

IMPORTANT

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NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION

Artists' Lives

TERRY FROST

Interviewed by
Tamsyn Woollcombe

F4312 Side A

[Terry Frost talking to Tamsyn Woollcombe at his house in Newlyn on the 19th of November 1994. Tape One.]

So today I just wonder whether we could go right back to the time you were born, so, where were you born?

Leamington Spa.

And when?

October the 13th 1915.

Right. And can you remember, do you know whether you were born at home, or were you born in a hospital?

Never heard anything about that. I think I was just a one-night stand in fact, in the wartime.
(laughs)

So, can you remember your grandparents at all?

Oh yes, I lived with my grandparents.

Which set, the maternal or the paternal?

Mother's mother and father, yes.

And what was their household like, what can you remember?

Well I was in a small house in the Rugby Road of Leamington Spa, opposite the school, which became quite useful.

Oh that was handy, mm.

And, two down and three up, with the attic being the third one.

And so, it was your grandmother and your grandfather?

Grandmother and my grandfather, yes.

And were you the only child in that household, or did you have brothers and sisters, or...?

No, I didn't have any brothers and sisters. I had...[TF SNEEZES] Oh dear, this is a blessed pest, I'm sorry.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

So, sorry, you were an only child as it were?

That's right, I was an only child, but I didn't realise that because my grandmother had three sons, and so I had three brothers as it were, although they were actually my uncles.

Yes, yes, right.

And I was brought up with them.

Yes, so it was, there was a sort of family unit as it were.

A total family unit. My mother had married again, having divorced my father immediately after the war when he came back.

And so did your mother live in the same town, in Leamington Spa?

She lived in the same town, but she, it was a simple story, that she met my father during the wartime, and then, after the war she met her original sweetheart again when he came back from the war, and my father never had a chance, because he had only been a temporary wartime affair. And so she divorced my father to marry her original sweetheart.

Right. And did they have issue, did they have children?

Yes, I've got a half-brother, and I've got a stepbrother, because he had already married someone else too who had died when they had the baby.

I see, right, right.

And that's when my mother and he got back together again. Very nice chap. So we had a lovely household, because my uncles were all sporting guys, played football and cricket and all the rest of it, and that was a great thing for me.

And, your grandmother, what sort of age was she? Was she quite a young grandmother? You probably don't know.

Well actually, I mean I never thought about that in those days; she lived to be about 90 I think. She was a marvellous, kind lady, and she always had to work because in those days ordinary families didn't have any income of any kind except from working, and so she was a night nurse and things, she used to go and look after people who were older than herself, sitting up with them all night kind of thing. And my grandfather had been a groom and steeplechase jockey and athlete, but he had had a stroke from running I think, he was a good athlete. And he had a stroke when he was quite young, so he was handicapped in a way, and so my gran had always had to work. And he was a toff really, he had had a...he was the last but one Bath chair proprietor of Leamington Spa; I mean there was a lovely notice above the door 'Charles Lines, Bath chair proprietor', and they were beautiful chairs, we had two beautiful...with the glass door at the front and then the hood comes up when it's wet, and... And his job used to be to take people shopping down The Parade at Leamington Spa, and I used to have to do it when he wasn't able to do...sometimes he couldn't because of his handicap, his rheumatism and things would be so bad, so as soon as I was old enough to pull the chair I used to have to do it. Which meant you had to go in and try bits of cheese and bits of bacon and bring it out and show the lady to see whether she would order it or not, from Home & Colonial. So, it used to be quite interesting.

What, Home & Colonial was the store?

That was the store, yes, yes.

And did you get tipped when you were doing it, or paid properly?

No you would get about threepence for that, yes. Take them out for about an hour you see.

And so he did manage to bring in some sort of income into the household?

Yes, and we also had, when the Bath chairs stopped, because Mr Hearnshaw took over with the last Bath chair, we kept one, took the wheels off and put them round a truck, because the way to earn money then was to go down to the railway station and meet people with their

luggage and put it on the truck, and we used to deliver it to their houses for them, because that was the way it was done, there were no cars to that extent in those days. So, we earned our living in that method you see.

And had he been in the war, had he been injured before, in the Great War?

No, he had a stroke when he was about 27 I think, something like that.

I see. And did he ever talk about his life as a jockey?

No, I had his black velvet cap above my bed, and his whip. But they never discussed their life really, but I heard all kinds of rumours that he had been a bit of a lad when they were in service, as, I think they were in service at one stage.

Is that where you think they met?

Yes I think they met in service. And, he was a great gambler on the horses - well not a great gambler, but I mean put a shilling or two on, and that was part of his life was doing that.

And you don't know where they were in service? Was it in a sort of country house around there, or was it in a...?

No I can't remember, no, I can't remember enough about it. I met my great-grandmother, who was a Sowden I think, and she was a great old lady, very strict, she used to sit in a beautiful chair with antimacassars behind her, and the cap, you know, on.

A sort of white...

Yes, and used to be absolutely strict. I used to have to sit very tight on my chair and wait for my slice of bread and butter on Sunday, whatever it was, or cake.

Was that your grandfather's mother, or your grandmother's?

No, my mother's...my grandmother's mother, yes. And she lived to be about 100 I think. But fantastic, I used to be delighted to go and see it, although I was a very young lad at the time.

You didn't find it frightening or...?

No, I don't think it was frightening. One sat in a kind of awe, because she was a powerful personality, with her own daughter who still lived with her, unmarried daughter who was looking after her.

Your great-aunt?

Mm, she was treated like a servant as it were, you know, with absolute strictness.

And, was that also in Leamington Spa, they lived?

That was in Leamington Spa, yes, Moss Street. I don't think it exists now.

And what were your...sorry, what were your grandparents' names, what were they called?

My grandmother's name was Edith Martha Lines, and my grandfather was Charles Thomas, or Thomas Charles, I can't quite remember now, one or the other.

And so, your grandfather's parents, your great-grandparents, did you know them?

No. No, they were, I think I knew a sister, yes, I met a sister who lived in Kenilworth. I think he had another sister, because I can remember faintly something about what they called, I'm sure it was called bee wine, it was wine made with bees swimming about. I may have got...I remember seeing it in their little shop, they had a shop window and this bee wine was made. Something I've never been able to solve, because I couldn't think they could be alive if they were swimming about, could they? But there was a wine called bee wine.

And who had the shop, sorry?

It was a sister of my grandad I think.

Right. What sort of shop was it?

It wasn't as a shop, it had been a shop, but I remember seeing the bee wine in the shop, what was the shop window.

Oh I see.

It wasn't...it didn't work as a shop.

Oh I see, right. And then when you went to...sorry, I'm leaping about a bit, but when you went to see your great-grandmother, on your grandmother's side, can you remember the sort of house she lived in? Only you describe it as a...

Yes, well I was only allowed in the front room as they called it. You went in through the front door, but you didn't go straight into the front room, you had a little hall-way, but it was, I should imagine it would be one down with a kitchen, and two bedrooms above, one above each, one small one above the kitchen and one above the room we sat in. And that had a little garden, about two yards in front with railings. It was a little terrace. I never went out the back door.

And in the front room, can you remember anything in it, objects or...?

No, I can't remember anything in it at all, it's too long ago.

Except for her chair.

Yes. It's too long ago. I think I was totally in awe when I was there, had to sit tight and to do what I was told. I must have been very young too.

And so, the household you lived in with your grandparents, can you remember any objects in that house?

Yes, that was...

Any reproductions on the wall, or...?

Well, reproductions on the wall, I don't know what they were, because no one mentioned what they were. Well I know there was one 'Leading the Horses to Water', but I don't know who by, and they were reproductions. There were two similar, farm sort of scenes.

They weren't Constable or something like that? No, no.

No, I wouldn't think they were anything like that, but they were...could have been, but I don't remember. 'Leading the Horse to Water', the only reason I know it was that when my grandmother had to put more water in the tea, she would say, 'And that's where they are leading the horses to water,' and like fools we would look, and all she was doing was, put

some more water in, stirred it round to get a bit more strength out of it you see, so that's why I remember the title of that one. And, we fell for it every time, 'That's where they're leading the horses to water', and we knew exactly what was going on, part of the process. And, that was all we had in the room, except on the mantelpiece was a rather lovely silver teapot which was fluted, and a lot of brass things which, I don't remember exactly what they were, because, I used to have to clean them now and again but I can't remember what they were for, odd little things with little handles on and that. I think some were egg warmers and all kinds of things, which were all just, they were never used, they were just polished, put on the plates.

And was the teapot ever used, the silver teapot?

No, no no no no no, it was never used. I don't know what happened to it. And, then of course we had a fire, a coal grate with an oven at the side, and there was also a water tap there, but it didn't work, and it had never worked in my life-time, but it was the fire in which you made sure you go the chilblains from every winter. And my grandmother always had a pint of beer at night in a jug, well it might have been a quart, but she always had that, and then they put the red hot poker in to mull it in the winter time.

What does mull...oh, to warm it up kind of thing.

Yes, you just put the red hot poker in, and that just brings a foam up on the top, and it takes the chill off in the winter you see. I can always remember witnessing that.

And was that, was that in the front room, or in the kitchen?

In the living room. It was a kitchen and living room, which had a back yard, three steps down, to the outhouse where the washing was always done on a Monday, you had a copper in there where you lit the fire, with a lavatory down the bottom of the...it was just a stone yard, bricks. And a bicycle shed on the right, because we rode bikes in those days. And then the back door led onto a passage in which the Bath chairs were kept, in the top end of that passage, which led down to the back of the whole establishment. It was a lovely cobbled area at the back, there was two streets ran down and formed this back, and later on it was very useful because when I acquired a vehicle I could park it down there, and it wasn't a main road it was just a back round to both streets.

So how...I'll get back to it in a minute, but as a matter of interest, the vehicle you acquired, what, a car?

Oh yes, I jumped about quite a lot here.

And so, you said that was the living room, the living room-kitchen kind of thing?

Yes.

Did you also have a front parlour kind of thing?

Oh yes we did, yes, that was...that was full of sort of ceramics of various kinds, and photographs of family. There was a wonderful family album in there, quite a thick one, which had a wonderful selection of photographs right through of the whole family, and I think there was even one of my father allowed in there, but, it was quite a wonderful thing. In fact, I wish I had got it, but unfortunately when my grandmother died the house was cleaned out, and I was down in Cornwall you see, and I think all that stuff went. And there was a lovely table in there, oval table, with a central column with four brass legs, beautiful thing. And the aspidistra in the window of course. And a nice chess table with about four legs, little pin legs which came down to, different ones at the bottom. And, also a gramophone, a wind-up type. And a cupboard full of, I suppose they had been wedding presents for my grandmother, ceramics, tea cups and things, which we never ever used, they were obviously too precious to use. Oh and I think there was a...I think it was an army hat in brass made out of a shell, because my father was in the artillery, and that was one of his souvenirs which was kept, and I don't know where that went, because one of my uncles was an auctioneer and I think as soon as my gran died he got some money quick, and I didn't see those lovely things again.

So how often were you allowed in that room then?

Well on Sundays, on Sundays we always went in there after lunch, and, I think sometimes one played cards, or put the gramophone on. And then tea was quite an event on Sundays, because normally we had...one of my uncles would have a girlfriend or something in for tea, which was a big event. And we all went then back into the kitchen for that. But we had a fire in the front room then on Sundays of course.

And what did Sunday mornings consist of? Did you go to church or anything, or not?

No, I didn't go to church on Sunday mornings. I went to Sunday school in the afternoon, I think that was arranged so that the people who went to work could have a sleep on Sunday afternoons, that was a good idea that Sunday was arranged like that. And, yes Sunday afternoons I went to Sunday school.

And then by teatime the visitors arrived?

They had arrived, and we would have tea, that's right. And then in the evening you would get visits from other members, like my Uncle Tom married first, so he would come over with his wife, and there would be various visitors like that, friends of my gran's, in the evening.

And, for lunch, was there the traditional Sunday roast?

Yes, traditional Sunday beef, yes, usually beef. We did have pork, because in those days various neighbours used to keep a pig, that was the usual thing, you kept a pig in your back yard and fed it. I mean you took all the scraps from your neighbours; we used to pass ours over the wall to our neighbours, and then you would get a certain piece of the pig when it was slaughtered as it were. That was a regular event. Like you got produce from...most people had a garden, an allotment.

Somewhere separate?

Yes. And so on Sundays when the people came back from the garden, they would always bring something for my gran you see. And my grandfather had a garden too which I used to work on with him.

What sort of things?

Well, mainly one grew a crop of potatoes, and every other vegetable like peas and carrots and, I know we used to have to paint the peas with red lead to stop the mice or whatever it was eating them.

But you didn't poison yourselves?

Oh yes, well that's only, they would paint the things you were planting to stop them being eaten. Once they shoot out they're all right. Runner beans and the rest of the things. Oh that was great, the garden was a marvellous thing; we had a little shed there, and I used to have to dig the marrow pit, which was a great event to dig very deep and put all the compost and stuff in it. And, we had a nice lot of rhubarb, a nice lot of raspberries, lots of gooseberry bushes. Then of course there was the great problem of keeping your garden looking better than the one next-door, which was a great competition, because the chap next-door could dig a bit

deeper and better than my grandfather, who was slightly handicapped with his stroke paralysing him a bit you see. So it was always a bit of a problem to keep it up to the nick.

