books that you did, do you have a preference, did one Book come off better than another?

I used to like Isaiah quite well, and I think that's the one you've just been looking at, I liked that. And because in a way it wasn't story-telling exactly, it was trying to...

The nearest to an abstract I've ever seen of yours.

(laughs) It doesn't happen to be mine.

Oh this doesn't happen to be yours. That would explain it.

I wanted to show you some of these that I've never...oh here we are I think. Yes. These are perhaps not the best of them. They're very strange and rather interesting I think.

Whose are these?

Cyril Reason.

Ah right. And are they recognisable from knowing the rest of his work, or they're very different?

I think so. It's a pity we haven't got the Song of Solomon here. That's Bratby.

He was a student of yours, or not?

Mm. Funny, I don't know who that one is.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Now where do we go from there? Would you like to look...this is a book of `The Go-Between' which I was disappointed in. For one thing I was never allowed to correct any

proofs, and in the printing some of them came out surprisingly unlike what I was intending for them.

This cover isn't yours, is it?

No.

And how did this commission come about?

Oh I don't know, somebody suggested I should do a book, and they asked me to do, someone or other, I can't... And then the book, the first book they offered me to do, I didn't want to do.

Can you remember what it was?

No I can't remember off-hand.

And was `The Go-Between' something you had read before and liked?

Yes, I did like that very much.

And this came after the Bible?

Yes.

So what are you using here?

Well I was allowed to use a couple of colours.

But this is drawn, or chalk, or what, what is it?

It was drawn. Do you know, I can't remember how I did it. I think it was done on three plates, and I was able to do it rather like a lithograph.

And had you done much of that work before, that kind of work?

A little, not very much.

And again, you could choose which pieces you wanted to illustrate?

Yes.

And was this for instance, we're looking at the one opposite page 62, is this based on a real place or...?

Yes, it is. It's a house called Cannizaro Park, which is a place where I painted a lot, and it's just the other side of Wimbledon Common.

And the figures are imaginary?

Yes.

And in this case, did you research the costume or you just made it up?

Made it up.

Do you have quite a sense of different periods and what people might be wearing and things, or not?

I think so, yes. Whether it's authentic, God knows, but I can give a sort of feeling I think of what a thing looks like.

And you say you weren't allowed to correct proofs; what sort of changes would you have made?

Well, I mean it's all very well to ask, but you see I, when I drew these reds for instance, I didn't know that it was going to shoot out as strongly as that, and if I had seen it I would say well, dull that piece down, bring up that piece, and it's all, well it's a little unlike, if I were doing a thing in coloured chalks it wouldn't have looked much like that.

We're looking at the one opposite page 79.

Mm. It's not a particularly good one. Let me show, there may be one or two that I think are a little bit better. That one I don't think is too bad.

Opposite 83. Well again, that's got the Carel Weight railings and two people along the path.

Well it has, yes, yes. That one isn't good because he comes out too much like a ghost.

That's 206.

That one I think is not bad.

127. I suppose there you haven't got such strong blocks of colour.

I think that's probably true.

Do you remember whether you had to do lots of versions of this before you got to the one you wanted, or...?

No, because I didn't know, and if I had have seen them in these states I probably wanted to have had other versions, but I never saw them you see. That one is almost monochromatic, but I think that's quite a nice one in a way, of a cricket match.

Right, opposite 110. And something like that would you base on memories of real cricket matches?

Oh yes, yes.

And are there tiny details that were actually things you had around you that were...?

No. I always feel it's a bit of a failure, and I'm furious really that they didn't just give me a sort of chance of correcting things, because I had had no experience of how one colour laid on another, and what the result would be, and in this it's full of jumpy sort of things that come right out, and not supposed to.

It's very curious that they go to all the trouble of commissioning an artist and not let him do it properly.

Yes. I was rather fed up about that.

And, another medium that I wanted to talk to you about is, when you were talking about the pictures that the Queen has at Buckingham Palace, and you said - or wherever, you said she had watercolours of yours, and I don't think I realised you did watercolours.

I've done watercolours, yes, quite a lot. But, I think...yes. I don't know quite...I did used to do more watercolours than I do now, but I always like it as a media, and I rather always, nearly always rather regret that I haven't done more. I do enjoy sploshing about with watercolours.

And would you work outside with watercolours, or you work in the studio with them, or both?

Oh yes, I think so.

Both?

Mm. I would prefer it as an outdoor medium really I think, because you don't get the depth of tone and luminosity that you get with oils, but you can get a sort of lightness with watercolour.

So, at the moment, I mean have you done watercolours this year, in the last year?

Yes, used in a funny sort of way. I invented a technique. I didn't...I would have liked to have sent everybody Christmas cards, and I had a feeling that I would have a photograph of a picture of mine, and, what is the word? Have it copied, you know these shops that copy things, in black and white. And then I would paint onto the copy with watercolour. And I found that very successful in a way, because, it was the same sort of technique here, but I was able to control it perfectly well, and I did about 30 Christmas cards you see. I haven't got any here unfortunately. But, it suited me very well, and then you see, not only could one just colour these things, but one could vary the colour, and you could have 30 slightly different pictures.

Which picture did you use to start with, what was the actual painting?

Do you know my picture of the old man in the snow? Well I thought that was a good old, rather corny subject for a Christmas card, and that was I think one of the most successful really. And then I did one which I called `Waiting in Bethlehem', and it wasn't called...the original picture wasn't called that, but my adaptation as a Christmas card. There were several people just standing, and I thought they were waiting to hear of the birth of Christ you see.

They were in Fulham or somewhere presumably.

They weren't actually, they were on the outskirts of a farmyard. There was a picture I painted of a sort of farmyard scene, and that came from that beginning you see.

But I mean over a normal year, leaving Christmas cards aside, presumably the absolute bulk of your work is in oil, isn't it?

Oh yes, yes. Yes it is definitely.

So you just do one or two watercolours a year, or it would be a bit more than that?

Yes, just, possibly for some particular reason.

But you would never do...if there was an idea that had really gripped you as a major painting, you would never do it as a watercolour rather than an oil, would you?

