

**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.**

Memories of F E McWilliams 1909-1992

Interview with Mary Fedden C466/15/01 – 02 (F5775, F5776)

Tape 1 Side A

[starts at 008]

... very affectionate friend. He was a very nice man. Rather throwaway. He didn't gush, ever, you know. But you knew who he liked and who he didn't like. And he was ... was incredibly loving to his friends. And he was wonderful to his poor wife who, you probably know, she had ... do you know about his wife?

I know he nursed her at the end, but I don't know what it was.

Yes. Well, she was, she was very beautiful, very nice. I don't think she was anything but his wife and the mother of his children. I mean, she didn't, I don't, as far as I know, she was never a painter or anything. A very smart, pretty lady. And then she got this awful thing ... not multiple sclerosis ... when your hands shake and ...

Parkinson's?

Parkinson's Disease. And it went on for years and years. And Mac nursed her entirely. Looked after her, absolutely entirely by himself. And he used to have Mel and Rhiannon and Julian and me, and a few other people round on Sunday mornings. Not, not every Sunday, but quite often, just to have a drink. I think for his own sake, but also for Beth's sake, because, although she could hardly speak towards the end, I think she knew we were all there, and she had, always, some books beside her table, so she could still read. And one used to hold a glass with a straw, so she could have a drink, because she couldn't hold her glass. But Mac was so sweet to her, without fussing her or anything, you know. And we often, Mel and Rhiannon and I often went, on a Sunday morning. And Julian didn't come so often, because he hated being interrupted on Sunday mornings, because he always painted on Sunday mornings. But ... and there were, there were other people too, who used to go. And Mac always was so sort of sweet and jovial. And, I never saw him despair over Beth. And he absolutely adored her. And used to, I believe he, you know, bathed her, put her on the loo,

dressed her and undressed her. He did everything for her. And yet, when she died, he was devastated. I mean, it was real devotion.

Had she been ill for many years? Or was it ...

Ah, well, it was very gradual. I suppose this awful state of not being able to talk or hold a glass was about a year, I should think. It's only a guess. But she'd been getting worse and worse.

And when she died, how did he cope with it?

Well, he wept at her funeral, which I thought was so touching. He was very shattered, although it must have ruined the last years of his life, because she was so totally dependent on him. And his two daughters were good, but they, you know, they neither of them lived nearby. Bridget and ... oh .... God ... Bridget and ... I'll remember in a minute. I know them quite well, but my, my memory's jolly bad. They used to come and stay for weekends and, and help. Sarah. Bridget and Sarah. And I think they were a terrific support to Mac. But one of the, one amusing time I ... [am I sort of ambling on?] ... a painter called Eileen Agar.

Yes, indeed.

Oh, you knew her?

Well, I went to interview her, so I ...

Oh did you. Well, you know what a pretty, tiny, pretty old thing she was. Well, Julian and I knew her and her husband, Joseph, always, you know, for 45 years. And when she died, Mac and I went to her funeral, which was in an extraordinary cemetery at Gunnersbury Park. I don't know if you've ever been there. It's full of Poles and Czechs and Jews, and it seems to be a special cemetery for ... sort of ... non-English and ethnic types. And it was a very strange, interesting cemetery. And I don't know why she was buried there. Perhaps because Joseph was, and Joseph was Hungarian, I think, or something. And ... she had a rather ... none of this is, is really public, is it? She had a rather boring niece, Eileen, who asked us all back for a drink afterwards, and Mac and I started sort of driving towards this house somewhere in Notting Hill, and he said, "Do you want to go for a drink, to those nieces?" And I said, "Well, not terribly." And he said, "Nor do I. Let's go and have lunch in the restaurant where Eileen and Joseph always used to eat", which was an Italian restaurant at the end of Earls Court Road, just opposite the Commonwealth Institute. And we went in, and

they all greeted Mac with screams and cries, because he used to eat there quite a lot, you see. And they were Italian, and they said, "Why are you all in black?" And he said, "We've been to the funeral of Eileen Agar". "Oh, Mama Mia! How terrible she died", and they were almost in tears. It was, it was rather sweet really.

One of the things that impressed me about her, when she was, it must have been in the last year of her life, she still took herself out to breakfast every morning, in one of those little coffee bar places.

Did she? Did she really?

Was it the little Italian restaurant that's on a, slightly on the corner of a small block, with a kind of wooden facade? I can't remember what it's called.

No. No, I don't think it's there. It's almost next to that enormous cinema. There.

Right. Right.

Was that the one?

I think so, yes.

Yes. I can't remember what it's called. Anyway, they were, the restaurant were all crowded round to hear about her last days, and how she'd died, and all that. And Mac and I had an absolutely hilarious lunch. It was so sweet and, he said, "Now, what do we say to the nieces?" And I said, "Well, I'll ring them up and say your car broke down." "That's right", he said. So we did. And they said, "Oh well, come round now." And we said, "No", we were both doing something else. So, but that was a very nice little occasion with Mac.

Had he known her since the Surrealist days?

Yes. Yes.

Ever since that time.

And Julian did too, because Julian was a Surrealist for a time, you know. Mac and Julian were rather fringe Surrealists, I think. But she was a Surrealist all her life, and her flat was entirely Surrealist, wasn't it. Full of things.

I was very glad I got her on tape, actually, because her personality comes over very well, whereas there's a book which is, really ...

The book wasn't her much, was it.

No. I read it before I went to go and interview her. And I thought, "I'm not going to like this person much." And then, of course, I did.

She was lovely. But the book was really written by ...

Andrew Lambeth.

Lambeth, yes.

I think what it was is, that it came over as being a string of name-dropping, without any substance to it.

Yes. Yes.

Because her thing was joie de vivre, rather than ...

Yes. She did know Picasso and everybody, but it was ... she wasn't a name-dropper really, I mean, she talked about them, but only because they'd been friends of hers.