And were you actually virtually self-sufficient then in vegetables, fruit and vegetables?

No, we wouldn't be self-sufficient, but we certainly grew a very good crop, and we also had very good friends who perhaps were less in number than us who brought things to us on Sundays. This was the normal thing with people in those days. You did live in...we lived in what was called Milverton, which had been a part of its own, it still had its own name, but it has now become absorbed into Leamington. And, so that you knew every neighbour, too much probably looking back, but it didn't worry me at that time, and every neighbour knew your business you see. On the other hand, if you were ill there was always somebody to help out, and you knew who was desperately poor and you knew who had got a good job.

And your neighbours, were they of the same generation as your grandmother, or were there children your age, or...?

No, the next-door neighbour was Mr Jenkins I think, because his wife died when he was young, or she died probably in her sixties, something like that, so he was my gran's next-door neighbour. And next to that was the pub, the Nation's Arms.

That's on the other side?

Yes. And the back of that came to our back door, that was a skittle alley, the old skittle alley. And on the other side was, oh I can't remember the names now, but a couple lived together, and they didn't have any children. And then the next house was a couple whose name I can't remember, they had a daughter. And then the next house was the little shop, and that was that block then, the pub, Mr Jenkins, our house, next door whose name I can't remember, then the couple who had a daughter...

And then a shop.

And then the shop. And the shop was marvellous because it had all aniseed balls in the front which used to change colour with the sun, you know, and liquorice sticks and lunch bags[??] and all that kind of lark. And they also sold Indian corn, which used to be sold in, not on the cob like you buy it now like that, it looked more golden, and it was sold for the chickens, you bought it by the pound or something to feed your chickens with, you know.

Did you have chickens then?

No we didn't, no. We only had one cockerel once I think, and I've never liked chicken since really, because it was my, it became my friend and then it was killed for Christmas or something, and I didn't like that as a young lad, that put me off chickens forever I think.

And what else did they sell in that shop? Was it sort of general...?

Oh general, yes, you could get anything in there, everything. Vinegar, treacle, the lot. And it was a tiny little shop. And the girl who served in there was named Amy, and their name was Ryman, and they had a son and a daughter, and, they had two sons and a daughter, that's right, and the one son played the piano, I think they tried to get the daughter to play the piano but she wasn't having it, and I used to go there for tea on a lot of Sundays, because he was quite a good lad, Coffee Ryman he was called, the boy.

Coffee?

Yes, well his name was Mud[ph] Ryman. Why we changed it to Coffee I don't know, but he was always known as Coffee Ryman. And he was quite a good lad, good sportsman, and he used to play the piano, and he also took up the sax, and he also had a wonderful steam engine which, I used to go over my wall, because it was a high wall you see, climb over it and drop down to play with him when he was stoking up his steam engine in their wash place. And we used to go swimming together, and we also used to go birds nesting together of course, because we could just walk up the road and we were in the, in those days in the fields where you saw every bird and, it was farm land then, but it's all houses now, but at that time it was farm land, and we had a wonderful collection of eggs and butterflies and all kinds of things. But it was just the natural thing you did in those days.

And was he your main friend then?

He was at that time.

Is that pre-school we're talking about?

I'm talking about...yes, by the time we started to play more seriously was about eight and nine, yes, he was my friend then. But then, he was my friend right up to the war, but I mean the thing is that it got a bit thin, because when we were eleven he went to the college, and I passed the same exam but I couldn't go, because his parents could afford books you see and

the uniform, so he went to the college and I went to what they called the Central School, because as we had no one working in the family in the same way, it was split like that.

Right. And, in your household with your grandparents, on these Sundays, did your mother make an appearance?

Oh no, no.

When did you...?

No, she didn't make an appearance, no.

So when did you realise that your grandmother wasn't your mother, or were you always told?

Oh there was never any...my mother lived with us.

Oh I see, she lived there too.

Oh she lived there...I can't remember when it happened, when she actually moved away, but she certainly lived there during my formative years.

Oh I see, yes.

She was still there when I was three, I know that.

Oh right, oh right.

She was probably there when I was five, I can't remember.

And then she met the man.

Yes. Oh no, she had met him immediately after the war.

Oh right.

Before my father came back even.

Right, right. So she used to go...he didn't live there too though, he lived in his own separate house did he, or did he live...?

What, my father or stepfather?

The stepfather.

I don't know how they met, I've never...it was the kind of thing you weren't allowed to discuss with your family, it was all very secretive. And my mother would never tell me about it either, she would never discuss my father. I tried before she died, and she said, 'I just fell for the uniform'. And I knew that she didn't want to talk about it. And you can't, if somebody doesn't want to bring it up you don't want to talk about it.

No.

I can remember going out with him once, and I remember, all I remember, the only picture I've got of him, it must have been, I must have been about three, because I was born in '15 and it was the end of the war, and I know that, I can see him sitting in the chair with a big red handkerchief and crying, because I thought that they must have been discussing splitting up. I think he had just come back. I know they took me to Birmingham, and I remember him very well because he was a very smart chap in all his uniform, and then in the artillery he had a whip for horses you see, and I apparently, I think I stepped in front of a tram or something and he, I can remember being hit with this whip. And I always had that whip hanging in my house as well, and his spurs I had too.

So what happened to him then? Then you lost touch with...?

I lost touch with him, he never made any contact, and one of my uncles, my Uncle Fred, was the only one who mentioned it once to me, he said, 'I saw your father once,' he said, 'at a Coventry City football match, and he's an inspector in the police in Birmingham'. That's the only news I had. And the only other recollection I've got at all was when I was out, I used to go on a bicycle, which was too big for me, you used to put your legs through the bar, pedal through the bar, to pick bluebells at Chesswood Grange, Chesswood Woods, between Leamington and Kenilworth, and I used to go to pick these bluebells.....

End of F4312 Side A

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Well I went to pick the bluebells and on my way - you must remember that if you're in the country in those days you could be the only person on a bicycle, hardly any cars, but there was a red sports car coming towards me, and he slowed down, and I don't know what happened but I can...the picture I've got is, I remember him asking me if I was Terence Frost, and he said, 'Do you live in Rugby Road?' and I said, 'Yes'. Now this is a very odd thing, but he did ask me that, and I can remember the dark hair, which was like the hair I had seen in a photograph, but we never said who we were, but I think that was my father, who spotted me. It's the only time I've seen him again, and I was about, I suppose ten or eleven, something like that. And I don't know why we didn't have the nerve to tell each other who we were, but we didn't. But I think that was my father, I hope it was but I don't know.

And your mother, what was your relationship with your mother?

Well she made the best jam tarts, so every Sunday I used to go, as I got older I used to go down and take my new mate down, and we used to eat all her jam tarts, lovely little round ones with lovely jam in. She was a very good cook. And we always got on very well, and no problem at all. But I was better with my gran, because she was with my step-father, who was works manager in Alfred Herbert's, brilliant chap, but, they didn't want me around, I had been brought up at my gran's you see, so that was where I belonged, with my uncles.

Mm. And so how many of you lived in that house then? There was the grandmother, the grandfather, you, your mother...?

Yes.

And three uncles was it, or two uncles?

Two uncles, yes.

So that was six.

We had, in those early days I slept with my mother in her bedroom. My gran and grandad in the opposite bedroom, and I think my Uncle Tom must have been married quite early, I can't remember exactly, but my Uncle Fred and Uncle Don slept upstairs in the attic, and of course they used to get up early in the morning to go to work at Coventry, they were up at 6 o'clock

to catch the train. And likewise I was up very early because I used to do a newspaper round you see, I did a newspaper round in the morning, and a newspaper round after school.

So this was when you had gone to your...the first school?

No this was...in my first school, no, I didn't do the newspaper round till I was about nine or ten I don't think. You had to be big enough to ride a bike; I mean if your legs weren't long enough you couldn't deliver the newspapers, you know.

So actually, if we just go back to the first school. Oh no, before we go back to the first school can I just ask you about the uncles and what they did then?

Well, my one uncle worked for Lock, became Lock and England which were auctioneers in Leamington Spa, and they were estate agents and auctioneers, that's right, they were the grand old firm on The Parade, so, he was only the sort of runner and office boys, that's all, but he became quite distinguished there in the end, but I remember in those days he was just the young chap there.

And was he Fred, or was he not Fred?

That was my Uncle Don.

Right, right.

And then my Uncle Fred, he was quite a skilled tool-maker, and, I can't remember the name of the firm that he worked for, but he ran about eleven machines at the time when tool-making was quite a skilled job you know, micrometers and all the rest of it. And my Uncle Tom was an upholsterer at Humber who used to make all the beautiful cars and they were the classic cars, and he used to do all the leather upholstery in them you see, so he was a top craftsman. Of course they had all been apprenticed you see, those people were apprenticed; that was in the days when you learnt your trade properly, and they all worked at Coventry you see.

Except for the uncle that was an auctioneer?

The uncle that worked at the auctioneers in Leamington. Otherwise the others went... And my mother worked, that's right, my mother worked, she must have lived at home, she worked at the...Woodwards, which was a big ladies' dress shop, but it was more than that, it was like...

A department store?

The department store in those days, very...it was one of the...Leamington had a very wonderful parade which had very posh shops in and all the rest of it, and Woodward's was the shop. Well she was a milliner by trade, but she specialised in fur, repairing furs if they got torn and things like that, or altering fur coats and things like that. And I always remember the story, when I rode on that bike again down The Parade, with my leg through the bar, and the bike was far too big for me which I had borrowed, and I was going down The Parade and there were lots of people either side of me. I think the Duke of York or somebody was visiting, I didn't know, and I had gone riding down The Parade, and my mother and all her friends who she worked with were looking out of the window where she was working, and someone said, 'That's your Terence, isn't it?' And I had caught the arse of my pants on the saddle so, which, she was absolutely furious with me, riding down The Parade with all these people with little flags waiting for somebody. (laughs) And I had gone shopping, you know, for my gran, not knowing anything about it. I always remember that story. She told it with amusement afterwards, but at the time she was quite cross.

And did you ever go into her department store?

No, I used to go and meet her sometimes, but I never went in the store. Oh I went in the store when, I went later on, with Kath, but not when I was a young boy, no. She was a dressmaker you see, she made her money by making dresses at home; I used to have to see people standing on the table having things changed. And she made wedding dresses and all that kind of thing. She was very good at cutting out things; she didn't have patterns, she could do it...

And where did she train then? You said millinery.

Millinery, yes. She must have trained, she must have been trained at Woodward's.

Right.

She was there...she was there when she must have left our place to go and live with John Ward, her new husband, she must have been... I remember when I...I mean I must have been about seven or eight on that bike, I must have been old enough to ride a big bike with my leg through the bar.

And she had gone by then?

No, she was still with us by then.

No, still with you, right, yes, yes. And did she look very...

I don't remember her much at home, except that I...because she went out a lot, she was a great girl for the dances and wonderful glamour and all the jewellery and all the gear.

Yes I was just going to ask you about that.

She was a very good-looking girl, and she really went around. I mean I was always asleep when she came back.

But did she used to tuck you up in bed before...?

I don't remember anything like that. I don't think you got that kind of treatment a great deal in those days. I know above the bed was a wonderful selection, which grieves me very much I haven't got them, or didn't get them, but they were all the wartime cards that my father must have sent home, but they were not ordinary cards, they were...what do you call it? It was...they were all done with silks.

Oh, yes.

You must have seen them.

Yes I think I have.

Beautiful, done with silks. There were two frames of those in the house, and they all went when my gran died, I was so upset about that. I don't know why I wasn't able to get there, perhaps I hadn't got the money you know. But things like that I remember very much, they were part of my life, you see. And certain pieces of, I think there was a watch there, and a silver bugle, silver chain, which my father had got off some dead German officer or something in the war time, loot, you know; of course it wasn't called loot, it was victory.

Yes. Where had your father served then, do you know?

No. I know that he was on...I've got a name, Manitou, is my third Christian name, and that came, my Uncle told me, that came from my father, because he was in Gallipoli, was sent to Gallipoli, and they were on a, I don't know whether it was destroyer or cruiser, they were on

the boat, and the German submarines were sinking quite a lot and they sent...they saw the torpedo coming for their boat, and 200 odd jumped overboard, were drowned, but the torpedo didn't go off, and my father didn't jump, he stopped on the boat, and so he thought that was lucky, and that's how I got the name, because that was the name of the boat that he was on.

Oh I see.

And it's an Indian god.

How do you spell it?

MANITOU, Manitou. So, that was a story I got about my father.

And, obviously you hardly saw him so he couldn't tell you any tales particularly.

No I didn't get any stories at all. I know he was in the artillery, and he was a sergeant. And I've got to find it, I've got it somewhere, I've got the form when he passed his maths and reading, he was all right at reading and writing and arithmetic. And that's, and I want the army number, because I want to do a bit of tracking down, because there is a Frost you see, I had someone send me a, genealogy, is it, thing?

Sort of family tree kind of thing.

Of the Frost who... And, I couldn't make any connection with that because it didn't go back far enough, but it went back to Scotland, and I'm surprised that the Frosts were in Scotland; I never felt ever at all Scottish, I felt more...I always felt a bit of Latin sort of, because I like dancing and that, and decent rhythm and that, I couldn't believe that belonged to the northern thing. But I found...and they sent...also, there was a Frost who was an RA, and I saw his work when I was in Los Angeles for the first time when I went round a gallery there. And there's another Frost who paints portraits as well in Scotland. And I think there's one in the Tate Gallery according to this letter, which I sent to my daughter to try and see if she would do something about it. So that's why I want to find my dad's army things, because if I get his army number...