I don't know really. Yes I think I would really. I do rather like using watercolours, but...I don't know why I don't do more really, I can't tell you why.

And, as you said we haven't really talked about the drawings very much.

Pardon?

As you said, we haven't really talked about the drawings properly.

Well you can use these as a basis, there are about eight drawings in that book which are fairly dispersed.

This is a book for the Royal College of Art Printmaking Appeal Fund.

Yes. The drawings for the Bible are in this.

So tell me about them.

That's a drawing, I used two colours. No, it's really...yes, it was a drawing which was, I thought I would do a lithograph of it, and it's of a woman looking into a shop window at night in the street, with the lights about. There are only two colours.

And this character appears in your `Seven Deadly Sins', didn't he?

Yes.

Is he sort of Cupid?

Well he's the naughty equivalent of Cupid. He is firing his darts at all sorts of people in this night scene, in the shops.

They're different. And this one?

A drawing, just a straightforward drawing.

Of whom?

That's of Helen, when she was young.

So would this have been done at the time that you...were all these drawings done at the same time, or they're far apart?

No no they weren't, they were done at all odd times, and it's a sort of selection from my drawings of all periods.

Did you draw many pictures of Helen, has that been something you've done all her life?

Not many, no, not many, not many. That was done in the Army, and it was a chap who sat for me and he was very sleepy because he had been on the guard for a long time. And that's a study for `The Return of the Prodigal Son'.

Ah, the one you did at Hammersmith.

Being embraced by his father.

The one with the big railing - the Hammersmith one.

That's right.

So is this typical, is this the sort of study you would did in those days but you don't do now so much, of detail like that?

Yes, it is really. Although there are one or two others there which are much more recent. That's one of the Bible illustrations.

I love this wonderful hat the woman's wearing.

Yes.

That's your soothsayer again.

Yes, yes. That's...that's from a drawing.

Who is that of?

Oh, she was a model actually, and there are a lot of paintings of her, drawings of her, some years ago. That's one of my comic ones, and it happened when I was elected to the Academy, and in the early days, only men at the Academy, and there was an upset and the table collapsed, the trestle table collapsed, and all the plates and things full of delicious foods all fell amongst the people in their immaculate evening clothes.

And you were actually there that night?

Yes.

And it was a table being knocked over as opposed to somebody hurling it over in a rage?

No, I'm sure it was a pure accident.

Did you enjoy occasions like that?

Yes I do really, I quite like doing those things. I like going...you haven't seen my thing of the `Midsummer Night's Dream' have you?

No.

I'll show it to you afterwards when I can get up. And there you see is a scene, a drawing which, I think it's better in black and white than it is in colour.

This is from `The Go-Between'.

Mm. That was a study for a painting, a chap looking out of the window.

Is this a war one?

No, no.

And did you do the painting as a result?

I did, yes, but God knows where it is now. A child in anguish.

A real child, or a made-up child?

A made-up one.

So how often would you draw without a view of doing a painting from it, just for the pleasure of drawing?

Not very often really, because I don't find that awfully necessary, because I can work out a thing direct on the canvas. So there you are, now you've seen those things, I don't think there's anything much more to see, unless you see odd things in this book which you may not have seen in the others, but...

Yes, and there's some in the others I wanted to ask you about.

But most of these things are, well quite a lot of them appear in...

This is the catalogue from the RA retrospective.

That's right, yes.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

We were going to talk a bit about `The Departing Angel' which is in the Academy collection.

That's right, mm.

What's the story behind this one?

It's a very well-known story. It's the angel appearing to the Virgin Marry and telling her she's going to have baby.

Ah right, then you did talk about this one

It's called the Annunciation.

Right. And this was your garden?

Yes.

And the lion was real and all that?

Yes, just like that.

The girl was a model from the College, or...?

The girl was a model from the College, that's right, yes. I only painted her about once. She was stiff and ill at ease, and worried, and I thought, what a lovely Madonna, at that moment. And that one is called `The Silence'.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

`Battersea Park Tragedy' I wondered about.

Haven't I talked about that? Well, when I was a child I was wheeled in a pram in Battersea Park, and it was, I've got a clear memory of it, and I remember seeing my first aeroplane, and it was, it made a terrific throbbing noise, much more intense than the average plane, I mean it made...because they are much higher up; this was just skimming the top of the trees, and it was going along very, comparatively slowly. And the thoughts of the park there stayed in my mind all my life more or less, not just about the aeroplane but about all sorts of things that rather stimulated one at the time. And then, I've got a love for Battersea Park, it's a funny old place, and it's the sort of place where people, very working-class people go out on a Sunday and they put their best clothes on, and they still do it, and now of course you have an extra factor of lots of coloured people there. But I found that it always gave me a certain amount of pleasure. The park is extraordinary, I don't know if you know it, but you walk along, and you

come on to a lake, and the landscape seems to change, and then you walk along, over towards the river and it becomes quite different, and then there are little odd places where they keep semi-wild animals, and all that is, I found

enchanting, and I still do in a way. But that has very little, except that, just after.....

End of F2552 Side B

F2553 Side A

You were saying about the funfair just after the war. Was that the Festival of Britain one?

Yes. And, then suddenly one heard a frightful accident in which a number of little children who were on a giant racer, it jumped the rails and crashed down, and I think all the children, or, I think all of them were killed, or very very badly maimed for the rest of their lives. It was rather terrible really. And that somehow had a significance to me about, all because, partly it all happened in one of my favourite places, and I decided at once to do a painting based on it. And I went down to the very spot where it was, and I did some drawings on the spot, and this painting came out of that.

I mean are you affected, for example when the Gulf War was on, did that trigger any pictures like that? Are public events sometimes a source?

Not particularly. I hated the whole thing really. But, no, no, I can't say I was very deeply moved about it really. We were killing a hell of a lot of coloured people in a most easy way, and through very little suffering on our part.

But you would never paint anything like that? It was really in a sense that it was a tragedy in a place that meant...

It was a tragedy, and it was...yes, and...it moved me really. It was a rather wonderful subject I thought. And this of course, the women in the front is a widow from...