That's what I mean. When you were with her, it wasn't that.

She was much nicer than her book, wasn't she.

Much much nicer.

I didn't like her book at all. No. What about Mac?

When did you first meet him? Do you remember?

I first met him when I was first with Julian, which was in 1949. I didn't know him or Beth before that.

And he and Julian had already been friends for about ten years?

Oh, they'd been friends for ages, yes. And, as soon as I was with Julian, I met them, and we were always friends. You know, not the closest of friends, we didn't spend Christmas with them, or anything like that, but ... or go for holidays with them. But we used to see them regularly and constantly.

And when you said that you didn't particularly know about his work, when you were all together, would you actually, would he and Julian ever debate their work, or anything like that?

I never remember them talking about their work, because it was very different. But Mac, I never visited Mac without being asked, because I never visit artists without being asked, because I know what it's like when people ring my bell, and say, "I'm just passing, can I come in?" when I'm in the middle of a painting, and it bores me stiff. I hate that. So I only saw Mac when he was prepared to welcome one in, you know, which he did terrifically. But I never went round, and I never saw him in overalls, I don't think. I never saw him actually at work. He took me down to his studio at the end of the garden and, you've been there, have you? Oh, it's so sad! I think they still, Mel is doing, trying to do something about it.

I know he's trying, I don't think he's finding much success, though.

No.

But can you describe it? What was it like when you went there?

I will describe it. But also, I will ring up this charming girl, Tamsin John, who etches here, who is, oh, well, she's about 20 or something, who is Mac's granddaughter. And, for a time, she was living in his house after he died. And now she's living in her father's house, and her father lives in Wales, you know. She's floating about rather, but I'll try to get hold of her, and she might take you round.

Oh, that would be wonderful. I'd like to talk to her too.

Yes. She's such a sweet girl. She loved him too. She's very nice. She's at Wimbledon. Well, in Holland Villas Road, there are those huge houses, which are mostly Embassy houses along the road, and, in between, are sort of narrow passages which go down to houses behind, and you went down a little brick path, about as wide as that, between two high fences, which

were peoples' gardens. They were the gardens at the back of these big houses in Holland Villas Road. And it was a long, brick path, and, at the end, was this house, which, I suppose, was a modern house. I, I never really looked at it. I didn't stand back and look at it. You came upon it at the end of this path, and then round into the garden where Mac's sculpture was, and into the house. And it felt like a sort of ... lovely airy sort of thirties house. I may be quite wrong about it's date. I never remember looking at the house from the outside much.

You sometimes ... I find it alarming, so many times you go somewhere, year after year after year, and if somebody asks you to describe it, you can't.

And you can't! Well, I, I never really looked at it outside. But inside, you went into a little hall, and on the left was a wonderful great living room. Well, it wasn't as big as this, actually. It was about as big as this bit, and it had lots of his sculpture in it. And Beth collected stone and marble and china and glass eggs. And there was a huge dish of beautiful eggs from all over the world - porcelain and ... I don't know, all sorts of things - eggs made of all sorts of things, you know. And that was their living room.

Would his sculpture change, or was it the same pieces that remained there?

No, he brought in new pieces, if that's what you mean. When he'd finished something, I often went there and there was something new. So when he'd finished the work, he brought it into the house. And there were new pieces about.

And the ones in the garden, they would change as well?

The ones in the garden seemed to be the same, more or less. There was a head of Picasso, covered in blue mosaics, but it was quite, well, I always thought it was Picasso. I never asked him! And then, at that enormous storm when, you know, five, six years ago.

1987, I think it was.

Yes. He had a mulberry tree which blew down, and he said that was wonderful, because he adored the wood of the mulberry tree. And he had an exhibition, perhaps it's that catalogue, of these sculptures, which were sort of knobs of mulberry wood, and he didn't even alter them all that much, you know, but cut them into bits. And he had a whole exhibition at the Mayor Gallery of the mulberry tree. And so that was ... the mulberry tree was there, and then, after the storm, there were bits of sculpture there, from the mulberry. And I went into his studio when he was doing the Mulberry Sculpture, and it was a rather nice sort of warm,

pinkish/orange colour, rather warm colour. And all these ... there was one which had a sort of finger pointing, like that, which was a long straight branch of, of a piece of mulberry. Anyway, you went into the house, and on the left was this big sitting room, and on the right was a very small, cosy dining room. And beyond that, a little sitting room, so you could sit ... we always ate in the dining room, which was quite small, or in the little sitting room beyond. But if there were more than four people there, we used to be in the big room. And then there was an upstairs. And then you went out of the big living room, into the most wonderful garden. And it wasn't amazingly gardened, but it was enclosed with high, old walls, stone walls. And, at the far end, was his studio, which wasn't very big, it was, you know, sort of a smallish studio, really, where he worked. And the garden was full of old apple trees, and down each side of the stone walls were marvellous herbaceous borders with roses, masses of roses. And Beth was the gardener. I think she did all the gardening. And there was an awful lot of grass. The whole of the middle was grass, with apple trees. It was so lovely.

And did they use that to eat in, in the summer?

Yes. We often had meals out there in the summer, and drinks out there. And when you came out of the living room into the garden, there was a, a paved part, where there were sort of iron, an iron table and some chairs, you know, before the grass began. And we often had drinks out there on a Sunday morning. It was so beautiful. It was spacious, and ... not cosy, but a comfortable and spacious and airy and ... lovely.

It sounds a bit like I imagine you are, that you have both found places where you knew you would always stay, and there weren't ..... (CAN'T CATCH 207) at all.

Yes, I think so. I mean, Julian found this place, I suppose in about, just before the War, about 1937, and, and stayed here till he died. So he was here about 50 years. And I think they felt the same. They'd found this wonderful place, and they never ... I, I didn't know them before they had it. I don't know how long they'd had it before I knew them, but I think they'd always lived there. I think the girls were brought up there.