You can look through the army lists.

I can track back more about him, because I think he lived in Colchester, it's got the address that's with the envelope still.

There was a sort of garrison wasn't there in Colchester.

Yes, and it would...I also had his address, his mother's address, in Colchester.

Right. So did he go into the army as a career then?

He must have done, yes. And I would like to have...I would have liked to have sorted that...that would be helpful to my daughter to sort it out. But I'm interested in the two painters Frost you see, because it's interesting that that might be a family connection, because if it hadn't have been for my, I suppose my mother being a dressmaker and very fussy about hats and always wore beautiful hats and things, and lovely dresses, which she made, that I must have been affected by that, and the fact that my Uncle Fred was always drawing from photographs and was brilliant at it you see, and so...

What, copying?

Copying, yes. And from...he never copied from the image but he copied from photographs, of his girlfriends usually, he would make them quite good.

So it was interesting getting a likeness?

Yes. So I would copy his copies, and in turn I copied my, I think my 'Billy Bunter', and I forget the magazine, with Harry Wharton[ph] and all these people in, was the magazine I took in those days. And I would copy all those things, because he copied them. So I was very interested in drawing, not interested in art but only interested in drawing.

And was this pre-school you started?

Oh I must have started very early, because he did it you see. And then of course when I was, I went to that Central School at eleven, I became art editor of the magazine you see. Now I must get that right, I was joint art editor with Fred Crosswaite[ph].

Was he the one that was good at lettering, was that the one?

No, no that was...

No that was someone else.

No, no, that was Frank Unitt, no that was a bit later. Fred Crosswaite[ph] was in the same class, but he was brilliant at maths and he was clever. I wasn't clever, I was really run of the road. Because you're not clever at school unless you can do mathematics, and I was quite good at maths until I was twelve, and once they started to give real problems I could never work problems out, like I can't play chess, I haven't got that kind of, I shouldn't use the word can't, I'm too bloody idle to find out how to play it. I don't have that kind of will-power for that kind of game. And I was the same at school, because I was quite good at maths, in fact I think I was about top at eleven, but by the time it began to get problems I knew that I was lost. I couldn't learn from listening quick enough, and therefore I was getting behind, and it becomes an embarrassment and so you don't do it then, you avoid it. It's bad teaching really, because if I asked, I was made to be a fool because I didn't understand you see, I always remember that kind of thing. But I was very good at composition, writing things, and writing stories.

Actually before...sorry, sorry to interrupt you. Before we get to that school can I just go back again a bit?

Oh you're going to go back.

I've got to go back again, sorry. It's just, in your home, before you went to your first school, can you remember any books or illustrated books? You were just mentioning magazines, that must have been later, comic magazine type thing.

No, I don't think anybody...I don't remember anybody reading to me or anything like that, I don't remember things like that. We always played in the streets you know, I mean it was safe in those days to play. Because I lived on the Rugby Road, the school was opposite, then two side streets, which I've forgotten the name of, went down, with only the four houses, the pub, the side streets went down like that, and along the bottom. Well we played every game, football along there, cricket against the wall. I mean the whole of our life was spent skipping, hopscotch, rounders, and it was all play down there, all the kinds from everywhere, I knew them all there, and that's it. And there was only person who complained and that was Miss Hicks who lived on her own, who sold the milk, and we used to have to go and we used to get a halfpennyworth of skimmed milk. And she had a big garden, and apple trees which we always used to try and pinch the apples off. She was a terrible old dear and she couldn't stand any of us, because she lived on her own.

What, did you used to go and take a tin pail?

Yes, we would take a jug and she had the milk in a pail. That was Miss Hicks. And then, opposite Miss Hicks was a little, another little alleyway off the street which had one, two, three houses on, which were the poorest people in the district; they were one up and one down, and they had six children in the middle one, so they all slept in the same room, both in the same bed. Because I knew the girl there very well when I was about eight or nine, and she used to come with me when I used to go and collect the washing for them. The people who lived beneath us did the washing, they had a laundry in their garden and they did the laundry for people, and I used to go out on Thursdays I think and collect...I can't remember, I went out on one day, collected and took it back on Saturday mornings I think, on the truck, my grandad's truck.

Did you collect everybody's laundry in the area or just...?

No, only certain, the posh houses where they had servants you see. That's when I used to go flirting with those girls who worked as servants. They used get half a crown a month at the most you know in those days, and one night off a week, and they used to have to wear uniform. Well I used to go and collect their washing.

That was in another part, that wasn't in your...?

No that was where the posh houses were.

Yes.

Used to have to go to the back door. Is it on all right?

Yes it's on, yes, it's OK, it's on.

So, and that laundry, and there was a lovely girl there, and two families lived in this rather large house, which had to be made into two houses because there were two families, and that was at our back where we had our back door, and then, they had a big garden with a big pear tree, and the laundry was a long building, and they made their living doing this laundry. And they used to crimp all their hats that they wore with the special...

Tong things.

Hot poker, do that, and I used to see them doing that, because they were doing them before I put them in the basket to take them back you see. And that was one of my jobs. And this girl Alice who lived with the six used to come with me, walk with me while I delivered the laundry, my help mate as it were.

And was she your age sort of thing?

Yes, she was my age, yes. She tried to teach me how to make love at about eight or nine I think, yes, very nerve-racking lesson that was. (laughs)

Where did that take place, in the bed?

No no no no no.

Outside?

She was a wonderful girl actually. But, it was just child stuff, you know.

And, so, I don't remember much about any books at all; we were more...you played a hell of a lot. You used to have to go to bed reasonably early, especially if it was like now, dark, you would be in bed by 6 o'clock.

And did anybody tell you stories?

No, I don't think so. I don't remember being told stories, but you must remember I got...my uncles played sport, soccer on Saturdays you see, cricket in the cricket season, snooker in the week, or billiards as it was then, so I mean their mates used to come in and talk about sport, and that was, I was interested in that really. And I used to go and watch all the matches, and I used to go round with the money box to collect off the spectators, things like that, until I was old enough to play myself.

Oh you played as well?

I played later on, but I was never good enough really.

What, football or cricket or both?

Football. I was all right at cricket, I played cricket regularly, but as a youngster I was never good enough at football. But, I don't remember much about the, sort of the infant school; I know it was only across the road but I have no recollection of infant school at all. Very odd. Oh just one recollection of sitting with a marrow when we had our photograph taken at Harvest Festival, I had a bloody great marrow, so you couldn't see me, (laughs) holding this. Those were all in that diary, in that album which I wish I had got, and which we lost, but I remember sitting having my photograph taken there. So that's about the only memory I've got of infant school. I think I was quite happy there, I didn't have any...I can't remember the teachers either. But as soon as I went, moved up a bit, which was the same block but you moved up into the next class, I mean...

What age was that then, do you think, were you when...?

Well, I mean I left when I...I left there when I was eleven, so it must have been about seven or eight, when you make a move. And we went then to Miss Dentry, who was very beautiful, I thought, and she was a very good teacher too. And then, it was very difficult in those days because there was no such thing as dyslexic, you were a dunce, and I used to have a dunce sit by me who used to copy because he couldn't...and he used to copy everything I did you see, and that was accepted you see. I mean a very nice bloke, but you see nobody knew he was dyslexic, so he was treated something terrible by everybody really. But, actually he's grown up and married and very happy and works in the Post Office.

So you kept in touch?

No, I met him when I came home after the war, and I saw that he had got a job, and quite...you don't know he's dyslexic because it's not necessary that you would know, and it was only that I...I didn't like the way he was treated because he was a mate of mine anyway, and, I mean you think back how disgraceful it was the way people like that were treated. So we were in Miss Dentry's class, and she was very good, and then I went up a bit then to Miss Huggins, who was a tartar, tall and black-haired and very tough, and I know I failed her completely, because I couldn't whistle this bloody Scottish song, or something...'The Bluebells of Scotland' or something.

'Blue Bonnets Over the Border'?

Blue something of Scotland, and I...blue something of Scotland, and I was supposed to be able to whistle it. I was never any good at whistling, and I had to stand up to do it in the class and failed completely. And I don't think she liked me after that. And then of course I was in

some play with 'The Burghers of Calais'[ph], I can't remember what the play was, but I was one of the leading dukes in it or something. But I fell in love with Muriel Fairweather, that's it, who was the leading lady, and I obviously showed it too much because I got reduced to the ranks and had to be put in as one of the burghers with a rope round my neck to be hung. Oh dear oh dear! But I used to walk past the square where Muriel Fairweather lived, because I went to school with her. That was the end of my career as an actor. (laughs) That's the great life, wasn't it.

And what about this writing compositions and things? You said you were good at that.

Well that was later on.

Was that a bit later?

Well at the early school, before I was eleven, I mean, then we went to Sticker Stamp's class.

What's that?

He was called Sticker Stamp, and he was a very good chap, we all liked him, but we did our silent reading with him, and I did read a lot, but only historical romance as a rule. I can't even remember titles of them now, but I used to read a lot of that stuff. And he was very good because he encouraged us to read, and I enjoyed being with him. We used to have to write about what we were reading too. But I enjoyed being with Sticker.

And what about your friends from that time, school? We're still at the original school?

Yes, the original school, Mill School. And, I don't know what happened there. I know, I just passed that exam to go to the Central School, because you had to leave by the time you were eleven you see. Well you didn't have to leave, but if you could you did. But, at the school it was, it was a very good school, it was a very good school for sport, and we had a very good playground and everything, and we did a lot of theatre, because I know I was in something else. Oh, what's Bottom...

'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.

'A Midsummer Night's Dream', yes.

What were you?

Oh, Thisbe I think. 'Even walls have ears', is that the bit he says? I'm not absolutely sure now.

I'm not quite sure who said what.

I know it was part of one of my lines. And I was very good, I was a very good actor, and I was doing ever so well until the family came in, all the parents came, and I got totally nervous and went to it, brrrr, like that, ruined it completely, so I never got asked again. Got stage fright, totally and absolutely.

And so, what about A-R-T, art, art classes and things?

Oh I never remember any art in those classes at all, I don't remember. I've tried, I did try to think about it often. No, I can't remember. I don't think art was even a consideration.

What, there was no poster paints and splodging around?

I've got memory of most things, but very little memory of the infant school, but pretty good memory of Miss Dentry and Sticker Stamp and Miss Huggins, but I don't ever remember any art being done. Probably it wasn't even on the curriculum, because it's only come in in the last few years really, and it's still not really accepted. They think it gives the teachers a rest to get them out to art galleries and all that kind of nonsense. Not taken seriously.

But what about...I mean not even splodging about with poster paints, you don't remember anything like that?

No, there wasn't anything like that, no, nothing like that at all. I never saw anything like that in my life I don't think, not up to that age. I did when I got to the other school, the Central.

And so in...and your friends, you had friends from school and the friends sort of, your neighbours, friends, did you, at that point?

All neighbours, yes, yes. Only neighbours at school. There was various...Mudd Gardiner[??] was one who was a friend, he was a marvellous character, but he was an Arsenal fan so I wasn't very keen on him.

So what was your club?

My club was Aston Villa, because my uncle, my Uncle Don was a linesman, became a linesman, and he actually got in league matches as a linesman, not in the top division but he did get as a linesman in league matches, and he also had a friend who became a referee in league matches, and he used to take me to see Aston Villa. And he also took me to see Warwickshire play cricket because he...

Oh that's exciting. And then, I think I've read somewhere you saw Bradman, did you?

Oh yes, saw Bradman, and Hammond and all those people who were absolutely fantastic. And I saw Dixie Dean, the footballer, and Harry Hibs, the goalkeeper, and Talbot and Tate, and Pongo Waring of Aston Villa, all my favourites, yes.

End of F4312 Side B

F4313 Side A

[Terry Frost being interviewed at his house in Newlyn on the 19th of November 1994. Tape Two.]

So you were just talking about the football matches, and...

And the cricket matches.

And the cricket matches.

Well that was, of course I was about 12 then, I had made my move to the other school by that time, and that was a different school altogether. I mean the cricket was taught a bit there, not a lot but it was... Taylor, who taught us maths actually, I think as a youngster had tried for Aston Villa at football, or had a trial, so he knew about football, and anybody who is good at football usually is quite good at cricket, I mean a good sportsman. So he did take us for cricket, and tried to teach us a little bit. My problem was that, and I was a very keen cricketer, was that I had been taught in the back yard, which had no distance at all and had a step in it just before the lavatory, so you couldn't drop your tennis ball in the right spot because of the step being in the way. And we had the wickets drawn on the back door, and if you hit the ball you might break the wash-house window of next door, because it was only a low little wall between next door and ourselves, and a pump which you got your water from. So, cricket, you had to learn to keep the ball down, so all I played was a forward defensive stroke, which was the only stroke I finished up with, because I could never hit the ball in the yard because you would break either next-door window or your own, so always one was playing straightforward shots. And much to my chagrin, I mean when I'm playing for very good teams, I could never hit the ball; I could stop in all day but I could never hit the damn ball. And once you start playing against professionals, once you move up and play against good class cricket, within one over they know exactly what you can do, so they don't allow you to hit the ball any more. And it was very frustrating for me, because I loved cricket.