And what about this totally different contrasting one of the masks that's opposite, this [INAUDIBLE].

Well that's quite a thing that is just fairly close to me. There was a funny shop which was always very dirty, and it had weird sort of things in the window, sort of figures like that one of a sort of, I don't know quite what it was really. It was hardly a child's toy, it was something rather hideous in a way.

This creature with a Union Jack.

Yes. And it was also a theatrical costume place, you could buy, I suppose, or rent out, costumes for amateur dramatics. I never saw anybody going into the shop very much, but it rather kindled my imagination because they had all these funny things, the pixie ears and

things like that. And one day I was passing, and I did see a very dirty looking woman come out with a large perambulator, no child in the perambulator, but it all added to the rather fantasy of the thing really, and that's why I painted it.

Is it the same area as `The Day of Doom', where that shop is, or not?

No, it isn't really. This is much closer to my house.

To Clapham.

Mm. But that...

`The Battersea Medusa'.

That is the same shop from the other side of the road, and it's called `The Battersea Medusa'.

So what about her, how did...?

Well, that's a figment of one's imagination. But it was...there are lots of coloured people about which seemed to me to have something to do with it.

Do sort of ethnic cultures interest you, or you like the sort of glimpses that you get in [INAUDIBLE]?

I do rather like looking at them. I think they're...well, because they are so different to us, and then, they have a certain fascination. For one thing, they're wonderfully original people. The extraordinary clothes they wear and get away with it, they look beautiful very often. And, I like introducing coloured people into my pictures if I can.

And this actually was one I wanted to ask you about anyway, `The World of Edvard Munch'. How did you come to do that one?

Well, as a matter of fact I saw a photograph of, a sort of ordinary black and white photograph of this house, and then I thought, Munch had a rather extraordinary life and he had awful affairs with women, and they went mad and all the rest of it, and I thought, what a good subject and so I painted these people all sort of whizzing about, and...

And that actually was a photograph of Munch's house was it, or...?

Pardon?

That was a photograph of Munch's house that you saw?

Yes it was.

And does that seem a fairly common connection to you, that, you know, having affairs with women equals madness and problems and difficulty?

Mm, what do I say to that? I like...I don't want to be there, but I like thinking about it sometimes.

Right. But I mean do you associate women with sort of hysteria?

Very often, yes, yes, yes.

One of the pictures I did want to ask you about was, when I came here first I think there was one of `Hamlet'. Did you ever paint an act of playing `Hamlet'?

I did 20 paintings at least of `Hamlet'.

Why, how did that happen?

Because I was commissioned to do it. At least, I thought it was a commission. A man came to me, and he said he had an ambition to publish a series of deluxe books, each one representing a play of Shakespeare's. And he said, he came to me I think first, because he said he thought I would do good ones, and I said, well I'll do `Hamlet', it's a wonderful subject. And so, I didn't see him again for a long long time, and he sent me one or two letters saying he was still hoping that I was going to do this, and I painted 20 pictures, the one in the other room there is the largest, the others were of all sizes, some no bigger than about 24 x 20.

The one that's here now is sort of wall-size isn't it, it's huge.

What?

The one that's here now is huge, isn't it, it's much the biggest picture of yours I've seen.

Quite the biggest, yes. And so, I did these pictures, and I wrote to him when they were almost completed, I think I had done 18 out of a possible 20, and he came along and saw me, and he said, `I'm terribly sorry but I've suddenly realised that I haven't got enough money to produce the thing'. And so, I was sorry for him in a way, but at the same time, I was quite happy to have the pictures, and I've shown them, and every one of them has been sold except this one.

And they've been sold to a lot of disparate people, they aren't all in one place somewhere?

Yes, always to different people. I don't know whether there are any others here.

Why did you choose `Hamlet'?

What?

Why did you choose `Hamlet'?

Because it's a marvellously dramatic play, I think. It's got everything in it really. And I recommended...you don't know Linda Sutton do you?

Not personally, no. I know her work a little.

You know her work? Well she's a marvellously inventive character, and I recommended her, and she decided to do `The Tempest', and jolly good they were. They were nothing like what I would have imagined, but they were very very original pictures. And she did them, and I think she sold all hers really. But it really never got off the ground I don't think. I don't know whether he...there were one or two other people that were suggested, whether they ever got further I don't know. Peter Blake was one of the people who were asked to do them, but...

Had you seen productions of `Hamlet' that really stick in your mind, or is it mainly a general idea of `Hamlet', or from reading it?

Oh, well I think it is very much, the situations are so vivid in imagination I think that, sometimes I wonder whether it was any great help to go and see a play, because it can build up a sort of extraordinary eerie sort of feeling about them.

Did you...we talked about you going to the theatre as a child, and did you carry on going to the theatre in your adult life?

I used to go a lot, but I don't seem to go very much now. I watch the box, but it's generally not very satisfactory, the productions you see [INAUDIBLE].

And who is the picture in that RA catalogue of the painter-poet then?

The what?

It's the actor-poet isn't it, the portrait of somebody in there?

The actor-poet?

Mm.

You know I told you that next-door there was an old people's home?

Mm.

And he was an inmate there, and he wasn't a very nice character, but I felt very sorry for him, and he rather couldn't mix with anybody much there and was rather finicky about the fact that they all made a lot of noise when he wanted to go to bed, and he was obviously a difficult man. And I said to him, would he like to come along and be painted? And he thought that was wonderful, a wonderful idea. And so I painted him, and he kept on sort of talking about various plays he had been in, and so I said to him, well, while you're being painted, I don't mind at all if you would like to declaim, and he thought that was rather a good idea, and so he...he was a rather sort of blood-and-thunderish, old school actor, and I painted him just as he was sort of declaiming. He's dead now. One of the most pathetic things I think I ever did was to, he said, `Oh you must come, old chap, to, I'm giving a poetry reading in the Lyric, Hammersmith,' do you know the Lyric? And so, I said, `Yes, I'll come.' And do you know, there were only three people there, including myself. And he, for one thing I couldn't hear what he said very clearly, and so I had no idea, and I felt, well I can't go until the end, and I sat there and sat there and sat there. It seemed to go on for hours and hours. Eventually it ended. And about three weeks afterwards he died. But it was his great moment, he could do... So there you are.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

By the way, I don't know whether you missed it, in...