Because what you've said already, and it just sounds utterly settled, which is so rare.

They were utterly settled, they were. And they were absolutely devoted. I mean, Mac had quite an eye for girls, but he was totally devoted and faithful to Beth. They were a marvellous couple, and it was just too sad, the way she slowly declined.

And, in the early days, I mean, if you went there for supper, were they very hilarious? What was it like?

Pretty hilarious, yes, they were. Pretty ... jolly, jolly parties.

[INTERRUPTION]

You were just about to describe going to supper with Beth and Mac.

Oh yes, well, it was very, very jolly. He had a lot of ... English artist friends like, often Patrick Heron and Delia, and great friends of William Scott and Mary, and some people called George and something Bear, who weren't artists at all. I don't quite know the link, but they were often there. And then he had hilarious Irish friends. McQuittie, a man called Bill McQuittie, who lives down the river here, now. He is a photographer, and I think his wife ... I used to get rather confused with his Irish friends! I think his wife runs television for Ulster. And then another couple of Irish friends, whose names I forget. And the four of those, those four Irish friends were, they were all friends of each other, and they were hilarious! And sometimes they were all, they used to come over from Ireland, and always Mac used to have them round. And I got to know them quite well, but I never quite sorted out which wife belonged to which husband. And they were, they were awfully nice. I don't see them now that Mac's dead. And once ... I suppose it was the wife who does television, made a film of Mac in Ireland, and we all went round to McQuittie's house, in a flat down, on the river down here, to see it. They asked me, they asked all these Irish friends and me. I was the only non-Irish person there. And it was a tremendous giggle, you know, they were all so jolly, and the film was very good. And Mac loved it.

Would it be people telling anecdotes, or would it be people sparking off each other, and throwaway lines, or, what would it be?

Oh, they, they reminisced a lot about Ireland, and, yes, telling funny stories. Showing off, really. But the Irish are very good at it, you know.

And with a dinner party with Mac, who would do the cooking?

Beth. And after Beth died, Mac went on having dinner parties, but he always got it from Marks and Spencers. And he had delicious food, but it was all, you know, ready done. And he was very good at sort of heating up food. But he couldn't cook. Beth was a wonderful cook.



What sort of food would it have been when she was cooking?

When she was alive?

Mmm.

Oh, sort of basic ... meat and fish and things, and soup and ... nothing, nothing exotic, but very well-cooked. English food.

And, obviously, it would all have been very informal and relaxed?

Oh yes. They were tremendously un- ... they were tremendously relaxed people. Really sweet.

And would it be full of alcohol? Was it very gregarious in that sense?

Yes. A lot of whiskey. Yes, tremendous, tremendous boozing went on. I've forgotten who else. Oh well, Eileen and her husband, Joseph Bard, were often there. I can't really remember who else. The girls and their boyfriends. And this little girl I know, Tamsin, was, is the daughter of Bridget, who is Mac's younger daughter, who married a John. So this little girl's grandfather is McWilliam, and great-grandfather is Augustus John. Rather eminent.

And he sounds the sort of man that would be rather good with children.

He was, yes, he was very sweet. Well, he treated his girls rather like grown-up friends. He didn't treat them as children. Well, I didn't know them until they were in their teens, sort of 14 and, 14 and 15 I suppose they were, when I first married Julian.

And when he wasn't being hilarious and telling anecdotes, I mean, what were the sort of things that he felt serious about, passionately about?

Well, he felt passionately about his work. And I think he felt a great loyalty to Ireland, though he was such ... one might say, a laid-back man, that he didn't ... he didn't ... he was sort of easy and casual in his talk. He didn't gush about things. I'd say he was cool. Friendly, smiley and cool. I don't think he was deep. This may be completely wrong, but I never remember talking to him about music or the theatre. But he was also friends with, great friends, with Ceri Richards and Frances, and, of course, Ceri was mad about music. But I

don't remember Mac having links with music or the theatre. I think he read, but, as I say, I was a fairly casual friend of his, although I seemed to know him well, it was on a, a social basis.

And would there ever be arguments?

I never saw Mac angry about anything. I expect there were arguments, maybe with other sculptors there might have been arguments. And if he didn't like somebody, some critic, or something, he could be quite, you know, he could be quite fierce about people. But always cool. Always, as I say, I never saw Mac in a rage. Perhaps I didn't see him ... you know, if you don't spend holidays with somebody, or stay in the same house, you usually get rather one aspect of them.

But, I mean, there are people who, if they're having a gregarious dinner party with lots of wine, become tearful or cross, or anything like that. And there was nothing of that?

No. Amorous rather, but not tearful or over-excited, no. Oh, I never saw Mac drunk. But there was always plenty to drink.

And was he interested in the gallery world, and the art world? Did he care about it?

Yes, he was. Yes, he liked going to exhibitions, and he talked ... yes, he talked about ... I can't remember him saying, "I'm absolutely mad about somebody's work." But, as far as I remember, he had a big, I think he had a big Patrick Heron over his fireplace in his living room. I think it was, I'm almost sure it was Patrick Heron. He did like, he did talk about, about, I mean, if there was an exhibition on, and one said, "Have you seen so and so?" he would have a strong opinion about it.

Can you remember anything in particular?

No, I can't, Cathy. I, I'm hopeless! I ... I told you, I hadn't much to say that was factual about him, really. I don't remember anybody he specially adored, as a painter or sculptor. Oh, I know who he was very fond of, Prunella Clough.

Ah, a very good choice.

Yes, very good choice. They were friends. And, in a way, Prunella is a bit more serious than Mac was, but they each had that, I mean, Prunella has a very laid-back attitude to things, doesn't she, in a way.

Laid-back, but sharp.