So did you bowl as well, or were you mainly..?

No, I wasn't any good at bowling. I did bowl, but only in emergency. I was a good fielder, and I captained this team that I...

What team, sorry, are we talking about?

Pardon?

What team are we talking about?

Oh this is my, I ran a team once I left school, I ran the old Central School boys, I ran it when I left. And, I've played regularly, and I did get, I played against Warwickshire Gentlemen and played in the Coventry North Warwickshire League for a bit, because I was a good fielder and I was very keen, and I could open bat for a long time, but I couldn't score, unless it was...unless the ball came on the leg side, and then I could usually turn it away without any problem. And I did make some good scores, but only if the bowling was bad. Once I played against top quality, I had my lesson in the first match I played against them, that they know, a good bowler knows immediately, you haven't got a shot on the off, you just, you beat them. But I still stuck it out, and played all my life you know, and it's a wonderful... And soccer I was no good at, I mean I used to just collect the money mainly, and go with the team, because it was great to go out on Saturdays, it was a great event to go out and go to all the villages. If you live in a place like Leamington you are surrounded by villages.

And so what, did your uncle, sorry, did he play in a team?

No, my Uncle Fred, but a winger, yes, he played, he played on the wing, he was known as Tossler Lines, he was a marvellous player. And my Uncle Don was a referee.

Yes.

And of course when he happened to referee the team that my uncle was playing for, then he was called a fixer, if the other team lost. It was terrible the things that used to go on in those days. And, we had a wonderful team, a wonderful name. Mudder Aitken[ph] was I think goalkeeper, yes; Nobble Davies was another player; Spike Read was a left-back; Percy Jenkins centre-half. No, we had a wonderful team. But the trouble was that in those days the lads used to have to work very hard all the week, get up at 6 in the morning to bike to Coventry or wherever they were working, and then Saturday morning of course was, they were in the pub, probably having four or five pints before they went to play you see, and then they would go home and have a big dinner, and Saturday of course was a day when you had a boiled pudding usually, probably potted dick or jam roly-poly, which was not a good thing on top of a lot of beer, to run about on. There used to be quite a few of them falling down and fainting, and of course you had to put the wet sponge all over them, because they had completely failed on, having so much beer and food, that running about like that was...that's why they conked out, there was nothing wrong with them really.

So you used to go with the team out to the villages surrounding?

Yes, yes, Stockton and Harbury and all those places.

And do you remember sort of team teas, did you go and have sort of great big hearty team teas afterwards, or...?

No, we had hearty piss-ups in the pubs afterwards, and that's why you go to play in the villages. We would all lose and have a great time with the other team afterwards in the pubs, the Black Bullock's Head and something like that, it was wonderful. And the same for cricket; cricket you got strawberries, you went and had marvellous strawberry teas at Stratford, that's why we played, the only reason we played that team was they gave the best teas. You were very careful on your fixture list, you know, if they didn't have a good tea, and if the squire didn't put a barrel of beer out, you know, you didn't play them again. They were very good days as far as the enjoyment went, win or lose.

And then so, at school, on the academic front, the maths you weren't so good at you were saying, at that point.

No, I was hopeless when it got to problems. So after that I struggled through. I managed, I was usually about the middle, I never got to the top, about the middle. I could get through, but it was never easy, and a tremendous worry to me, because I could never understand what they were talking about when they were showing us how to do it. So, I was beaten before we started really on maths. But I did all right, I did all right with algebra, I don't know why I did better with algebra, I think, if you've got an X it's easier to find the answer than it is with ordinary problems. And logarithms I think weren't so bad. I was never brilliant at it, I was only about mid-way, and I wanted to be better at it but I couldn't.

What else did you learn then? Geography and...

Oh, we did geography, I wasn't bad at geography. But we got caught out by Danny Morgan, a wonderful teacher, a Welsh chap, a wonderful teacher, he was a chap who interviewed me for the Central School. We had to do an exam and then I was sent for for an oral, because obviously there was a limited number of people who could go, and I must have been borderline or something I should think, so I was called in, and he asked me lots of questions on history, things like that. And I know he asked me one, and I didn't know the answer, whether it was the Battle of Crécy or something, but he mentioned something about the Black Prince

and I knew immediately. So he helped me by...and I always thought, I've always remembered, he helped me by mentioning the Black Prince, so I was able to tell him the battle and the date and everything. So I always owe Danny quite a lot. And he was our teacher, he used to always be late, he would arrive at the last minute; we were all in our classroom, and he would arrive but he would still have got his bicycle clips on, and his flies undone, which always used to amuse us, because he didn't realise it, and he would put his foot up on the chair and of course his fly would open and we would all be sitting there. And he would then read the 'News Chronicle' to us, the daily news you see. And Amy Johnson had flown to Australia, or round the world or something, I think she had flown to Australia, but it wasn't a non-stop flight, she did do this flight, she was a very famous air lady in those days, and we listened to this, or sort of looking at each other rolling bits of paper and shooting them, all the usual stunts you know, while he was giving us all the news of the world, and Amy Johnson's flight. Well when the exam came we got a blank map, and it said, 'Put Amy Johnson's flight pattern, the rainfall, what they sell, what they make, what they grow, in each of these countries'. Well, did he shake us to the core, because we thought that was great him reading these stories to us and we never took any bloody notice you see. Core dear oh dear! We took notice after that, I mean he absolutely floored us with that. Very clever of him, wasn't it, absolutely woke us up, and I've forgotten that, the old Danny, a wonderful teacher. He would explain, he helped tremendously.

And then, English?

And we did English, yes, and composition. We did French, but French, the French teacher was a lovely bloke but he was no use as a teacher. Heavens, what's his name? I can't remember his name. Wonderful grey-haired chap, but he had no sense of discipline at all, and we always had one or two what they call naughty boys, but we weren't really naughty, but the fact was that we knew if one row of seats there started humming, he would go over there, then somebody else would start over here, there were four rows of you see. And we used to drive him mad, and it was ridiculous, he couldn't control us at all, and there was nothing he could do about it, so we didn't learn much French you see. It was a pity really, because when it came to the French exam, and he wrote all these questions up on the blackboard, we couldn't read them, just what the bloody questions were! (laughs) And our housemaster was Captain Billingham, and we said...he just said to us like, because the French teacher was out and he said, 'Why aren't you getting on with it?' We said, 'We don't understand the questions, we can't read them at all.' Well he had been in the war, so he had learnt a little bit of French as a captain in the trenches, and he tried to help us to read what the...(laughing) It was a terrible disaster I'm afraid, because he didn't remember very much either; in fact he was only very good when he told us war stories, when he was in the trenches and when they threw grenades

and all that, we used to like that. But I'm afraid the French teacher was, he was a marvellous chap, I feel so sorry for him now, but I didn't then, and he didn't have any control, and I'm very sorry I didn't learn French, but we didn't.

But English composition you quite liked, did you?

English composition, well, I was quite good at composition, although I came bottom on one occasion, because it was the Christmas exam I think, or just after Christmas, I don't know when the exam was, but I wrote about making the Christmas pudding, which I did every year with my gran, I always sorted the raisins and wash the fruit and candied peel, we would chop that all. Did all the work with her, and we used to sit at the table and do that. And in describing it, I was in love with the idea, and I described the room and the table, and everything we used, the grater and everything. But you see, I don't know how long we had, an hour say, something like that. Well I never got as far as making the actual pudding, and so, I had always been top you see, and when the marks came out I was bottom, and I know, I mean it broke my heart, I couldn't believe it, because I had written the best I could...I had described every raisin, every bit of...the basin, everything we did, but of course I hadn't got time to bake the bloody pudding. And so, because I hadn't made the pudding I was put bottom, and I didn't think that was right, and I still don't think it was right, because I think I wrote like Proust, who, although I didn't know anything about him, Marcel Proust, I hadn't ever heard of him, but when I did read him I knew that was the way I used to write, so I was a bit peeved by that Captain Billingham, never forgiven him for it.

And what about Christmas in your house, in your grandmother's house? Can you remember it, what happened?

Yes, Christmas was...we always had a party, but I don't know which day it was, when my Uncle Tom and his wife, Beat, would come, and my Uncle Don with his wife and daughter would come. And neighbours always came in, certain neighbours sang certain songs, and I can't remember...`The Bells of St. Mary's' one of them used to sing, always used to come and sing `The Bells of St. Mary's' for us, and he was dark, he had to be a dark-haired man that always came in, yes, with a piece of coal I think or something.

That was New Year, was it?

Probably round then. He would sing these songs, and he lived just down the road, a marvellous chap. And, the family would all come, and we always had, when they came it was rabbit pie, that's right, in the evening, rabbit pie. So it must have been after Christmas.

Must have been New Year, because if he was dark and he first footed with coal...

That's right, that's right, yes, that's right. And the rabbit pie was what the...that's when all the family came, because they all had their own Christmas dinners you see.

I see, yes. And your mother and her husband, not your father but your stepfather, when do you think that was then that they set up home together?

Well, I can't remember, I can't remember when they set up home. I never took much notice of it really.

No, because you were...

I was very busy anyway, I mean I was doing a morning paper round, an evening paper round, a Sunday morning paper round, taking the washing out, bringing it back, cleaning the drains in another house, some colonel's house on Saturday mornings.

And the Bath chair business, when was that?

Well that we gave up you see, that was given up in my early days, because that business just folded, they didn't have Bath chairs any more, and it became, I just became a newspaper boy and leaf-sweeper up at a certain house, and drain cleaner, just to get all the leaves out of the drains and that. Everybody had servants in those days in the houses. So I was very busy, I don't think I remembered when my mum moved away.

So you didn't really feel it, you didn't feel deprived in any way.

I didn't feel deprived, because I had my...I had to go to the cricket matches, and the football matches, you see, and then I started to play snooker, I mean, oh yes I was a really busy man - a busy young boy. And then of course, I also joined the cycling club, the Leamington C&AC, things like that, I bought myself a bike, ninepence I paid for it, in bits and put it together, it was all broken down and I got spares, and re-spoked the wheels and everything.

What, and you used to go off for bike rides with friends?

Yes, I used to go for bike rides.

Out into the country, did you?

Oh yes, I used to bike-ride away. And, we used to go and swim in the summer in the river between Leamington and Kenilworth, near the Chesswood Grange again, which, Chesswood Grange was a wonderful place. There was a chap named, it was near Bluebell Woods but it was a wonderful house, and it was lived in as a house, it's now a hotel but in those days it was...and it belonged to somebody named Pratt I think, so was the oil, Pratt's Oil, it used to be Pratt's Petrol and now it's Oil, before they got taken over by Shell or something like that, but he was obviously very very rich because he was in the oil business. And the river flowed through there, and we used to go in there on our bikes, and take cold tea normally we took with us, and sandwiches and stuff, and boys and girls. And in those days I don't think the farmers minded you going on their...we didn't do harm, they were grazing fields I suppose, and we would go in and sit there, and then we would swim in the river. Never had bathing costumes, we just went in. Very cold, I always remember it was very cold the river, because the River Leam flows quite a lot. And...when I say the River Leam, it might have been the Avon, I'm not sure, but between Leamington and Kenilworth. So that, I don't think we ever had a dull moment, never when there was nothing to do, because if you were getting up early, you've got to get up early to do your paper round, you've got to be at school by 9 o'clock, and then you've got to do an evening paper round at 4.15, and then you've got to do your homework. And I was also into radios you see, from 'Boys' Own' I began to build radios, and I had my first crystal set very early in my life, and I also had my first sound set.

What's that?

Well, in the fact that the crystal set you got earphones.

Right.

Well I then made a one-valve set from the 'Boys' Own Magazine', and I took the gramophone horn off the gramophone, and I had two sets of earphones which I took to pieces and set in the horn at different angles, so that my gran and my uncle could hear the sound you see. So we had about the first sound in our area you see. And because I was in the attic I could have a piece of wire to get a good aerial you see, and then I ran it...the only trouble was, I got into trouble with running the wires down the stairs you see to do this. And then of course, by the time I was 14 I was working you see at Curry's.

Yes, perhaps we can talk about that in a second.

Well I was thinking of the radio business.

Yes, then it took you...yes, yes. So you moved up to the attic.

Yes.

When your uncle...so you only had one uncle left in the house, was that when the other two...Don and...

Well my Uncle Don was in the house, then my Uncle Fred got married you see.

Oh I see, he did.

Oh he got married, so I had the attic to myself.

They had all gone?

They had all gone.

Right, right, right, oh that was nice then. And then at school then, so we talked about composition, we talked about geography and French and sport. But what about art?

Oh well, art, I do remember art at that school, because Titch Eveleigh took it. Titch Eveleigh was, he was all right, I mean I think he had a tough job because he had to take all the classes, and he had...it was a very funny way of doing art really, because there were posters he had up were of Terence Cuneo, the railway engines you see, which of course, when I say it was a funny way, obviously the engines interested most of the boys and girls. Why did I say boys and girls, because it was a boys' school? The girls' school was next door.

Oh right.

And, well, while that was all right, I mean the thing was, all you had to do was bring a rose or a flower or something in, pin that on your, or stick it in your little jar of water, and do it.

Well, I did that quite regularly, I mean I always did my little things that I was asked to do.

Were you drawing or were you...was it watercolour or what was it?