Oh the Manchester one.

Mm.

Actually that was one thing I wanted to ask you about. You went to the Vatican, you were summoned to the Vatican or something, is this right?

No, I wasn't summoned there. No, it was a rather silly story. I had this, for that work I did a full-scale sketch, and when I had done it, it was for Manchester Cathedral, and it was all very complex in a way, because you know the tracery in one of these Gothic arches, well I had to get every one to fit exactly, which was a hell of a job, because you would think that they would be several sizes which went through, but none of the sizes were the same as the last one. And so eventually, that was all done, and I had this large sketch, and I couldn't see much possibility of getting rid of it and it was in my way in a rather smaller studio. So, I was told that there was a church in Acton that the vicar would really love to have it decorated with pictures, and he had prevailed upon Graham Sutherland to do, I think it was a crucifixion he did, and he said he couldn't pay me because he hadn't got any money but would I do one. Well I said, `You can have this one if you want, free of charge.' And so, he had it, and after a bit the old chap died and the new vicar didn't approve of pictures in his church, so they decided to give it to another church somewhere out at, well on the outskirts of London anyway. And it's rather good really I think, probably better than the original.

But how does that link with the Vatican?

What?

How does that link with the Vatican?

Well it doesn't, but...that doesn't, but there was a smaller picture which was to go on the back... You see there's an archway and a door through to the chapter house. In the chapter house there was, in the door, it was let in, an upright small picture, and I did a sketch for that. And then, have you ever heard of Cardinal Heenan? No, well he was rather before your time but he was quite a famous Roman Catholic Cardinal, and came a time when the English, they had decided to canonise a number of English saints, and he went over to the Vatican, and he took with him the sketch of mine of the Transfiguration as a present to the Cardinal - I'm sorry, to the Pope. And the first I saw of it was a thing in one of the papers, somebody sent it to me, a Catholic, of the Cardinal handing over this to the Pope you see. And I was slightly annoyed really, because I had given it to the church in the first place, and I wouldn't have

minded having that because it was quite a nice smallish panel. Anyway, I didn't say anything about it, and so that was the end of the matter, and then I thought, well it's probably been pushed aside. Somebody went on a trip around the Vatican, and he said sure enough, there it was hanging. So, that's all I know about it really.

So you weren't impressed to have the Pope as a patron?

What?

You weren't impressed to have the Pope as a patron?

Well I wasn't really, because I have got nothing in common with the Pope. I'm sure he's a very nice man. But I would think myself that...you see originally I was giving it to the poor people who were appreciating having their church decorated, and I was a bit fed up with it really, and I wouldn't have been fed up probably if the Archbishop or somebody from the church had said, well, `They're sending that over, I hope you don't mind,' or something like that, it would have been a courteous thing to have done I thought.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

It made me remember the painting of `John Wesley at Prayer', and I wondered what the story behind all that is.

That's one of the sketches for it. I did a lot of sketches, and this is not the original but it's one of the sketches.

It's one of the sketches for the Manchester commission?

Nothing to do with Manchester, no, this is for the Wesleyans and the equivalent of the Wesleyans, I forget what they call themselves, in America, and they commissioned it.

Out of the blue, or did they have some connection with you?

I think it was rather out of the blue really, because I had never heard of them before. There was a rather nice old man who was the vicar at the church, Wesley's church, which is right up in the City; I was rather impressed, and I had to go and see it, Wesley's house, and there is, he slept in a small bedroom with an anti-room, which was this bit here. Was that right? No, this was the sort of anti-room here. And it was the place that he prayed every morning, and I

thought, well I must paint him in his actual place you see. And so, that's I think all that I can tell you about that.

What about the arms coming in?

Well it's a sort of, he's being blessed by God.

And the commission initially was just to paint Wesley, was it? And you could have done anything you wanted?

Yes. Yes it was. And of course, to have just done a copy of an old photograph of an oil painting would have been the sort of thing that a lot of people might have done, but I wanted it to be impressive and...

It's very interesting. And, going back to the RA catalogue, I wondered what led you to paint `Pyramus and Thisby', the ghosts of Pyramus and Thisby.

Well you know it's a play within a play, don't you, and it has always rather appealed to me. And, it's a very ridiculous play of course, and it's been a lovely scene. You've seen my other thing, haven't you, of Pyramus and Thisby?

I don't think so, no.

If you can unbutton me.....[BREAK IN RECORDING]

You were saying that Mr Brandler is in some way connected with the Pyramus and Thisby picture, or he just...?

Well, he had a client, and the client said, `I can't bear Christmas cards and all the people in the snow, I've got fed up with it,' and so he said, `Well why don't you take Carel Weight's picture of "A Midsummer Night's Dream", the play within the play?' And he said, you know, `At the moment I am a wall,' just says Pyramus. And so, he thought it was a good idea. As a matter of fact it turned out rather nice and colourful, and seemed to look very well. And so...and then, not contented with that, he wrote...I said, `Well I want about 50 copies to send out to various people.' So I got the 50 copies, and then to my horror I found what he had written on the back. And so, my only thing was to take out all the things that he had written and just cut it in half, and just use it with, you know, as just plain, Carel, a happy Christmas or something like that. But you see why I thought it was so awful and frightful taste.

Because it says that your work's in important collections; you mean because you were sending it yourself.

Go on.

`His work is in many important collections including the Royal Collection, the Tate Gallery, the Imperial War Museum and the Vatican Collection. A recent television programme called him "The last of the great Victorians".' What did you feel about that?

Well there it is you see, it's there forever, but...no, I used it as a Christmas card, but I cut all that back off.

Why did he say you were Victorian?

Well this chap, on one of the BBC things, said I was sort of the last of the Victorians, I suppose meaning that I had nothing much to do with modern art, which is perfectly true.

Well, that's to decide what modern art is, isn't it?