Oh, sharp, yes! But, you know, she, she, I've never seen Prunella drunk, I've never seen her get ... oh well, she does get excited about, about painters and sculptors, yes, she does. And Mac did too, but in a fairly sort of calm way. You may find, are you going to talk to Mel about him?

Oh, sure, yes.

And Mel may say the opposite of all the things I've said. But this was my attitude to him. The, it was always lovely to see him. Always a pleasure.

I mean, he sounds divine. I mean, did he have any faults?

As far as I was concerned, he had no faults at all. He was a real, lovely friend.

And did he mind, I mean, the English hate people not being categorised, or, I mean, fitting into nice little slots in the art world. Did he mind all that?

He didn't, he didn't fit into a slot, artistically, at all, I don't think.

But did he mind that people didn't ... applaud that? Because, you know, the critics hate that, don't they.

They like to be able to pin themselves on to something. I don't think he did. But, of course, he was rather, I think, rather under-estimated, until he had that great exhibition at the Tate. Did you see it? It was wonderful. It was big. And it was with Cecil Collins. And they could not have been more different! It was rather ... I think it was a rather a bad choice to put them together. I mean, they were separate rooms, of course. But, you, if you saw the Cecil Collins, you saw the McWilliam as well, and vice-versa. And they simply were the opposite ends of the pole, as people, and as artists. And it was a strange choice to put them together.

Did you know Collins?

I knew him very well.

What was he like?

Very well. Ah! He was a fussy, wholly funny ... old woman, really! He was so different. I liked him. He was a great, great friend of Julian's. But he never would step into the garden without a, a muffler and an overcoat, even in the summer! And he wouldn't go on Undergrounds, he thought they were evil. He wouldn't let any of his pictures be taken on the Tube. "If you bring me that painting, you've got to bring it in a taxi." That sort of thing. And he used to start his classes at the Central, where he taught, with a time of meditation. All the students had to be quiet and meditate, before they started work. I think that suits some people. But it doesn't suit everybody. And yet, when he was here, having supper with us, he told us the most sort of ... not obscene, but little rude funny stories, which were quite funny. He was an extraordinary mixture. But, I mean, fussy beyond belief. And, "Oh, I don't think ... I don't think lamb would suit me. No, not today." He wasn't a vegetarian, but, you know, he ... he was incredibly fussy. And I had lunch with his wife, about a month after he died. And she is a lovely painter, but totally overshadowed by him. And I thought she might be distraught, because they'd been married for about a hundred years. And I said, "Are you managing? Are you all right, without Cecil?" And she said, "Ah, it's so wonderful not to have to cook meat and two veg twice a day!" (LAUGHS) I mean, he, he was a really spoilt man. But I think they were ... he was very strange. He never had a bath. She said, "We've been married for 45 years, and he's never had a bath." He was a bit smelly!

End of Tape 1 Side A

Tape 1 Side B

... liked it. But, to go back to Mac, I must just tell you [is this too vague?]

No, it's wonderful.

Are you sure?

Yes.

He sent me, on a postcard, about, I don't know, a couple of years before he died, when he was quite well. A postcard, and, stuck on to it, was a limerick which had won first prize in a competition in The Times. Did you see about this? Of a limerick written about an artist. And the winning one, it was in The Times! The winning one said,

"David Hockney exclaimed, as he lay by his pool, in  
the heat of the day,  
'Here I am, on the brink,  
with Elisabeth Frink,  
But I'd far rather Roger de Grey!'"

Ah yes, I do remember!

Which was terribly funny! And Mac sent me this, you see. So I, on a postcard, wrote an answer, which said,

"McWilliam ..." McWilliam, by the way, was devoted to Elisabeth Frink. I think he taught her, and he was terribly fond of her, almost in love with her, I should think. And did a beautiful full-length standing bronze of her when she was a student. Ravishing. It is absolutely ravishing.

I wonder where that is?

It's at Liz's house, where she lived and died, in the courtyard. I suppose there was more than one, I don't know. But that's the one, one I've seen. Absolutely beautiful. So my answer was ...

"McWilliam nearby, with a drink,  
Said, 'David, my boy, if you think  
you can Roger de Grey,

Who is really not gay',  
I'd be more than content with La Frink."

Beautiful.

And Mac couldn't think of another one to send to me, so I sent him a third, which said:

"Liz Frink was there, cutting a dash,  
in an elegant swim-suit with sash,  
She said, 'I'm no fool,  
If I jumped in the pool,  
I could manage a much bigger splash!'"

That's brilliant!

You remember the film was called, The Bigger Splash.

Absolutely, yes!

So we had a lot of, a lot of correspondence, Mac and I, on that. And he sent me a postcard, I think it was the House of Parliament, the Houses of Parliament by moonlight, or something, a really awful postcard. And wrote on the back, "I'm having a very boring convalescence." And it reached me after he died, which was dreadful.

And would he and Elisabeth Frink have seen each other quite a lot, after she stopped being a student? Would they have been in touch?

Oh yes, I think so. I don't know whether he used to go and stay there or not, but she certainly loved Mac, and was there quite often. And I think he must have been down to Dorset, where she lived. I don't know. But they, they were in touch.

And do you know much about him, as a teacher, because he would probably have been rather different.

I can't tell you anything about him as a teacher. I expect he was marvellous. But I don't remember any of his students. I don't know sculptors so much, or so well. No, I don't know what he was like as a teacher.

But might it have been hard for him, I mean, given that, as we were just saying, until his big show at the Tate, he was a little bit neglected. To have somebody so much younger, who

he'd taught, such as Liz Frink, you know, who had become so celebrated. Would he have found that ...

He wouldn't, he wouldn't be jealous. I'm sure he wouldn't be jealous. He wasn't a jealous man.

Which pre-supposes he was probably a very secure person, then?

I expect he was. He was, all his friends adored him. He was a very adorable man. I miss him very much.

Do you think that, until the Tate show, he did feel neglected? Was he ...