Watercolour, watercolour. But then again, I always remember they got...when I would pull my...I forget whether I went and pulled the rose out, and I think the water ran down on my watercolour, and he belted me across the ear for that, which I didn't like at all because I was pretty good at it, even in those days, and I've never forgotten him for that because it was an accident, you know, I mean it wasn't... I mean I loved doing the art things, so for someone to belt you for that did not please me at all, and I still remember it with resentment. And then of course, he tried to teach us a bit about lettering, which he was quite good at, and I can never letter very well, I could never keep the things level, I always used to get a bit of a tilt on. So I didn't do any good at lettering, but I was all right on the watercolours and things like that. But you never did any...I don't think he ever set anything for us to do, or taught interest in me about art, and perhaps he couldn't do that, taking all those different classes, probably too much for anybody. But I got interested in the school magazine, because I liked writing the stories, and so I did the cover for the school magazine, things like that.

Can you remember what you...?

Yes, Hiawatha, I copied one of my books with canoeing with Hiawatha, and I did that on the front page of my magazine, you see. And then of course Fred Crosswaite[ph] and myself vetted all the stories from the rest of the form you see, and we always put our own stories in as well, it was quite good for us, and we did illustrations and things. And then...

What, did you do drawings, illustrations?

We did do drawings, yes, yes, yes.

And did they have school printers?

Oh no, it was all hand done.

Oh I see, I see, I see.

There was one magazine for each form, each form had its own magazine, I think we were 2a or something and we did this. And...what was I talking about?

About the art classes and the lettering and...

Oh yes. And then of course at Christmas we would have to do Christmas cards and all the rest of it, and I did that, but I never got first, I was always second, because of my printing,

because if I printed 'Happy Christmas' it was never level you see. And old Frank Unitt had a wonderful print, it looked absolutely glorious, and he always got first. I mean he wasn't as good as me really. (laughs) He could just print better than me.

And can you remember what design, did you do...were they religious, your Christmas cards?

No, no, I usually did the holly and things like that. Didn't do religious things.

You didn't do anything like linocuts or anything like that?

Oh no, we never had any tools of any kind, no, unfortunately.

And did you draw, or paint, any figures at that point?

No.

You didn't do any people?

Nothing like that, no, no. No no, it was always flowers and things like that, never did anything else. I don't remember anything more about the art than Terence Cuneo's posters, and a little bit of lettering, and watercolours of flowers; I don't remember any... You only got a short time at it, you know.

And did you look forward to it, I mean, consciously or it just sort of came along?

No no, it was just another class. But I looked forward to play-time, and eat your sandwich that you had brought with you.

And did you mix...you were saying you went to the boys' school and the girls' school was next door, did you mix at play-time?

No.

No, that was completely separate.

No, no we used to climb on the wall and watch them playing basketball some evenings when they played a match. And we used to accompany them, I used to take one to school on the bar of my bike, Joan Hackett, I used to take her on the bar of my bike to school, because she

was a neighbour, and she would play five stones with me, she was a good player of five stones.

And then, so your...the uncles had all departed into their own ménages.

They were married and got children and...

But did you keep up with them all?

Oh yes. My Uncle Fred lived at Coventry, my Uncle Tom lived at Warwick, or Emscoat which is between Leamington and Warwick, and my Uncle Don actually lived in Leamington, not far from his office. So I saw them quite regularly.

And your grandfather was still living, was he?

My grandfather died when I was about, oh I don't know whether I was eleven or twelve.

And do you remember that?

Oh yes.

What happened?

I was alone in the house with him so I remember it quite well. My grandmother was out night-nursing, she was up the road nursing some lady where she had been for about nine months, and my grandfather had taken to his bed, he often had to have a bit of a spell in bed, but he was quite a good, well-built chap but he had this stroke down the one side which had affected him, and he took to his bed, and the day before we felt he was much better because he had his boiled pudding, and he had eaten it, and he really enjoyed it, and we thought, well he's getting much better. And so, I heard him knocking in the morning, I must have took a bit of time to wake up, and I went down, and he said, 'Give me a drink'. And I could only find some lemonade, so I tried to give him the lemonade, which he had a job to drink, and I thought he had just fainted you see, and I went and fetched my gran, because I had to go and do my paper round, so I fetched my gran, knocked them up at the house where she was, and she came, and I said my grandad was ill. And she came down - oh and I had to go to the doctor's, fetch the doctor, and the doctor came, and he told me gran that he was dead. And I had to go and do my paper round, and that was that. So, it just...

What, the doctor told that...

Told Gran that he was dead, yes.

So you were the last person to see him.

Yes, I was the last person to deal with him. But I didn't know, I wouldn't know what to do you see, if someone...you don't know how to deal with anything like that.

No. And so do you remember the funeral, and do you remember what went on?

I don't remember the funeral. It's funny, I don't...

You probably weren't allowed to go to it or something, do you think?

I don't remember the funeral at all. All I remembered was that incident, and fetching my gran, and that was it.

And you don't remember people coming to the house or anything like that?

No, no. Well I had to carry on as normal you see.

As normal, yes.

I would be doing my round in the morning and in the evening, and still doing the washing deliveries. And so I never remembered...I've always had a way of not remembering things I didn't want to remember.

Yes, yes. And, you know when you said that he had had that stroke, and, was his speech affected?

Yes it was affected.

Yes. And sort of, it was one side?

Yes. You could under...I could understand him quite well, but it was affected slightly. But of course he couldn't...he couldn't work like he would have liked to work; he would do odd jobs, he would do odd jobs for people, like getting the coal up at Miss Denny's up Binswood

Avenue, and when he couldn't do it I used to go and do it, used to do that on my evening round, go and get the coal in for them.

And when he died, did your grandmother, did you notice, did she miss him? I mean did she sort of just get on with it, or...?

She just...she had to go back to night-nursing the next night, didn't she, you can't...that's the only income of the, was the 30 shillings she earned, you see, and my newspaper money I think was about 4s.6d., which I used to give her half a crown of you see.

And so there was just you two in the house after that was there?

Just us two, yes, that's right.

End of F4313 Side A

F4313 Side B

I was just wondering, is there anybody among adults who made a lasting impression on you during your school-days, apart from the family that we've talked about, and apart from the teachers you've mentioned, but, anybody else that came into your life at that point?

No I don't think I had any adults I looked up to particularly. My uncles were the great, my Uncle Fred was a great, always I looked up to him because he was a good cricketer, and a good footballer. Certain people had style, but I didn't look up to them as, in the sense of, in the way in which you are putting the question to me, they were people who I remember because of their particular personalities I think. Like Nobble Davies, it was fantastic to go to the cinema with him.

And who was he?

Nobble Davies? Well he lived just down the street, round the corner from me, but he was a waif-and-stray, he was living with a family, the Reids, and he lived with the Reids, and he was a loner really but he, when we went to the cinema for instance, which meant twopence to go in, when he got to the counter he would say, 'Ditto repeato', which I thought was fantastic, because he had lovely long sideburns and a little Bill Sykes cap with a button on top, you know, and flannel trousers, very wide. 'Ditto repeato' he would say, and I always remember that, I was very small compared with him.

And what age was he? I mean how much older was he than you?

Well he probably would be, probably ten years older than me, but, we were with a big chap going into the cinema you see. And he was a wonderful character, and he played goal for us I think on occasions, when Modder Aitken retired, and he was very good. And then, who was the centre-forward? He was another...Tiger Tim was the centre-forward, wonderful player, used to run himself into the ground; never fit enough because I don't think he got enough to eat, and he used to drive his dad's taxi, which was a Crossley with a wonderful gold or brass radiator, and big headlamps on, all brass, and he used to drive that for his father, and do little jobs, do taxiing for him. Tiger Tim. But people like that I respected, they were my guidance, because they...and Pisa Green, who ran, who was a runner, a real good athlete, and he, I mean we used to make money on him, because...I mean talk about athletics now, I mean they used to run for money, those boys from the poor families.

What, did they run cross-country you mean, or on a track?

No, track, run for money, it was gambling, people would back Pisa Green against somebody from somewhere else, and that was a regular thing, like the whippet racing on Sunday morning was also the same, it was all gambling. It's how people entertained themselves then. So I don't have any other personalities. I mean Anthony Eden used to use our front room for the elections; I mean we didn't vote bloody Conservative, but I mean he used the front room because they paid us ten bob for it.

Did he really? What, he used to come in?

Yes, he used to use it, because the school was the election place, and we had all these posters on our window, and he used that as his sort of office place.

Oh right. Oh that's interesting. Did he speak to you?

Oh yes he did, give us, I think he gave ten shillings to the allotment society, you know, something like that. Oh yes, he used it all the time when he was there. He stood for Warwick and Leamington. But you know, I mean, none of those kind of people impressed me. I think one chap outstanding was the Bible class chap we used to go to on Sundays, he was quite good, and, I've forgotten his name now, which is terrible, I always used to know it, but he used to run a Bible class for all us boys who were getting up to 18, 17 and 18, and he was very kind to us.

What, and you used to go...did you used to go until you were quite old then?

Yes, Sunday afternoons, yes, because he was such a nice chap, that's why we went.

Mm. So you knew all the...

Skipper, he was Skipper somebody. We used to go to his house too and he used to entertain us and things.

So you used to know all the Bible stories off pat, did you?

Oh in those days, yes, yes. And, I was also in the Wolf Cubs too.

God, you were so busy.

I forgot that. Yes, I was the senior sixer, three rings on there, in the Wolf Cubs, and that's when I was very young of course, I had forgotten that, I was in the Wolf Cubs. And then I, of course then I joined the Boy Scouts when you get, is it 11 or 12 you have to join the Boy Scouts?

I don't know I'm afraid.

Well in 1926 I was at the World Jamboree in Birkenhead, yes I remember that, the World Jamboree, Birkenhead, 1926.

What did that entail?

That was at Boy Scouts, and we met Baden-Powell, we all shook hands with each of the family, which connected us to Baden-Powell...

Like 'Auld Lang Syne' sort of thing.

Who was there, Baden-Powell was actually there you see.

Oh right.

And, we had Polish Boy Scouts, and that's when I learnt 'dobrynighty' ['DOBRANOC'] or something, was goodnight in Polish, and they were next-door to us. And they were amazed at our food. I remember we had hard tack biscuits, and the Poles put two sledgehammers and the biscuits between them, because they had never seen anything so hard in their lives, you know; two sledgehammers and the biscuit crossed outside their tent. (laughs) Which I thought was very good. And that's how I met Annie Pearce[ph], she was a Girl Guide, that's right.

Oh there were Girl Guides as well as Boy Scouts?

I don't know whether they were actually there, but she came into our tent to see some of the boys, she would only be about 12 I suppose, and someone spotted her, and I was the one who was responsible, seeing this chap coming I had to take a long while undoing the flaps so that they could out through the back, I had to take my time and make lots of mistakes. And of course when he came in, she had gone, which was...I always remember Annie Pearce, that was the only time I ever met her. (laughs) From Chester I think, something like that. So, and I know I wore my Uncle Fred's Boy Scout shirt, because he had been a King's Scout or

something, and it had every medal, every badge it was possible to get, so if you...and it had been washed so many times, his shirt, by the time I got it it was...I hadn't got any Scout badges at all, so my gran had to take them all off and I had all these marks everywhere where the stars had been, and nothing at all. (laughing) It looked pretty terrible, but you know, one couldn't afford another shirt and it had to do. And then of course I failed as a Boy Scout really, and I gradually got reduced to the Swift Patrol, which was the most unreliable I think, simply because I had already got interested in girls, and snooker and cigarettes.

And what age was this then?

About 14. I mean if you go to work...

When you were about to leave school?

If you go to work you get interested in...and I had joined the cycling club.

Oh yes.

And once you do that, I'm afraid the old Boy Scouts, knots and things began to get a little bit...I wasn't able...I didn't have the proper keenness for it, and yet I didn't want to leave it because it had been a family tradition, but in the end I did of course. Well I went camping with them and things like that, to Wellesbourne, we went camping in Wellesbourne, and we used to go and push the truck in from the camp-site to Wellesbourne and get the bread and the lardy cakes, which were fantastic, ooh, lardy cakes, so beautiful, fresh, you would open the bag.

What are they like compared to the saffron cake down here? Are they bit like that, or not?

Oh well they're very rich, and the sort of grease all goes to the bottom and makes them quite crisp when they're cooked like that, and they're so beautiful. Good lardy cakes aren't made nowadays. And we used to do that, and then we used to push the food back into the camp, and get on with the cheffing I think, cooking. but that was just a genuine experience which happened. And then of course when the cycling club became more interesting, and of course I went to work, and I had a good bike...

So, hold on, so when you...you always knew you were going to leave school at fourteen did you?

Well you had no choice, there was no choice.

Yes. So were you looking forward to leaving, or not particularly?

No I don't think I looked forward to it, it was...

Just something that...

It was so ordinarily accepted that it had become part of one's life, that you would go to work. So, I don't know how I went to work, but I certainly, what happened to me? I know I left school and I went to work, I think my first job was at Curry's cycle shop.

And there was a radio factory, no? Was that later?

Yes.

OK, so Curry's, right.