Well, I don't do any pictures which couldn't have been done perfectly well a century ago. But I mean they have my own personal twist to them all, which is I suppose, you wouldn't have got quite in that form in those days, but there's nothing about Cubism, or any of the other isms of which there has been so many.

But you could say that about Lucian Freud, couldn't you?

Oh yes, but it doesn't mean to say that he's any better than I am.

No, but I mean...

Rather worse I think, because I am trying to say something and he's not saying anything as far as I can see, just doing it very nicely.

But nobody would call him a Victorian, would they?

No, because they haven't got round to that.

One of the quotes I was going to ask you about, somebody said of you, and I can't remember who now, it's in one of the catalogues, `He believes in the ultimate loneliness and isolation of man.'

It's true, and there are pictures which are about that, quite a lot of my pictures are about that. There may be one in here, I don't... I'm sorry. I'm not sure whether it's in here.

Which one are you looking for?

I was looking for the picture...and I can't even remember the name of it. But it ought to have been in here somewhere. Here, the bottom one there, with your thumb on it.

Oh `The World We Live In'.

Yes.

Right, I was going to ask you about that one, it's somewhere else as well.

Well, it's just two people, and they may have been in love with each other, I don't know, I don't know, but they've been very close, and they can't, they no longer...they feel all of that comes to nothing, they're just two solitary figures. That's much my theme, and my theme a bit, slightly similar and not entirely similar, on the picture, my diploma picture in the RA, `The Silence'.

But do you think there are moments of communication, or you think that that's really an illusion?

Oh yes, in a superficial way, yes. But, I always think of one as being lonely, and oneself, all the things that go on in oneself is only, you don't compare it with the same things happening to somebody else at all, at least I don't.

And do you wish it wasn't like that?

What? No, I don't really, I'm perfectly willing to accept.

And does it make you unhappy?

No, not really, I don't think. Perhaps basically it does, I don't know.

Did you ever meet anyone who you thought it might have been different with?

I don't think so. I think love and all that sort of thing is a rather superficial thing very often. I mean you can love people, but it doesn't bring you any closer to them.

Could you have lived alone all your life?

I don't know really, I suppose...I don't...wouldn't want to live absolutely alone at all really, I don't think so.

End of F2553 Side A

F2553 Side B

You were saying you like company.

I do like company very much, and...I am not inquisitive about what goes on in other people's insides and things. I know that my things may be similar, or may not be.

But your paintings are all about people, and they're quite perceptive about things that go on inside people.

Well I suppose because I know what's going on in my own inside really. (laughs) I don't know.

Do you think you are a pessimist?

A what?

A pessimist, or an optimist?

I tend to think I'm an optimist really, because I come across so many miserable people and sometimes I lose my patience with them. I love, in a way, to feel that one can help people get over their pessimism. I think pessimism is a sort of destructive element.

And that kind of sense of isolation is quite frightening, isn't it?

I've had it about me for such a long time it no longer worries me very much.

And do you think death is just being snuffed out, or do you think it goes on? Do you have any hope of some kind of better afterlife?

I don't know. I really don't know, and I don't understand lots to do with the religious approach to things. On the other hand, I find that if one...one is very often in the back of one's mind, one's thinking of God, or something like that, or some... I just don't know. I wish I could be more positive about it, but I can't really.

And do you think you might have felt closer to other people had you had children?

I don't know, as I haven't had children. I've seen other people, and they don't seem to have got a lot out of all that sort of thing; they find them a bloody nuisance most of them.

What about the family next-door, they're quite close aren't they?

I like them very much, and I think that there's a lot to be said for them. I don't think...I don't find them very close at all really, I just...I'm just quite interested in them.

But I mean aren't they quite close to one another, doesn't one pick up a sense of family?

Yes, I think they are, I think they are very much, and yet I'm appalled sometimes how far, how little they seem to understand about each other.

And, did you partly not have children because your own childhood had been pretty hellish, and that you didn't really want to inflict that on to someone else?

No, no, no. I do think that my childhood, I suppose everybody's childhood isn't what a lot of dear people say, that the best time of your life is your childhood; I don't believe it is at all. I mean if you're a sort of sensitive sort of person you're suffering like hell. And, I suppose it's when one...I don't know, it's a lot...I can't talk about it very much because I don't know really.

What would you say were the best days of your life?

Now really.

Because you are free to paint?

Yes. I can get on with my own work, and I... I've got a lot of enjoyment out of my friends, and, I don't want to be isolated particularly.

And, you obviously don't like Lucian Freud, but I wondered whether you felt relieved when people started to do figurative painting again. I mean there was a point when you could hardly see any, wasn't there. I mean, did you welcome it, did you think it was...?

Well I just, I went on with my own work rather indifferent to what was going on. But that wasn't quite true. You are over-generalising really, that, there has never been any very serious abstract painting in this country, I've never seen any that I've been at all impressed with. In my old age, you know, I've got more and more interested in other people's work, but

it doesn't affect mine very much. I mean, for years I found, Dali for instance was not a particularly sympathetic character to me; now I find him very interesting, very much...

Why do you think that's changed?

Oh I don't know. One gets more tolerant about things oneself. I think one, very often one has a sort of feeling of, a certain feeling of jealousy about, not so much about their work as the fact that they don't deserve acclaim, but when you get older you just don't care very much about them really. Am I doing something naughty?

I thought you were turning the microphone off.

Was I?

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

One of the people I wondered what your feelings were was, do you like the work of Edward Burra?

Yes, yes, up to a point. But, when you are an artist you get involved with one's own problems, and there are a few, and only a few, artists that seem to touch you in the same sort of way. I quite like Edward Burra because he is in a way an imaginative artist, and some of them, but not all, I found ring a chord in me. I think there are some rather good artists now that I like really. I like Mick Rooney, who was a student of mine, and I don't think I owe him anything, or he owes me anything, but he is a very imaginative artist; not always, but in his best years.

You said you had been to some exhibitions in the last few months.

What?

You said you had been to some exhibitions, since I last really saw you in August. Can you remember what they were, were there some quite major things?