Whether he felt it or not, he never said it. But I thought he was neglected. He did belong to Waddington, but he quarrelled with them, as Liz Frink did, and they both left Waddington. And he said, "It's so lovely to be on my own, and not attached to Waddington. Liz Frink said that too. This is dangerous talk, isn't it! But neither of them really liked being Waddington's creatures. And after that, he showed, well, at the Mayor Gallery, that, I remember that show of the mulberry sculptures, mulberry tree sculptures. Must have had other shows, and he had the one at the Tate. And they were both after he left Waddington.

And was he, he must have been extremely thrilled with the Tate show.

I'm sure he was. Again, he would never say, "Oh, I'm so thrilled!" you know. He wouldn't, he wouldn't do that. He, he liked ... I'm sure he was very pleased to have it. But he, he was cool. He wouldn't ... to me, he never said, "How wonderful!" If I said, "What a wonderful show", he'd say, "Oh, good." Or, "Did you like it?" Or something, you know.

So there wasn't any bitterness in him.

No what?

No bitterness in him.

Not really. I suppose he ... I suppose he sold enough to ... I mean, he led a very comfortable life. He had this wonderful house and he never seemed, in fact, I'm on the Council of the AGBI - the Artists General Benevolent - you know, and we give money to people who are hard up. And there are various ... what are they called? Sort of pensions for old artists.

They're rather honourable. There's one that's given by the Queen, or something, called ... oh, what are they called? Anyway, they're kind of, not very big, perhaps £1,000 a year, pensions to artists who are ... both eminent and are rather hard-up. And somebody suggested McWilliam. And I had, because I knew him so well, I was asked to write to him, and ask if he would like it. You couldn't have it if you had plenty of money, you see. I think there's a sort of limit to what, you know. And I wrote and said, "Sorry to ask you if you're rich or poor, but would you like this pension?" And he wrote back and said, "No thanks, I'm too rich!" Meaning he was just over the limit, I don't know how much. But, I mean, he was never hard-up. He did quite well, I think.

And would he come here to the Boat Race parties?

Oh yes, always.

Have you got particular memories of him here .....

.....

..... (CAN'T CATCH REST OF QUESTION - O88)

No. Just being very sociable and, and nice. Nothing, nothing that I can think of, special. He loved going down to his flat at St. Ives.

Oh, I didn't know about that.

He has a, well, I don't know what's happened to it now. He had a flat, sort of on the sea, apparently. I never went there, in St. Ives. And he used to go down there quite often. And he was, well, he was a great friend of Pat Heron, and Brian Winter, and, I don't know about Barbara Hepworth. I expect he was, but I don't know. But he knew all the St. Ives artists very well, and used to go down there for a week, and things like that, by himself, after Beth died, and evidently loved it.

So, it sounds as though he was more or less the same after Beth died. He managed to keep everything together.

He didn't appear to be devastated, though I know he ... I know he loved her, and I know he cried at the funeral. And, but he kept, he kept his pecker up. And I think it was after her funeral we all went back, yes, we did, we all went back to the house. And there was a great big party, and he was pouring drinks, and calm.



And did you ever meet any of his family from Ireland? Or was that entirely separate?

I don't know that he had any family in Ireland. I don't know. I only met these hilarious friends, the McQuitties, and, and some other ones, two others - a sculptor and his wife, and the one, the woman who made television in Ulster, and McQuittie who was a photographer. And there were two others too. I met a little gaggle of, of Irish friends of his, quite often.

And did he ever talk about his childhood?

No. Not that I remember.

No brothers and sisters?

I don't know. Isn't it extraordinary, how little I know about him, really! I find I found out about people a lot if I go, if somebody drives me to Yorkshire, or I come back from Somerset in a car with someone. You know, you have lovely ... I found out so much about various friends when I've been long journeys with them, and I never did with Mac, so ... and usually there were people around and, you know.

And would you ever go to galleries with him?

I used to meet him at galleries. I used to meet him at ... Christies have, you may know, when they're going to have a huge auction, they have a pre-auction sort of private view, and if there are paintings of mine or Julian's that come up, they always send me an invitation. And they're quite fun. They're such a mixture of stuff, you know. And I, I've been to them quite often. And Mac often had work that came up in auctions, and he used to go to these. And I used to meet him at those quite often. And then I met him at private views of friends. Oh, he was a friend of a woman sculptor called Karen Johnsen. Do you know her?

I know of her.

Well, she was a great friend of his, and she was at the Slade with me, she's my age. And, after Beth died, she gave a dinner party, and Mac was asked, and we waited an hour, and he didn't come. And she rang him up, and, "Oh, my dear! Is it tonight? I'd forgotten", he said. Well, by this time, we'd all waited for dinner, but we guessed he'd had some supper of his own at home, you know, and she said, "Oh well, never mind." And he said, "Of course I'll come." And in ten minutes, he was with us, and he ate supper with us, although, he didn't

say whether he'd eaten at home or not. I expect he had. And he was terribly sorry, but he took it light-heartedly, you know.

And were there any other places in London that were his haunts? I mean, any places he ate, or drank, or anything like that?

I don't know. He was quite a home bird, I think. I don't know if he belonged to any clubs or not. I don't know.

And he wasn't a great traveller abroad, presumably.

I shouldn't say great, no. There was some trip to somewhere like Mexico, that he and Beth went on, I think it was something like an Arts Council trip, or Friends of the Tate, or something. But I don't, I don't remember anything about it, really. I think he went to America once or twice. But he wasn't what you'd call a great traveller abroad. And he never, as far as I know, had a house in France or anything like that.

[INTERRUPTION]

Well, the photograph on the cover of this catalogue of Mac's, is that wonderful garden I told you of. The house is here, and the studio is at the end there. And these were mostly, as far as I remember, apple trees. And there were wonderful flower beds all round the edge. They're very good photographs. This was the head with the mosaics on, which I think was Picasso, but I'm not sure. It could have been, couldn't it.