Yes, I went to work at Curry's. I don't know how I got the job, but I know...I wanted to change jobs once. I think my mother came with me to Harris's the grocer's, a very posh grocer's in Leamington where you could get everything, high-class stuff, treacle and everything. And of course the chap behind the counter gave me a list, because you had to be able to add up, and I had to write all this down and it was a penny-three-farthings, or one-and-three halfpence and all that you see. Well it's very difficult, he gave me all this list, and my mother, who couldn't add up anything really, was sort of embarrassing me while I was trying to add it up. And of course I made a mistake so I didn't get the job, and I think that's when I went over the road to Curry's where they didn't give me any difficult questions to answer there, and I did know a bit about radio, because I had taught myself, and I used to do the very amateur radio repairs, like I could test if a condenser had gone wrong I could put a new condenser in; if a valve had gone wrong. I knew how to do all the testing, very elementary testing in those days, because it was only about three valves, it was before superhets, anything like that. So you just ran your meter through things and if they didn't read you knew that it had gone dead, and you replaced the parts. And I could mend three-speed bikes and things like that, and I could put spokes in wheels, and straighten the wheels up, and put a new link in a chain. So I used to be the boy who cleaned the floor and waxed it, scrubbed it and then waxed it, and then cleaned the windows, and then did the repairs, charged the batteries. Killed the rats that we had caught in the night in their cage, and charged the batteries downstairs, and general sort of, do everything. Because there was a first assistant, and I was

just the errand boy, and I had a big bike with a carrier on the front, for delivering batteries and things like that. And then if people didn't pay I used to have to go and knock on their door and try and get the money, all the rotten jobs you got, you know. And they would open the door and then I would have to put my foot in quick, things like that. And then if they were girls they would definitely try to vamp you, I learnt that, if they were young ladies. I didn't...you don't believe these stories till you go to collect their money, and then they will try and vamp you so they didn't have to pay, which I found very embarrassing as a young bloke, so it didn't work on me, it just embarrassed me. And, so that was...and my Curry's experience was quite good really, because I used to have to deliver cycles too, so if someone came in and bought a bicycle on Saturday they would want it delivering, and I would have to ride out probably seven miles on my bike, pushing the other one you see, to deliver to the village.

Oh, very skilled, mm.

Well that was all right, but when I would get to the village, I always remember, I think it was Harbury I delivered this bike to, and there was a nice lady there, and she gave me something to eat, and she said, 'Now I've got some new parsnip wine,' she said, 'we've just had in.' Two or three glasses of parsnip wine, I had a job to ride back, fantastic it was. So, it was quite pleasurable really doing these jobs. So Curry's was quite good, because I did the window dressing there then; they found out I liked doing it, so I would then be involved in, because we had glass, curvilinear plate glass which went on three different shelves, and you were putting break blocks, electric bulbs, batteries, hubs, mudguards: you were using everything you've got in different areas, right to ball-bearings, so you make a tremendous display which takes ages to do on each shelf. And then down at the bottom you put the bigger things, then you close the door. Well unfortunately one day, one of the glass shelves went shoom! and everything crashed, you know, and that kind of thing happened, because you get, transport began to get heavier going through the streets. And then the other window used to be bicycles, and some later radios, but it was mainly bicycles in those days, and I used to do that with the crepe paper running streamers, and I learnt to make the crepe paper do different shapes, and I used to choose the colours and that.

Can you remember what colours?

Well, for Easter I used to use the yellow and green and that, but I used to use any colours I really wanted, out of the season. But I always did the windows, but I didn't...I don't know why I was asked to do them, I just did them. And, in fact I was very busy when I was at Curry's, and I quite enjoyed it, because, we were opposite Francis's, which was the other shop, compared with Woodward's where my mother worked; Francis's was just up another class,

really posh, a big store there, and all the girls who I liked very much then used to be undressing the models in the window and putting new underwear on them. Of course I used to love watching that, and they would be winking at me, cleaning my windows, you know. And it was sort of a great thing. In fact I went out with one or two of them, took them to the pictures and things like that, you know.

And were some of them ones you had known from school, or were they just new ones?

No, you knew practically all the girls in a little town like Leamington, because I used to go to the dances you see. I went to dances from when I was about 11 with my mother, to tea dances at the Blue Cafe, which was a leather floor...

Leather?

Green leather, deep green leather. The Blue Cafe. Well green-blue it was. And you used to go to the tea dances in the afternoon, because I learnt all the dances, like the black bottom and all that stuff. So I used to dance with my mother. And we used to go to the, oh God! what did we call them? The Pump Rooms, where Jan Bolenska and his orchestra used to play, used to go with my mother for that and then we had tea.

Can you remember any tunes of the time?

Oh no, I don't remember any tunes, I was only...I was more interested in the visual excitement, the look of the cakes, and the way... And I used to go with my mother to Bobby's too, which was another, had a lovely cafe there which overlooked the town hall and that, and the gardens.

What was Bobby's, a department store, another one?

Another department store, yes, really beautiful, and that, we had, used to go with Betty Oates too and my mother's friend, and they were girlfriends together. And they used to have to take me, you know, when they went on a coach trip and things like that, they used to have to take me, that was my mother's responsibility. But they didn't take me on many coach trips because I was coach sick, so I didn't go on that, only the once I think.

Where did you go on the...?

Oxford.

Oh right. And did that make an impression on you, Oxford?

No, it made me ill, the coach trip. So, I don't think they took me again - well I didn't want to go. But, that was the way I spent my time. And then of course I started going to dances regularly when I was 14, in the evenings, or probably a bit before that actually, on Saturday nights, for ninepence at the Salisbury Hall, and that was of course a great event, because then you used to have to have the nerve to ask the girl you fancied if she would dance with you, and it could be terrible if she said no, and everybody would see you walk across the room to ask, which had probably taken you quite a bit of nerve, and then saying no. Oh, you had to come back and start all over again, and probably not ask anybody the rest of the night, you know, just stand around. And Coffee Ryman was playing in the band by this time you see, he was playing his sax, and we used to go to all the dances like that, and of course you learnt to do all the rumba and the foxtrot and all that gear. Then of course there was the question of which girl you could take home was the great thing, which was never easy, because you could probably never get the one you fancied.

And were any of them chaperoned at all? No, they were just there, no.

No no, you didn't... You see I don't think...I don't know why it was so different then, but it was different, that you went with a girl and you went with a girl, and it was as simple as that, and if you managed to get a kiss, that was about the maximum in those days, and one was thrilled to bits with that. Now where did we get to?

Well we got to, I mean, your first job at Curry's, we got to.

Oh yes, that's right. Well that lasted me, I don't know why I left Curry's, I wish I could remember why, I can't remember why I left, but I know that, I joined the Territorial Army when I was 17 I think then. You see I was at Curry's in about '33. I mean I saw the hunger march people come through you see, I saw all those marching.

Did you?

Yes. They had marched from Jarrow.

Mm, mm.

And they came through Leamington on their way to London. So I saw the hunger march people, spoke to some of them. I was working at Curry's then, that was '33 wasn't it?

Mhm.

And why I went, why I left Curry's I don't know.

But do you think, you left because you wanted to, or because they...?

I don't know, I've got a gap, I've got a gap in my mind at the moment about leaving Curry's, because I became...ah, well of course there was a lot of unemployment about at that time, and I became unemployed. I never got the sack from anywhere, but I changed jobs in desperate effort to keep going, and I think I went from Curry's...

Did you work in a baker?

I did work in a bake-house, but I can't remember whether I went... No I think I went from Curry's to the bake-house. Oh I was on the dole, I was on the dole, that's right, so I must have got the sack.

In those days could you get the dole if you got the sack?

Oh I don't know, I don't know, I don't remember enough about it. I know that to get the dole I had to go to evening classes.

Yes.

And so I went to my old school for evening classes, and that's where I did the...that we had to do some drawing, and then we drew, and they got some casts of sheep or something, and I did some drawing there in the evening, and that was...

Did you say casts of sheep?

Yes, sheep in...sheep, animal.

Yes, oh right, so, oh I see, a plaster cast.

It was a plaster cast was put in the middle, and you had to draw that, very interesting when you're on the dole and you had to go and do that just for the sake of getting your dole, you see. I mean it wasn't helping you very much to get a job. Obviously the teachers were taking the easiest way out. Anyway I did that, and...

Could that have been after...this is from an old chronology I've got from the thing, the Serpentine and Touring Exhibition. Radio factory, I've got...this has got, 1933-5, working in radio factory, a bakery and then the paint shop of Armstrong Whitworth's.

Yes you've got it right now. That's where I went, from Curry's to the radio factory; I didn't, I left, and I got this job in the radio factory, because I was interested in radio, and I wasn't getting anywhere at Curry's so I left eventually and went to the radio factory at Warwick, and there of course you always in practice, if short-time came, what they call short-time, as there wasn't much work about, then you were laid off, and there was no recompense in those days, or no redundancy pay or anything like that, you were just laid off. That was the way factories were run all over the country, they only used you when they wanted you, and then they didn't lose money, they just put you straight out. So I worked at the radio factory, I don't know, probably a couple of years I think, and that was very interesting, because I did have an interesting experience there, which I think was valuable to me, I mean now this is with hindsight, I didn't think about it so much at the time, but it was also, it was the Eagle factory in Saltisford, Warwick, which made, the main factory made the cabins for lorries, the cabs for lorries, so, you know, like you see Harrods cabs which are their special design, they made special design cabs for everybody, whether it was for dust-carts, or whether it was for carrying things. And so, I used to have to walk through that part to go to the bit where they made radios, just a small area where they made radios, and I remember seeing people come in when the cab was there, and there was an old boy there who had a book of designs. Now I wasn't working with them, I was only walking through to my factory, and I would see them talking to the person who was ordering the cab, and he would be showing them the patterns of radiator, the lettering and the colours, and I always thought that was a marvellous job, but of course it was nothing to do with me and that factory belonged to the firm but it was nothing to do with me. But I always remember looking at those designs on the cabs as a matter of interest, because all I did was work with radios when I got up there, just put more components on; all the girls were putting components on, and I would solder them up, or I would put the components on and the girls soldered them up. And we did those, and I was quite busy there because I got paid a penny, or three-halfpence a set I think; originally it was a penny-three-farthings I think. And then I worked too hard because I wanted to buy my racing bike, because I had joined the club and I wanted to get a Dawes racing bike, and I wanted special handlebars and lightweight and all that. So I worked too fast, and the girls, two or three girls

who worked before me soldered up, and we got a bit of extra money in about a month, and so the foreman said, 'I shall have to reduce your pay, you're earning too much'. So they then gave less, three-halfpence instead of a penny-three-farthings a set, because I had earned enough to buy my bike you see, which I needed 30 shillings or something more to buy this bike. So I had my racing bike anyway, but I lost out really. And then, of course they used to just advertise the set in, say, the 'News of the World', the radio set we were making, at a special price, £5 or £3.19.6d., and we just, I assembled, the girls soldered, then the boy at the end put them in the cabinet and screwed them up. And we had all kinds of problems, because the girls in another part used to make the coils you see, and we found we were getting verdigris on the coils, and we thought they might have been eating apples sometimes, which...

You were getting what on the coils?

Verdigris, green.

Oh yes, yes yes.

Which on the wiring, because they're very fine wires they were handling, and you couldn't help but handle them in the middle, although they weren't supposed to. Then we found out that it was the periods that were causing the trouble; they thought it was the apple they were eating or something. So, they had to wear gloves then, and then of course you can't handle the fine wires as well. So there was all that kind of complication. Because if you get a fault it goes right through the whole lot you see. So we had all that. And that's when I met a little girl there then who I fell for, I was actually doing this, came from Warwick, and, I can't remember her name now, but I know we had a nice time for a bit. And then the cycling club of course took a lot of my time, because we got into riding 50 miles you know, and the chap who sprayed the cabinets was a crack rider, and he could do the 50 miles in I think 2.13, which was very good in those days, there was no dérailleur gears or anything like that, but you did have two gears, one on one side of the wheel and one on the other, so you could take, if you knew it was a hilly part you could take the wheel off, switch it round and get the other gear on you see. And I used to go in and train every Wednesday night we used to do this fast ride to Southam, and we used to only drink milk, and, I don't know why, tomato I think we had, we were trying to be very fit, you know, and ride and race like hell. And I did, I took about 2½ hours to do the 50, I was no good, 2.36, I was hopeless you see, so I became really, I used to give out the rice pudding and that, I would be their marshal of the race, and when they came past me they would get the rice pudding and a drink and that, you know, on Sunday mornings that was. And then of course they allowed girls to join the club on

Sundays, and that was the finish of me, I used to go on the 100 miles on the Sunday, because the girls went on it.

End of F4313 Side B

F4314 Side A

[Terry Frost interview at his house in Newlyn on the 20th of November 1994. Tape Three.]

So yesterday we finished talking when you described...you described your job in the factory that made the radio sets.

That's right.

And you had also been talking about when you were joining the cycle club, when you were a member of the cycle club, and the person who sprayed the cabs of the lorries had been a terrific racer, and you had gone and you had dolled out rice pudding and things on the races.

That's right, yes. And I had looked at the chap who had the book of designs for the lorries which interested me, only in passing as it were, I never even spoke to him but I did look while he was showing people. And also I saw all the lorries that were being painted. And after that experience, I forget what I did next from the lorries actually; I don't know whether I went...I think we got...yes we were out of work for a time.

Had you...the bakery, did you go the bakery?

Oh yes I went to the bakery, but I'm not exactly sure when it was.