Well I saw most of the things in the Academy, and I saw the Monet exhibition, and I saw the Hokusai exhibition, these are all people of the past. And, what else have I seen?

Did you see the Pop Art exhibition?

Yes.

And what did you feel about that?

It's pretty superficial, but I do like some of our own pop people that again, ex-students, like, I like the pop art of Peter Blake, but I can't bear his work now.

What about Richard Hamilton?

Not...I find it a bit cheap and nasty really. But generally speaking, I admire a lot of the Surrealists really, and when I thought about Dali, he's only one of a whole lot of different people that one does like very much.

Have you been to the Leonora Carrington exhibition at the Serpentine?

No I haven't. Is that good?

It's certainly interesting, yes.

Oh.

And, you were saying to me, but we weren't recording at the time, that you picked up quite a lot of Hokusai books a long time ago.

Oh yes, yes, yes.

Can you tell me a little bit about them?

Well, it's difficult to describe Japanese art really. Curiously enough it has a greatly humane quality, and the figures are wonderful, a slight mixture of humour and wonderful craftsmanship. And Hokusai is only one of a whole lot of people that did works of marvellous craftsmanship. And there is more in it than that even; there was a marvellous humanity, and all that, and yet one is surprised, because you don't expect them to have any humanity at all.

And, roughly when did you pick up these books? It was quite a long time ago.

Yes. I suppose I started collecting them directly after the war.

So you sort of picked up on it very quickly, compared to other people.

Yes, yes I did.

And was the Monet exhibition wonderful? I didn't go to it because I can't bear being in great crowds.

No, not really, but he was a very very good painter, a very skilful painter. And Impressionism I suppose was one great movement that has happened in the last two or three centuries, and it's left one...I mean people gave up that sort of art because they thought there's nothing much more one could do about it really. But there is a great deal done really based on Impressionist painting. But of course it has this tremendous fervour which, well it was...you see they were doing something which was absolutely new. The whole history of art, it was a very ambitious thing to paint the sun, wasn't it, and they had always before that tried to paint the sun in a way, and did it pretty marvellously in some ways, but to put your canvas up and try to paint the sun was impossible, but it was wonderful.

Does it depress you that the public still absolutely flocks to the Impressionist shows?

What, the...?

The public, I mean it's almost as if they're seeing it for the first time still, it still has that...and they're not so interested in other things, they almost stay on the rail.

That's perfectly true, but it does speak pretty well for them, doesn't it really? Because they can all see with their eyes what the Impressionists were trying to do. It may be easy sort of thing, and a lot of people, of course like myself and other people, all paint rather barmy things and they can see what it's all about.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....talking about last time. When we were talking about the painting that the Tate has that you did in Siena...

Yes.

You said that it was, you had reduced it from another picture.

Yes.

And I wasn't quite sure what you meant.

It was originally a large picture which I cut down, because I thought it said all the essential things in a small picture, and that's all there is to it. And I frequently do that, and a lot of artists are continually doing mutilations to their pictures, and just getting them right. You see, an odd half an inch on one side can have a great effect on a picture, and I frequently do cut down things. This last one I haven't cut at all down; it doesn't mean to say that I won't. But all pictures, somebody said that a picture...actually it was somebody at school who said to me that, he said, `A drawing copy is never finished.' Well he meant a painting really. And it could go on forever, but you have to try and find the final statement, and sometimes it takes a long time, sometimes several years, before you can find exactly when a thing, you've got as much out of it as you can. Sometimes you don't have to bother, but sometimes you do. And very often I advise young artists and people to, after you have done a picture, put it on the wall in a prominent place and see how long you can keep it there without it making you feel sick every time you pass it, and then you start and you pull it about and you do things. I think that is quite true. I suppose as you get older you get more and more critical of your pictures, and you probably destroy more, or, not that I destroy a lot, but I change them a great deal.

And the one that the Tate has, was that part of one that was just a little bit larger, or was it much much larger?

I can't remember how big it is, but it wasn't a very large picture. I don't think I had a tremendous lot off it.

And would you sometimes, if it was quite a large picture would you sometimes get more than one smaller painting out of them, if you decided you needed to do that?

I could do, I could do. I rather like using up a painting, and using it like a composer might have a theme in his head which he may have tried out and it doesn't seem to work, and then he might try that same theme in something else.

And when we were talking before about your relation, the other Weight who has turned up in your life, you said he had bought a while ago a painting of yours of Holborn, and I wondered what that was, what view that was and how you did that one.

How I did it?

Why you did it, how you came to do it.

I didn't do it. I had sold it to a dealer.

No, but how you came to paint it in the first place.

Well you've got to remember that I had just come out of the Army, and it was almost my first picture that I had painted out of the Army. And I looked around at everything with a strange...it was rather strange to me, because half London had been destroyed, everywhere you looked had been affected in some way, and in that particular picture there was a whole great empty space of, where once a line of very high buildings were; it had opened up the place in a rather extraordinary way, and all that was rather interesting to me. And also the slight feeling of being at last free, and you could paint what you liked, and so forth. And all that made me want to paint things about London, and the river, and all those sorts of things; I did a whole lot of paintings of that period for about the best part of a year.

And that's not your sort of normal stamping ground is it. Were you actually intentionally going in to different parts?

Yes. Well I happened to know a woman that had a flat right on the top of one of these rather ugly, huge Victorian houses, and how she got up it I don't know, got up to the top, because she was a cripple. I painted there, and several other places, looking round, because everywhere had been opened up by the Blitz, and for once St. Paul's stood like it was meant to look, with nothing there all round.

And did you paint that?

No I didn't paint St. Paul's, but I painted all very close to there.

And, these are the sort of questions, we're jumping about all over the place, but how did you come to do the Nell Dunn book cover that's on your wall?

Somebody introduced me to her - oh somebody said to her that a great chap to do a book, or any illustration of her pictures, would be me. Well we met, and she was quite nice and so forth, and I did do that, but I never did anything else.

Did you like doing it?

Yes. I was able to adapt a picture which I thought was exactly right for it.

Is that `The Friends'?

What?