I think it's called that inside.

I think so, yes. And these are the ... some more photographs inside. Oh, here. These wonderful walls, they're brick walls, but not stone. But they're lovely old walls. It's a dreamy place. And we didn't ask Tamsin, but we should have asked her if she can take you round there, or if somebody's living there, or something, you know. I don't know if you have been told by anybody, but towards the end of his life, he had a friend, I think she was called Vera Lederer, or something like that. Do you know about her? She was quite, I mean, sort of ... not quite as old as him, but quite old. I think she was a doctor. In fact, she was a doctor. And she was his companion, more or less, in the last year or two of his life. I think, devoted to him. And I only met her occasionally, oh, I think twice at his house, and once or twice at one of these Christies preview exhibitions. And she was, you know, she was a very nice, intelligent, old woman, who ... I think he died in her house. She looked after him, when

he got ill at the end, she had him to stay, and she was a doctor. And she, Tamsin will tell you about her, and how to get hold of her. I never knew her really. But I believe she was a great comfort and help to him.

Somehow, when you've been talking about him, I imagine him as being a man of great energy, that he wasn't a sitter-about. Is that right?

Oh, he was a man of great energy, yes, he was. He was thin. Sweet to look at. Have you seen photographs of him? Yes. And, yes, very, very young for his age. And I remember him saying, when he got his old age bus pass, "Isn't it a jolly thing to jump on and off buses. Wherever you want to go, you just jump on a bus, jump off, jump on another bus, and get anywhere for nothing!" I always remember him saying what fun that was. But now, I've only just remembered about, I think she, I'm almost sure she was called Vera, and she would be a person to talk to. I can't think of anything else that I know about him.

Can I just ask you something that I didn't come to ask you about, but while you were talking, it made me remember. Since I've got you here on tape, I did a very long interview with Carel Weight.

Oh, did you? How funny! Was he fun?

Oh, wonderful! We did it over a year, and it's about 23 hours long.

Oh, isn't he killing!

I just suddenly remembered, when you were talking about the South of France, that he was talking about being in your house there, and he had a nightmare, and did one of his pictures as a result. And I'd forgotten you knew him. I mean, how does Carel fit into your life?

Oh, Carel fits in because, well, Julian and I knew him, not particularly well, until we both taught at the College with him. And then I was one of his tutors in the Painting School, and we became terrific friends. And he was so funny and sweet. I love him. Don't you? And, it wasn't our house, but two or three summers running, we were lent a house in Provence, on the Luber ... on the Luberon. A dear little sort of ruined house, which had been ... just had it's roof put back on, and it was pretty rough, really. And two years running we took Carel with us. So we got to know him even better there. And, every day, it was very hot, and every day, Julian and I used to work in the mornings, go out and draw, work in the house painting, you know. And then, at lunch time, we used to take a picnic down to the river, and

swim, and have a picnic with some neighbours. But Carel would never come. He never swam. Perhaps he never has, I don't know. And, although the weather was immensely hot, he always wore thick, grey flannel trousers, and a rather thick shirt. And he used to go out after breakfast, with an easel, and paint, standing up in the boiling sun! Absolutely boiling sun! I've got a photograph of Julian and me, and ... I'll show you. And the only problem was, he liked, like Cecil Collins, he liked meat and two veg. for lunch! So I always had to prepare lunch for him, before we went off with our picnic. Which was rather a bore. And we left him at the house to eat his lunch, because he wouldn't come down to the river, and have a picnic. He liked to sit at a table and have proper lunch. And that was the only, only drawback about having him there. Otherwise, he was lovely company. Absolutely sweet.

I can never imagine him teaching.

He's quite, he was good, I think. Slightly vague. But I think he was good. The students liked him very much.

Did he very much leave them to do, to progress as they wished? I can't imagine him engaging in that sense.

No, I think he used to answer questions more than teach. I don't think he said, "This is the way to do it." I think he used to ... but as the Royal College were all post-graduate students, they all, they all thought they were, well, they mostly were, going in a certain direction. They weren't, any of them, starting from scratch.

Therefore, at that stage, is it really just to give them a chance to have somewhere to paint, and be protected for a year?

Partly that. It was three years. Partly that, but also they used to get totally lost as well, and find that they'd been barking up the wrong tree in their pre-Royal College school, wherever it was. And sometimes, you know, sometimes, they got hopelessly stuck, and used to come and say, "Can we ..." I mean, people used to come to me and say, "Can I bring you my work and you tell me what's gone wrong", and that sort of thing. But it was nearly always trying to give advice to people who would ask for advice, more than ... I never gave a lecture in my life, you know, it was just ... trying to help people out of, out of an impasse.

So he was really a presence there?

He was a presence. Julian always said he was so good seeing that the girls had Corn Flakes for their breakfast. That sort of thing. He was awfully kind to the students and sort of, was concerned if they hadn't got digs that were all right, and that kind of thing. I think Roger was more of a teacher. And Colin Hayes was a good teacher.

Roger de Grey?

Roger de Grey, yes. But Carel was a presence, and he was the, he was the Professor. But he used to rely on Roger amazingly. I always remember him walking along corridors calling, "Roger! Roger!" wanting to ask what Roger thought about this or that, you know. Roger was ... Roger was the practical, good teacher, and Carel was the kind of ... And then always, in the afternoon, he used to go to his beautiful studio, which he had in the building, you know, it was ... one of the rooms was the Professor's studio. And he used to get on with whatever picture he was doing. And we all used to gather there for tea, which was nice. All the staff used to go into his studio about four o'clock, and have cups of tea. And, if any student was in real trouble, or anything, we used to discuss them. It was very good, that. And Carel never seemed to mind us going in and interrupting whatever he was painting. I remember him painting an enormous picture of Christ's Entry into Jerusalem. It's a vast painting. I don't know where it is now. And I remember him sort of going dabbing on a bit of paint, and talking to us while he drank, drank his tea. He was a good, a good influence, I think.