Oh well it doesn't matter too much.

No it doesn't matter but I know I went to the bakery, I worked, that was Cadina, I worked there for some time making...the main job of course was cleaning up, because we had a chef, the head chef was a lady, and then we had a male chef, second chef he was, and I suppose I was dressed in whites so I was probably a third chef, but all I did was clean the trays, put the jam in the doughnuts, and put the crosses on the hot cross buns and things like that. And help myself to big slabs of chocolate which we had to break up to do the chocolate biscuits, and also get a sort of little pocket full of walnuts, because I used to have to handle them as well. I got very white in the end from eating so much cream, that every time I put the cream and jam in the doughnuts I gave one to myself. It became quite interesting. And, oh it was quite a good job, because the decoration of all the cakes was done, I didn't do that but I did just put the jam in and things like that, but the decoration was done by the head chef, and they were marvellous. And the big scene for me in those days was to put all my white gear on and carry them down the town to the Pump Room gardens, which is where I used to go with my mother.

Now this time I was carrying the tray like that down The Parade, and I used to borrow the chef's hat, all the gear, and go down and take them in to the restaurant, because they had rung up specially because they had run out of certain cakes. I used to feel like the real prima donna going in there, you know, and all the girls that I knew of course I hoped they would see me. (laughs) But that was absolutely true, I used to do that on occasions. And then of course...

And...sorry...go on.

I don't know what happened when I left there. And we used to start about 4 in the morning you see and work till about 2 or 3. And then, I know, from there I think I went to the aircraft factory.

Right. Can I just ask you something before we get to the aircraft factory. Your mother meanwhile was starting a second family was she? Or she had started?

That's right. I'm not sure when it...I'm not sure when it was. I don't remember how old he is, he's younger than me.

But you didn't mind that and it didn't really affect you because you were out with...

Well because I was living with my gran, and I didn't see much of it at all, saw very little of it.

The baby?

Yes.

Yes. But you saw...you kept in touch with your mother?

Oh yes. Sundays for tea, yes.

Yes, yes. And the stepfather you didn't object to?

Oh no, he was marvellous, a marvellous chap. Oh it was a good family, I used to go and stay there some weekends and things like that, no problem at all. But I don't remember the baby incident because I think I was very busy at that age. I mean I had got my own little problems with all the girls and things, work. You see in those days you got up very early in the morning to get to work, and then you had to play your cricket or your football, and you had to do your flirting and you had to go to your dances, so there was no time for...and then you

played snooker, I played in the table-tennis league, the snooker league, and I went to a dance every...every dance that was going, so, you didn't have any time to mess about. And I had a motorbike to keep tuning up, and all the rest of it. Total occupation. No time to think of politics or anything.

OK. And, about the girls then that you were taking out. What did you used to do? Did you go to the cinema mainly and things like that?

I don't think I took many girls to the cinema, no. I would take them to a dance...

Right, oh right, I see, yes.

More interested in dancing.

Yes, yes.

And of course I did a lot of cycling which was also, Sundays.

And did the girls go in the cycling club?

There were some of them in the cycling club, yes, that's the reason I...my racing side fell off and went for the hundred-mile cycle on a Sunday instead.

Right. OK. And then, so then you said that the paint shop, the Armstrong Whitworth aircraft factory.

Well that was my...I think that was my last job before the war, because Sergeant Hadland of the Territorial Army that I was in knew I was out of work, and he said he could get me a job at Coventry, at, well, Baginton it was called I think, the area. And so I went over to the Armstrong Whitworth and I did get, he got me a job there in the paint shop, when I saw my targets, which I didn't realise that Jasper Johns was going to do many many years later, but I worked in the shop where they painted the targets on the wings.

And did you actually paint the target itself?

No, I made the tea, fetched the milk and mixed the paint and things, but I didn't, I wasn't allowed to touch the things. They were painted with dope first, because...

What's dope?

Well dope is what you put on the material that the wings are made of, because they have to be protected obviously against the weather, and the dope was very dangerous. We had to drink about two pints of milk a day because of the dope.

What, was it full of lead or...? No.

Well we worked at, I think something like 90 degrees or something like that, and it was a very very hot workshop; only two men and me in there, and one of them did the targets. And then eventually I did paint all the different colours for the wiring, which I think, when I think back on it, core! how important that must be in an aircraft. But I painted the colours in the, well I've forgotten which bomber it was now, isn't that terrible. But I did paint, in a special part which was boarded off, was a secret area of the place, because they were...the Wellington bomber, they were making the bomber, you know, at the time when the newspapers were saying, no war this year, or ever, kind of thing.

What are we, 1938?

1938. I was in there actually painting the electrical, some were blue and some were red and they had to be painted and marked in their different colours. So I'm sitting in this bomber on my own doing this, feeling like a king, wacking great machine, and then I was, because I had been in that area I was allowed on the runway when it went off for its first flight with a test pilot.

Oh that is interesting.

So that was very exciting to see that go up and come down again, because I had seen it started being built from wood, the first model, right through to the final thing you see. But I used to also work in the, do all the lead for the tubes, the metal tubes that make the body of the aircraft, and those used to have to be dipped in lead you see, inside and out, and that was a lousy job, dealing with lead like that. Probably why I've got a cough. That was also at high temperature. So I worked in the paint shop of the thing.

Right. And did the designer...was it Frank Whittle who designed...? No.

No no no, these were not...the jet engine hadn't been invented, they were still normal propeller. And we were also building the...I think it was a Hurricane fighter, and they were

being assembled and then taken to pieces again and put down on the ground, buried, you know, because we weren't supposed to be...we were all pretending not to do it I suppose. Politically I wasn't interested; for me it was a job.

And were you told...were you given something to sign, or were you just told, you do not speak about the work you are doing?

No, no no no, I don't think...I think...I don't remember that at all, I don't remember that. I think one just accepted that as part and parcel... The only time we ever had any trouble was when some silly bugger came round doing a time-and-motion study or something, and wanted to stop us all making tea at 11 o'clock or something. Well of course I mean, chaps had been coming in for years to work with their can, their special can, which has a lid on top which you drink out of, and they brought their tea wrapped up, and their sugar, and I used to have to go and fill all those cans up for them. Well, that's the only time I've ever been on strike, we all came out immediately. I mean, how impossible people are psychologically to get it all wrong, because if you do that to a working man, he will slow the factory up, not just for that ten-minute tea break, for the whole of the bloody day and every week afterwards. You never work like that with people. Anyway that was my first strike.

And then, so, you had joined up in the Territorials by that stage?

I was in the Territorials with Sergeant Hadland, I was in the Territorials. I was in the Territorials when I was 17.

Right. So what did that involve? Did that involve weekends going...?

It involved weekends, yes, Sunday mornings, riding, because we were cavalry, so, and it involved Wednesday nights, and of course it involved going on camping trips. And I was up in Northumberland or Cumberland, or, I've forgotten now where it is, Cumberland or Northumberland - Cumberland, that's right, it was the east coast, where people had...I met young men who had never been to work and they were 21, it was the time of the Depression, and that's why we were sent up there, to spend some money. I think the brigade was sent up there, so that would be the Shropshires and various...

So what was the regiment that you were affiliated to?

The Warwickshire, the Warwickshire Yeomanry I was.

Right.

So, we were all sent up to the east coast because that took some money to that area where there had been no work at all, and that was my first time I was talking to a young chap who said he had never had a job and he was 21. And we found that extremely interesting. Haltwhistle, is that on the east? No, I can't remember the name of the place. And, I know that fish and chips and peas were about sixpence the lot, you know, wonderful, and also the first time I experienced square dancing I think, which was...used to be done in clogs and that kind, but we were actually doing it, being taught it in...

Oh right, with a caller sort of thing, counting out?

Yes, in the village hall. It was the first time I had experienced that. But also we noticed, you couldn't take any of the girls home, their fathers or their mothers would always come to meet them. They were just so desperate for work and frightened the girls would get pregnant and all that kind of, which they would have done of course. So, that was an interesting experience, and affected my political leanings tremendously.

And did you also have to do sort of drill and things like that in the Territorials?

Oh well, just the normal...yes you did, you did...we had a rifle range, and we would do a lot of riding on Sunday mornings, because most of the officers were people like Dickie Samuel, Lord Bearsted, and Gilbey who was...and one of the Vesteys, I've forgotten his name now. Anyway they were all hunting people, so we had plenty of good horses in Warwickshire, and on Sunday mornings we used to go on our training on horseback, and I actually won the recruits prize on horseback.

Did you? What did you have to do?

We had to do the normal riding school arrangements, with passage, you know, and all the rest of it, dressage, you know. And I actually got...I would have won the regimental prize too, but unfortunately my horse got some shit on it, just a bit of straw on its backside that I had missed somewhere, or so, and that lost me the final in the brigade, and I was very upset about that, because I wanted to win it.

And so did you have to clean its pack and groom it and everything?

Oh yes, everything had to be...

And as well as your own uniform?

Oh yes, absolutely immaculate you had to... So, I loved horse riding, possibly because I knew my father was a horseman, and my grandfather was, but I naturally, I had a natural long leg and could grip on horses. I liked riding, bareback or with a saddle, it didn't worry me.

And so, did you think that you were actually...did you realise the war was brewing up? Did you think this was a means to an end, that you were in the TA, or was it a...?

Well I dare say, I think I did it for the holidays, to get away on a holiday, and also to get the horse rides. And, I don't think at the age, at the age I was, that I thought much about war. It's terrible, one is so romantic and busy.

And everybody thought that the Great War was the war to end all wars.

Yes, nobody thought there would be a war I don't think. I mean, you don't know, and I didn't know enough about it, or didn't think enough about it. I was too busy enjoying myself I think.

Yes.

I mean I had got a job, and I was busy playing cricket and playing soccer, and everything that was possible. I had a shock when we were called up.

Yes, it must have been. And so, at some point you had...when you were unemployed, when you...I think you mentioned last time you attended Birmingham Art School evening classes.

No not when I was unemployed, no.

Oh right, I thought you had to do that...oh when you were on the dole?

That's right. You had to attend the local art school when you were on the dole.

Yes. But, we're not quite sure when that was. I mean yesterday you said it might have been between the job, your first job at Curry's and the job in the radio factory, didn't you, but then you thought it might not have been.

Well I've got confused about that. I had seven different jobs.

Yes, yes.

I got confused about them.

But when you were on the dole and were attending these classes, you just drew casts of sheep and things.

That's right, yes that's it.

So then, the time came when you were called up. How did that, what happened exactly?

Well, you just had to report to the local depot, which was in Warwick, and I was in Coventry when I heard that it was up, and we had to get back and report, which I did, and that meant you were immediately, because you were in the Territorial Army you were called up immediately, and then it was just a question of waiting till they got themselves organised a bit to move you off into, I think we went to Thorsby Park, Nottinghamshire.

And you were now about 24, were you?

That's right, yes. And we had...all the horses were there, and we slept in the stables etcetera, and Thorsby Park was a big, a really big site and it was somebody's castle.

Was it sort of requisitioned then was it?

Yes. And we used the stables for sleeping in, and the horses of course were on the line outside, and that's where we sort of carried on training until we were then shipped off to somewhere else. I mean the thing was just, what is normally done in wartime, carry on training.

Yes, so, but the horses, I mean, you weren't going to take horses with you, were you?

Oh yes we were, yes. You see...

Not tanks?

You must remember that our generals were still in the First World War attitude, so horses were still, were king as far as they were concerned. And we took the horses to France, to...we went...we must have gone by boat, and we landed in Marseilles.

Oh I see, you did it down the bottom. Oh I see, I was getting...yes, I see.

We landed in Marseilles.

When was this then, what date was this?

I should think it would be...well the war started in September, and I reckon it was just before Christmas, I'm not absolutely sure.

Right. So when was Dunkirk then?

Oh that's...that's later, that was before any of that.

No I know, no, no no, because...

We were down in the south of France, Aubagne, which is where, you get a beautiful view of Monte Sainte-Victoire of Cézanne.

Mm.

But of course I had never heard of Cézanne and so I never knew anything about that.

No. So where was it again you went?

Aubagne, AUBAGNE, which is down in, near...

Oh yes, in Provence, sort of...yes, that Pagnol.

It's where we took the horses, Marseilles to there. And then we spent some time training there, well it was very very cold, I mean the poor old horses, the horse blankets were frozen stiff it was that cold down there, and we were in tents, which wasn't very pleasant either.

Is it very mountainous down there?

Oh yes, mountains, we could see Monte Sainte-Victoire from where we were. And it was quite interesting, because I enjoyed going into Marseilles, which I had never expected to go anywhere like that, and it's a very powerful and interesting city.

A port, a port and sailors and...

And brothels and everything.

Yes, I was going to say that, yes.