Was that `The Friends', was it adapted from `The Friends'?

I did it...yes it was based on my front room in a similar sort of way to `The Friends', yes. You did see it, did you? Did I show you the picture of the wrapper?

It's on the wall on the staircase and I noticed it, that's all.

Ah yes.

But you adapted it having read the novel, or you had...?

I read the novel, which I thought was a horrible story. Perhaps I would like it more now, I don't know. I thought she was a bit of a phoney because she was writing about the poor and she was very, fabulously wealthy, and I think she entered in all this, what fun they all got up to and that sort of thing you see, that was the sort of theme that she... But, I don't know, I might have been a bit hard on her, but she was all right really, I didn't take to her.

But not liking the story didn't mean you thought you wouldn't do the book jacket? That was irrelevant, was it?

Well, it was all about people that I knew about, and so I...it reminded me of my own childhood.

And again, this is jumping. Somebody told me that you didn't like Gowing very much.

I didn't because I thought he was so...he was a tremendously self-seeking man really, and always trying to get all the jobs that he could and that sort of thing. Oh he had of course a very charming way with him, and if he wanted something he would be extremely charming.

But you didn't actually have any great confrontations with him?

None at all, no. He did do some really nasty things. There was a chap who was, he was all really, as I said, self-seeking, that sort of thing, became the head of the school at Chelsea, and at once he sacked a chap who had been working there for years simply because he said...this poor chap had got deaf and he said, `You can't teach anybody if you're deaf,' and so I thought that was pretty awful really. And particularly as he had a frightful impediment himself, it may have been connected with that in some way, I don't know.

Did you ever have to sack anyone from your departments?

Never sacked anybody in my life.

And, am I right in thinking that, oh actually linking on with sacking, I wondered what you felt about Jocelyn Stevens' time at the Royal College.

Well I don't...it's very difficult for me to say because I have had no experience of him. Whenever I've met him he's been so charming and flattering to me, but all his staff say he was an absolutely awful man really. I don't know, I can't judge him because I didn't know him really.

And have you got any thoughts about who ought to take over from him?

No, but whoever they get will be wrong.

You mean they can't win, or they're bound to choose the wrong person?

I think they can't...they certainly won't...I've been on that committee and I helped to choose a wrong man; I thought he would be all right but he wasn't.

Who was that?

Lord...

Oh Gowrie.

No, not...no no no, Lord, starts with H but I can't remember. He followed directly after Robin Darwin, I was on the committee, and he gave a wonderful impression of... But he was a

Liberal really, and much as I rather admire Liberals, his job was to be, he was an architect and his job was to try and push the building of the College and make it complete all up Kensington Gore. Almost the first thing he did was to say, `I really can't go on with this because I think the old Victorian houses are much better than these.' And in fact he did nothing all the time he was there because he was so drawn in a dozen different directions that nothing ever came of it, anything.

And do you still keep in touch with the College quite a lot?

Not a lot, no.

Do you go to their shows?

I go occasionally to dinner, and I got a, very nice of them, they made me a senior member of the College, which I thought was rather nice of them. I had to make a speech on behalf of the other honorary Ms and, if you like that sort of thing it's rather nice sometimes, but not too much of it.

And what qualities do you think the head of it needs, whoever replaces Jocelyn Stevens, what do they need to be like?

Well, it's very difficult but I don't like mixing the running of a college with big business, and it seems the only way that could do it, but I don't like it. And I've got a great friend, a young chap who is employed in one of the design departments, and he tells me that it has become, run entirely like a business, and it may be all right for certain industrial parts of the College, but if you do the same thing with the fine arts I think it seems to me pretty awful.

But the person at the top doesn't really have much to do with, say, what goes on in the Painting School these days, does he, I mean he's administrative.

No, he doesn't. But he did say he wants the students to sell many more pictures, and he didn't want a lot of abstract painters who, nobody would buy their work, he says.

Who was this who said it?

What's his name, old...

Jocelyn Stevens?

Jocelyn, yes.

And you think that's a pretty bad thing really?

I don't think that remark, I think that remark was dead true, but a person of that sort of approach to everything of its monetary value I think is awful, but he's got into this state. I think what he really wanted was a title, and if he had got a title he would be sitting there very happy, but he didn't get a title and so, there it was.

End of F2553 Side B

F2554 Side A

And am I right in thinking that in 1976 you organised a Lowry exhibition?

Yes I did.

How did that happen, and where was it?

It was at the Royal Academy. For years...actually Tom Monnington was then the President, and he asked me to go and see him, and he said, `You're a great friend of Lowry?' And I said, `Yes, I think I am.' And so he said, `Well, we've always been wanting Lowry to have an exhibition at the RA, and he has always said he was too old, and too...' He thought that exhibitions were not for him any more, and he said they're too much trouble, he said, to find where the pictures are and that sort of thing. So Tom Monnington said, `Well you're a friend of Carel Weight's, how would it be if he helped and chose the pictures and all the rest of it?' He said, `Well, I would be very happy to do it under those conditions.' So I went down to see him with Tom Monnington, and he was sweet, I was very very fond of him. And, well, you know, all the critics and people said, oh, great tragic figure, and all the rest of it; he wasn't a bit, he was full of fun, and I used to go down so we could have a good laugh. And so, that pleased me, I was very happy to do this. And so I went back to London. Oh first of all I said to him, `Well now you must have some key pictures which you would like to be shown.' He said, `I'll leave it entirely to you Carel, I think you would do it better than I would.' So I said, `Well thank you very much, but it is rather sort of asking rather a lot,' you see. And so, I went back to London and rather full of forbearing, or, is it forbearing? No, it isn't forbearing, what is the word?

Foreboding.

Yes, foreboding is the word. And a few, comparatively, a very short time afterwards I saw in the paper that he was ill, and blow me if he didn't die, and there was me left to do this exhibition without any help from him. So I took one of the secretaries, who was quite a good competent girl, up to Manchester, and it was one of those terrible times just after Christmas, and it never got light all day long, it was terribly depressing. And then I had to be a bit like one of these detective people and try and find where all the pictures were, and luckily I found one woman who knew quite a lot about him, and we went from one person to another and I got a few people, famous collectors. And they weren't...they weren't really like ordinary collectors, because they were not interested in any other painter but Lowry, and some had several hundred pictures or drawings of him. So, I made some sort of selection, and spent a

fair time up there. And then it...and then we had to have a catalogue, and all the rest of it, and it was a lot of work. But I enjoyed it in a way.