And, at the College, were the Cassons ever part of all that, or because they were in a totally different department, were they ...

They weren't part of that at all. They were completely separate. In fact, in my day, the Departments were rather water-tight compartments. I think, I think they probably still are. I don't know. We used to see them in the Senior Common Room at lunch time, but, otherwise, the work never overlapped in any way.

And the other person who I remember mentioning Carel particularly, in connection with you, actually, was ... I know it was Hugh. It was Norman Ackroyd I was talking to, just over lunch, and he said, I think actually it was Hugh, he said it was Hugh who first brought him here to meet you and Julian, and how important that had been, when he was a very young student.

Oh, really?

He thought it was wonderful to meet people.

Well, I remember him coming here. I didn't know Hugh had brought him here. Maybe he did. But he was a very good student of Julian's. Julian liked him very much. And after, long after we left the College, he was one of the few students who used to come back and see Julian, quite often. In fact, he came to see Julian a month or two before he died. And when Julian died, he had a lot of ... really touching, long, obituaries. One written by Hugh Casson. A lovely, a lovely obituary. But ... Norman Ackroyd rang me up and said, "All the obituaries have said he was such a lovely man and such a good painter, none of them have said what a wonderful teacher he was. And I'd like to write something, in The Independent, to express my gratitude to him for the way he taught me. But I don't suppose they'll do it now, because all the reviews have been out." All the obituaries, you know, this was a sort of week after Julian died. And I said, "Well, why don't you send it in and see?" And they printed it a week later. And he said, in this little piece, you know, Julian was the great star of his time as a student, and he said, "He treated us all as fellow artists, and never as students, and he really put me on the right track." It was very nice. It was a sweet little piece, he wrote.

Yes. A good man.

Yes, he is. He's very sweet. I like him very much.

And when did you, this is going off at tangents I hadn't thought of, but it's sort of interesting.

Did you know Jocelyn when she was very young?

Well, we were at the Slade together.

Oh, of course you were, yes.

She wasn't, she wasn't at the Slade very long. I think she came for a year, or term, or something. But we used to have classes together with old Pollunin. Do you know about Pollunin?

Yes.

And we both did ...

Well, tell me your version of Pollunin.

Oh, Pollunin was ... I mean, Jocelyn, I think, was already set to go into the theatre. I think that's what she wanted to do, always. And I loved his classes, because he was such a funny man. But I, I didn't, I did some sets for, I painted some sets for him, I mean, Epstein did sets for Jobe, at the ballet, Jobe, and I and two other students painted them, and Epstein used to come round and say if they were all right or not. And that was because of Pollunin. And then his wife, Elizabeth Pollunin, did some designs. I've forgotten what for. The Snow Maiden, and something else, and I painted them with, maybe with Jocelyn, I don't remember. But my heart was never in theatre work. I couldn't, I couldn't do it. I couldn't sort of combine myself with all of the other people who had to be collaborated with, you know. But Jocelyn, I remember Jocelyn, I remember her rushing downstairs, singing a little song she knew, called, "Looky, looky, looky. Here comes Cooky." I always remember Jocelyn singing, singing that song!

What was she like, then?

Pollunin. He was ...

No, Jocelyn.

Oh, Jocelyn! Oh, ravishingly beautiful. Terribly nice. And her, she lived here, you see. So when I married Julian, which was obviously ten years after we left the Slade, or more, I don't know, 12 years about. I sort of got in touch with Jocelyn again, having not seen her, really, since she left, since we both parted at the Slade. And ... I remember her very well. Pollunin had four children. He had three boys and a girl. And Oleg, when Oleg was 21, he gave a party for him. And he lived in Chiswick Mall, with all these children and his wife, in a rather small house. And he wanted to give a huge 21st Birthday Party for Oleg, and so he borrowed this place, which is where Julian had just settled with his first wife. And it was the most fantastic party. I had come from a very conventional family in Bristol, and it was the first sort of Bohemian event I ever saw, you know. It was packed with Russian dancers, and there were two young Prince Galatziens, who arrived in, as far as I remember, in tails, when everybody else was dressed in lots of exotic rags, you know. And they threw off their clothes and swam the Thames at midnight. Both of them. It was too extraordinary! And there was a dancer called Sopolova, who had, who choreographed a little dance as a 21st Birthday present for Oleg, and she danced it here. And I, that bit, that triangle up there was a gallery in those days, with a ladder going up, and there was a dart board on the wall, there. And I was sitting in the gallery with some other people, with my legs hanging down, while Sopolova was dancing, you see, and somebody threw a dart at the dart board, and pinned me

to the wall by my hair! Not by my flesh, just by my hair. I always remember that. It was wildly sort of out! And it was a gorgeous party. And Jocelyn was here, and her, and her sisters, and her brother, and her parents. It was an amazing party. It was the first time I met Julian.

Didn't you tell me once, the story that, the first time you ever saw Julian was as he went into the Slade?

Yes. It was the day before the party, and he came into the Slade, with Pollunin, to discuss the party, or, you know, came to lunch with Pollunin at the Slade. Yes, I did.

End of Tape 1 Side B



Tape 2 Side A

... there by himself, and got scared and came home, or something? Or maybe it was another place in France where he was ...

No. He was never alone by himself there. He was always with us.

I don't know, just tell me on tape, because you told me years ago the story about first seeing Julian.

Oh, this is right off the point. It's miles from McWilliam, isn't it!

I know, it's a separate tape!

Well, oh, it's just that two days before, or the day before that wonderful party, Julian came, did you ever meet Julian?

No.

He was six foot four. He had a very long, sort of pale face, and, in those days, he wore very sort of dark, green, sort of very rough, greenish tweed suits, well, greenish-grey, you know. And he had this mass of hair that stood up on end. And he came up the path with Pollunin, who was minute, and had a little neat grey beard, very small. He came up to Julian's waist, you know, and they walked up the path. And I was looking out of the window upstairs, and I rushed downstairs and said to the porter, who was called Connell, and everybody's friend, "Who is that man with Pollunin?", and he said, "He's Julian Trevelyan." And I said, "I'm going to marry him." And he said, "Oh, bad luck, old girl! He's just got married", which he had, to Ursula Darwin, who was Robin Darwin's sister. And I said, "Well, never mind, I'm only 17. I can wait!" And, 15 or 13 something years later, Ursula ran off with somebody else. And Julian was round at my house in one tick. Not that we'd had any sort of affair, or anything. He'd just ... had me in mind, apparently. I'd known them both all through those years. I used to come down here and have supper with them, you know.

And were you really consciously waiting for Julian?

Not consciously. I'd had quite a lot of boyfriends, you know, but I hadn't married anybody.

And you'd never got that close to thinking you'd marry somebody else?

No. In fact, I never had met anybody else I would marry. And, you know, it just never occurred to me that they would part.

Was it very painful coming and having supper with both of them?

Not really, because it didn't, you know, I was only 17 when I said it. I always thought he was gorgeous, but ... no, it wasn't painful at all. I mean, just, you know, an unattainable lovely thing.

A wonderful story.

Oh, it was good, wasn't it. And so we went off to ... I said to Ursula, I rang her up, I said, "You haven't really left Julian, have you?" And she said, "Yes." She didn't tell me, or him, that she'd got another man. She just said she had ... And I said, "Well, are you coming back?" And she said, "Oh no". Still didn't say she'd got somebody else. And I said, "Well, I'm just off to Sicily to stay with some friends. Would it be a good idea if I took Julian with me, because he seems a bit low", or something, you know. And she said, "Oh, I wish you would". So I took him with her ... anxious demand for me to take him. And that was that. It was very lucky for me, wasn't it.

End of Tape 2 Side A

Side B is blank

END OF INTERVIEW

Queries - McWilliam - memories of Mary Fedden

summary:

p.2/line 19: Karen Johnsen - Johnson?  
Carel Weight - Carol?

Tape 1/Side A

p.10/13 - can't catch - 207

Tape 1/Side B

p.22/17 - can't catch rest of question - O88  
32/30 - Prince Galatziens - sp.

MEMORIES OF F.E. McWILLIAM

**Interview with Mary Fedden, 18th December, 1993**

Tape 1 Side A [Interview at Durham Wharf, Mary Fedden's home and studio in Hammersmith. Interview also includes material about Julian Trevelyan, Carel Weight and Jocelyn Herbert.]

McWilliam's qualities as a friend. Nursing his wife, Beth, during her illness. McWilliam would invite Mel and Rhiannon Gooding, Julian Trevelyan and Mary Fedden and others on Sunday mornings during Beth's illness. Beth's death.

Anecdote re. attending funeral of Eileen Agar with McWilliam. McWilliam and Julian Trevelyan fringe Surrealists.

First meeting with McWilliam in 1949 when first with Julian Trevelyan who had known McWilliam for about ten years. Never saw McWilliam at work, although would go to his studio. McWilliam's granddaughter, Tamsin John.

Description of McWilliam's studio, garden and house at Holland Villas Road. McWilliam using mulberry tree blown down in his garden during 1987 storm.

Atmosphere at visits to McWilliam's home. McWilliam's friends included Herons, Scotts, George Bear, Bill McQuittie (photographer), plus other friends visiting from Ireland. McQuittie's wife made film of McWilliam in Ireland. McWilliam's dinner parties. McWilliam's daughter, Bridget, married grandson of Augustus John.

McWilliam's passion for his work; loyalty to Ireland. Friendship with Ceri and Frances Richards.

Never saw McWilliam angry about anything, could be fierce about people he didn't like, but always cool.

McWilliam had large Patrick Heron painting over fireplace. McWilliam fond of Prunella Clough. McWilliam underestimated until his Tate exhibition with Cecil Collins. Cecil Collins' character, also a friend of Julian Trevelyan.

End of Tape 1 Side A

Tape 1 Side B

Limerick McWilliam sent to Mary Fedden, and subsequent correspondence. McWilliam devoted to Elisabeth Frink, whom he taught.

McWilliam shown by Waddington, but quarrelled and left gallery. Mayor Gallery.  
McWilliam's attitude to Tate show.

McWilliam's financial circumstances.

McWilliam's flat at St. Ives. Friendship with St. Ives artists.

Beth's death.

Mary Fedden would meet McWilliam at Christie's auction previews. McWilliam's friendship  
with Karen Johnsen.

Photograph on cover of catalogue about McWilliam (by Judy Marle and T.P. Flanagan).

Vera L, companion of McWilliam's last years.

McWilliam's energy as an elderly man.

[Digression about Carel Weight. Mary Fedden taught at Royal College during time when  
Carel Weight was head of painting. Carel Weight came to stay with Mary Fedden and Julian  
Trevelyan at house they borrowed in France, details. Carel Weight as a teacher. Roger de  
Grey. Norman Ackroyd's friendship with Julian Trevelyan.]

[Mary Fedden at Slade with Jocelyn Herbert, both taught by Pollunin, details. Memories of  
party thrown by Pollunin at Julian Trevelyan's home, Durham Wharf.

Mary Fedden's first sight of Julian Trevelyan.]

End of Tape 1 Side B

Tape 2 Side A

[Mary Fedden's first sight of Julian Trevelyan and vow to marry him cont'd.. Julian  
Trevelyan's first wife, break up of his marriage, beginning of Mary Fedden's life with Julian  
Trevelyan.]

End of Tape 2 Side A

Side B is blank

END OF INTERVIEW