Did you get a fee for doing it, or were you having to do it out of your own time?

No I don't think I did, as far as I know, I can't remember. I got my expenses of course. I don't think I got a fee, I'm sure I didn't.

And were you very proud of the exhibition, was the exhibition what you would have hoped it would have been?

I thought it was jolly good, yes, yes, very good. It wasn't as big as the Stanley Spencer show which followed fairly close on its tail, but...

Did you discover anything about Lowry by doing it?

I don't know whether I did doing... Yes I suppose so, odd little bits and pieces about his life. Oh what's that? [BELL RINGING - BREAK IN RECORDING]

You were just saying about anybody who, anything you might have learnt by doing the Lowry exhibition.

Well I learnt a great deal really but, I mean, I don't want to talk about Lowry as well as myself. But, no I don't think there...I think he was...you can read it all in lots of very good biographies really.

I meant really, did you, by looking at his paintings so much, did anything, did you notice things you hadn't before that were important at all?

I think I knew a lot about him really before, I don't think it came out very much there really. That he was a lonely man, and yet he need not have been lonely. He was much loved by people, and he just ran away from them after a little while because he felt he didn't want to be tied up with people.

And do you think that was because he really felt, similar to you, that whatever one did one was utterly isolated?

I don't know, I really don't know.

And since he has cropped up, you painted Thomas Monnington, didn't you?

What?

You painted Thomas Monnington, didn't you?

No. I was never on very good terms with him as a matter of fact. Well, not on...I wasn't a very close friend.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

One totally off-the-cuff question, how will you vote in the next election?

How am I going to vote? I didn't think it would come to this. I don't know really. I think I would vote Liberal really. I don't like the socialists. I don't like Mr Kinnock going round with his wife all the time; I think if that's the sort of domestic thing we're going to get in the future, I don't think I want it much. And, no I think...I don't think that the Liberals have got any very clear thing that they want to do, and I suppose the best for the country would be the Conservatives but I don't particularly want them.

Have you ever voted Conservative?

Yes...no, I don't think I ever have. No I think I would stick to the Liberals really.

And, we talked a lot about the people in your early childhood, your parents and Rose, but since you became an adult, who would you say have been the key people in your life, in terms of private life?

Well, I don't know, and I don't feel I want to talk about it very much really.

Could you talk about it just a little?

No, I don't think so. I think I've had enough of that, all that sort of thing. I change my mind all the time, and... I sometimes like my mother quite a lot and sometimes I don't like her so much. You know, it's all so very fluctuating. I think that, I haven't got anything much to say about a lot of, one had sort of love affairs with various people, and some I'm very fond of and still am, and so, there it is.

But, not necessarily to do with love affairs, but I mean, because you have spoken about him very warmly, was Ruskin Spear probably your greatest male friend, or is that not right?

I've always rather said he was. I think, but there were others. I mean, I've got some male friends that I like very much now. But of course it did last for most of my life and... I don't know. I've got some fairly, some friends that I like very much now who have only been, I've known a comparatively shorter time, but people...I don't know.

Mm. And, it's probably a very difficult question, but could we just try and track the places where you have lived and the places where you have had studios since you left Rose, and, well, since...we talked about the one that was bombed during the war, but where you've been geographically.

Well, after I had been bombed I went to...I was still living with my parents - at least, I wasn't living with my parents, I'm sorry, I was living, you know, in that original place with these poor people in Fulham. And then, my studio was bombed, and I took a top floor in a chiropodist's house which happened to be next-door to my mother's maisonette. No, I had just moved in there just before the bomb had dropped, and it wasn't a place I liked at all really, but you had to be fairly satisfied with what you could get at that time. Then I went into the Army. Oh, and that is where the bomb hit the studio. I saved what I could. But then, oh I went looking for studios and things. Oh, I had, when I came out of the Army a man named Percy Horton, who was on the staff of the College at that time, he said he couldn't really afford to keep a studio going, and would I like to come in on it, on half, and I said yes. It didn't cost me much, and he was much poorer than I was, and eventually he gave up the studio and left it entirely with me, and that was in South Kensington, a very good, nice, grand studio.

Can you remember the street?

Well it was just off Edwardes Square. And stayed there for a few years, and that was very nice.

And where were you living then, or were you living in the studio as well?

I was living...oh, we haven't got to go all through it have we, because it goes on and on and on; I've had about a dozen studios and they don't mean very much.

Judy Collins at the Tate was very keen...

What?

Judy Collins at the Tate was very keen to know where you had worked and lived.

Well I just moved about, you know, really, and eventually I...I always had a...I had that studio for quite a long time and then I had another one, later on, in the Old Chelsea...Old Church Street, and that was all right, I stayed there for quite a long time, enjoyed it really, but I couldn't stand the rector's wife, who was very domineering and wouldn't let people park their cars outside and that sort of thing. And then a rich woman offered me a room in, she ran a school for very rich young children, and she had a room free, and she said I could have it for about twelve months and I stayed about, several years, which was nice.

Where was that?

Sloane Gardens. And that was nice. And from Sloane Gardens I moved back into this street and I've often, I think I pointed out the house on the corner where I stayed, I painted there in the front room.

This is Keswick Road then.

I couldn't stand her, but it was a very nice room in a way, just right for me. And then I quarrelled with her, at least she quarrelled with me, and then, I came here.

So how long have you been in this, using this studio?

What?

How long have you been using this as a studio, roughly?

Oh, at least eight years.

Right. And how long have you been in the house you live in? You've been there a long time?

When my mother died, which was in the mid-Fifties, I thought I would buy a house, which I did.

And you've been in that same house ever since?

Yes.

End of F2554 Side A

Side B is blank

End of Interview