It's got the whole lot, it's totally complete, you know. And so, it was my first experience of that kind of life, and it was very interesting, in more ways than one. And so, we were eventually moved from there, and we took the horses through the Bay of Biscay to Palestine as it was then, you see. And that's when I learnt that horses really can't be sick, and they get terribly upset, because they were right down in the hold, the bottom of the hold there, and they were desperate; they looked as if they were grinning but they really felt very ill, and a lot of them caught the flu, because it was hot down there and the conditions were unbearable, and the poor things, we had to throw quite a few overboard that died you see. And then we had to clean them out every morning, which was quite a job, because you're bringing bags of wet horse manure up on your backs, you only wore your shorts or your bathing costume, and you were absolutely covered in it, because you've got to fling it on your back, carry it up about three flights: well they're not stairways, they're just carpet on a sort of raft thing, you walk up there, and you've got to test for wind to see before you throw it over, and then it goes wow! Until you learnt the tricks of the trade, it can be a hell a hell of a mess. And then of course we had to...then we had a warning about that, we had to do it...now what happened? There was some reason...we were a bit frightened that the submarines would spot it. I think we had to do it absolutely in the dark, which... And that went on, and that was quite an exhausting business getting to Palestine. And when we arrived there of course the horses were all unloaded, and that was very difficult to get them off, because they would not come up those ramps you see, they didn't like them at all, and they had had a terrible journey. And I know that, one of them which we couldn't get to move at all, and the farrier sergeant-major eventually lost his patience and gave it a real good belt, and it came up so fast it went...I was leading it, it went straight over the top of me, it took me off behind it, really frightening. Well we had to get them all off you see, two or three hundred horses. And then we had to get them into the railway, open railway trucks, and you've got to get six in at each end, which is very difficult, there's room for about four really, so what you were doing is sandwiching two of them[??]. Can you imagine what the poor horses felt like?

I know, it's bad enough getting more.

The heat is on now, the sun is really fantastic. And you can buy a bag of oranges for a shilling. Oh we've got on, shall we switch it off?

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Well eventually we took the horses on the train to our first camp, which I think was Alfuma, don't know why I should remember that name, and we took our horses to our first camp, and from there we did quite a lot of training, riding, map-reading and finding one's way around to various establish...there were the different races of, the Druze, and there were the Jewish settlements, as well as the different Arab settlements which were quite different from each other, politically as it were. And we used to go into various villages and meet the Mukta, who was like the Mayor, and we used to have to drink their coffee, because we were told that that was the thing to do, and of course it was very thick and black which we weren't used to at all, we were tea drinkers, but you had to do it, and your sugar was a piece of sugar cane which they always sucked. So, one was learning quite a bit. And then of course we were on the Lebanese border at one stage, and there was a lot of drug smuggling going on, and we used to have to patrol that border on horseback, and you would find them coming over with their camels from different places, and obviously one had to see what they were bringing over. And, well of course if they gave you 24 eggs they could bring what the hell they liked over, because I mean we didn't take drugs in those days and it was only their local sort of hashish they smoked or something, and we never worried about it as long as we got our pay-off, and I should imagine that goes on today.

Mm, mm. And so, did you know what you were training for? I mean there was no battle, potential battle there, was there? Was there?

No, there was no potential battle there. The thing we were still doing, I mean you must remember, you don't just do your map-reading, which is absolutely important, but there are the tactics of a cavalry which have to be practised, and also there are the terrific sort of musketry drill, which means you get first-class shots and all the rest of it. And you've got to be efficient on your machine-guns, which, we had the old Hodgkiss[ph] in those days; you've got to know how to, if anything goes wrong, how to do a quick check on it. All that kind of training went on.

So you had machine-gun things?[??]

Oh yes, and machine-guns.

You didn't have ordinary things with bayonets on the end?

Oh yes, we had...

Rifles.

Oh yes, you had rifles, yes, but you carry that on the side of your saddle you see, so, it's a different system. And you had a sword in the cavalry you see.

Oh yes.

But you had the machine-gun as well, which you would carry on the donkeys and things. So the whole thing was a very good training, and quite interesting first to be in a new country; it was damned hot of course. And then of course, I did a bit of rough riding, because I became a rough riding corporal, so I used to help train the chaps on riding and that, but then I decided, because I got sent on a gas course to Alexandria, things like that...

Egypt?

Yes, I decided to, there was volunteers wanted for various things, and the Commandos happened to be one of them, and I was getting into trouble with the sergeant-major - well I had always been in trouble with him really, right from the word go, in Thorsby Park, because being an innocent Territorial, which means civilian, and we had a lot of reservists mixed with us, when he said, 'Any questions?' on his first morning, I asked him some, because I hadn't understood what he had said. Well, I learnt that you never ask any...well that 'Any questions?' is a threat, only I didn't realise that, it means, 'Don't you bloody dare ask me anything, because I'll have you in bloody [INAUDIBLE], in jail straight away,' you know. And of course I didn't know that, I was a civilian, I thought if anybody said, 'Any questions?' you asked something. Bloody hell! Did I get a mouthful of British Army language, you know! Jesus! I had never heard anything like it in my life. 26 years in the...army. And from that moment I was in trouble with that sergeant-major. And I knew when I was sent on that gas course, this is why I think I got this throat, is that, I should have gone on a riders course but I learnt that he stopped me going on it, and got me put on that. And so I knew that I was never going to get anywhere at all, he had got a continual hate thing against me. I mean, I saw him come out of the bushes once and he caught me on something, you know. And so, it was a waste of time, and so I volunteered for the Commandos just to get away from him.

End of F4314 Side A

F4314 Side B

Right, from...so you went into the Commandos from Alexandria.

No, I went into the Commandos from Palestine.

From Palestine, right, right.

Which meant I was sent to, oh, somewhere up the desert, the base camp for the desert action in Egypt, I was sent to Egypt. And, we used to Alexandria on leave, but I certainly spent my time training in, Zigger Zag I think, it was near Zigger Zag, I can't remember all the names now, which is terrible. And there we were in 52nd Middle East Commandos actually trained at that spot, which was quite exciting; really it was, for me it was quite a shock because I'm with infantry men, who, infantry men are trained, they walk at a different pace when they're marching to cavalry men who are a much slower stride, and also their rifle drill is absolutely immaculate compared with ours, because ours is putting it into a holster, the big...and there of course it's all very smart, and their rifles things are absolutely dead tight. And of course the bayonet drill, the extra things which I hadn't been used to. And then of top of that we had unarmed combat, and the Commando knife, knuckle-duster affair. So we had a totally different set of training, which for me was quite tough, and I realised that infantry men are brilliantly trained in the sense of, it's parrot-fashion, everything is absolutely parrot-fashion, so that you don't have time to fear; you do what you are told, and if you don't do what you are told you're on a charge pretty quick. And I found that quite frightening at first, because, very casual really, the Territorials were, this military discipline, which is absolutely totally necessary. As soon as you come under real bullets, then that is when you need total and absolute discipline. I mean you still have initiative but you need discipline first. And I really found it, I remember writing to my half-brother - not to my half-brother, to my stepbrother, who was a captain, saying that discipline was absolutely essential, because I had been in action so I knew that unless you had people actually afraid that if they didn't do what they are told, rather than being afraid of the bullets, you know; it's a funny old mixture.

So when was actually the first action you saw then?

In Crete.

Right, yes, I've got that. So, then you...so we're probably...

No that wasn't the first action, what am I talking about? No, it was in Gonder in the, between the Sudan and the Abyssinian border as it were, where the Italians and the native troops had taken over.

Right.

And we were sent down there on the banks of the Nile, the blue Nile.

Right, so then, so the Italians were going to be pushed back to Italy and up?

Well they were being pushed back to Eritrea you see, and in fact they did, we actually did do some of the probing; we would go for about three days to get behind the enemy lines, and then perhaps surprise one of their battalion patrols or something like that, which was highly dangerous but nevertheless we did it, and then we would come back. The question is, finding your way in a jungle, which is not quite the same; it's no good having a bloody map in a jungle, because, if it's pitch black and it's a jungle, there's no footpaths, all you've got is the stars, if there's got any stars about. And we actually worked quite a lot on the stars, and I remember going to lectures in Cairo on the stars. Very difficult listening to a lecture in a marquee on a hot day, especially in the afternoon. Oh gosh, you had to keep your eyes open and your ears open, and I'm very glad we did have this, I thought, the silly old bugger telling us about the stars, but it was very interesting, because Adrian's belt, or Orion, actually, when you're...the distance we were off the Equator, which was not very far, it's very accurate, it's due east, so we knew that this, or at least I knew, as the corporal, that that was due east, and I knew where I had to go. If I had got that on my right shoulder I was doing the right direction back to where I had come from. And so I found the stars, and went back, we all learnt...only very elementary stuff but enough to get around. You knew whether you were going north, south, or east or west, which was very important.

And so...

Once the Italians had moved, on the run, we were pulled out, we were pulled back to Cairo.

Yes there's a picture isn't there of you in Cairo.

Yes, we pulled back to Ale actually is where our training, we pulled back near Ale. And we were there having a rest when the British Commandos came out.

What were you then if you weren't British? Sorry.

Oh well, we were formed in the Middle East.

Oh I see, right, right.

We were the first up, formed in the Middle East. The British Commandos came out, who had been training in Scotland, and the Crete thing came up because the Germans had overrun Greece and had started to tackle Crete. So, we had come back for a rest, but our CO, Colonel Wright I think it was, no Colonel Young, tossed up with the other Commandos who had come out from England to see who would go. You know, typical British sort of... And we won the toss, didn't we, so we didn't get our rest, and also I think the fact that we had been bloodied was important to them.

Yes.

And so we got whipped out smartly to Crete.

And that was what, January or so 1941 was it?

Yes, '41, and that was absolutely fatal, because by the time we had got there, because of various things with the fact that the, the Navy could be bombed so heavily by Stukas from Greece, that they never had a chance really; they had to get in to Crete by about 2 in the morning to turn the enemy out, because if there had been a light they would have been caught, absolutely trapped. And we saw those boats lying about all over the place, you know, that had been bombed. It was terrible. And we were whipped in and out pretty smartish, but the gales were so bad we couldn't land on a couple of occasions, so by the time we did land the job that we went to do was already all over. Maleme aerodrome had been taken by the Germans, so there was no way we could get it back then; there were only 200 of us anyway.

I see.

So we had to drop in on a thing, which we weren't really trained for, which was a defensive job just to let people get away, for about seven days we did it each day.

What did you have to do then?

Well you just dig in and try and hold up the German hoards that you could see being dropped by parachute by the thousand, and hear them coming singing up the road, there were 200 of

you spread over a very big area. Well you just held your fire until they got near, and then you found they were as frightened as you were. But it meant you pulled back every night, and, it was not a pleasant experience, but nevertheless... And then we couldn't get off Crete because there were so many demoralised troops who had come from Greece etcetera, and seemed something like 15,000 down, waiting for the boats that came to try and get the people off, while the New Zealanders and ourselves took turns at trying to hold the Germans back. Well when it came to it, we couldn't get our own boats; our own Commando boats were there, but we couldn't get to them because of all the other people, and I know our CO thought about fixing bayonets but there was no point in just a small number of us trying to go through all that lot, they wouldn't have it, they wanted to get off too, and they were demoralised and they hadn't got any arms, so we had to go and hold on till the very end, and that's how we ended up...

That's how you got captured.

Yes, because we couldn't go back any further, and we couldn't hold them up any more, because we were completely surrounded and being dive-bombed at the same time you see. So in the end we had to, we had to send the CO, we had to give up.

Yes. And so were you...did you feel very demoralised at that point, or were you so exhausted?

Yes.

Slightly relieved.

No, it is totally demoralising to be...because we had been doing very well really, we hadn't been beaten in a forward attack at all. You see when you've got aircraft, and you get fire coming from all round you, you know that, and there's nothing you can do about it, and you can see there's more and more of them coming, and more and more bombs being dropped on you, and you've got nowhere to go.

Right, because you're on an island.

There's the sea there you see. So, it was the only thing to do really, was to give up. It's quite demoralising.

So then, where were you taken when you were captured first?

Oh we were then marched back all the bloody way we had come, about 60 miles back to, near to Maleme actually, to work on the aerodrome, that was what they wanted all the chaps to do, to start filling in the craters etcetera. But that, we found the German troops who had been in action were not bad at all, but they didn't like it any more than we did; that was quite interesting. In fact we got on quite well with them really, under the circumstances.

And are we talking about, we're still in 1941 are we?

Yes.

June 1941.

May, May/June, yes, June that's right, yes. And that went on for, I think about six weeks or something, before we were moved to Greece, Salonika, and that was a totally different scene; once you were away from the troops that had been in action, then that was a different, a demoralising thing, and it was quite, I suppose deliberate policy that you are put in charge of Germans who are trained to demoralise you completely, to make you...it's a psychological thing, they don't want you trying to escape, they want to demoralise you and humiliate you as much as possible. And that's what goes on, once you're away from the fighting troops, who treat you as equal, most of them anyway.

Yes, because you have sort of respect.

Respect for each other. But once you are put in the hands of people who are trained to run concentration camps and prison camps, then you are treated like animals, I mean right from the start, no messing, it's quite deliberate. So you have to adjust yourself to another way of life, which most people manage to scheme a way round things to survive.

So, how long were you in Abyssinia then? Did you say Abyssinia? I mean Thessalonika, did you say?

Salonika, yes. Oh I couldn't tell you, it was probably two or three months I should imagine before we were moved to Germany, by train, and then we went in those coaches they put the horses in.

The horses in, yes, cattle trucks, mm.

Yes, and that's not pleasant.

No.

Because you are in there for days you see, and there's no facilities.

No, it must be terrible. Right, so then, did you go to Poland, was that where you went, or did you go straight to Germany?

I can't think where we went to originally. I think we went to Damendorf or somewhere like...somewhere not too far from Berlin, originally. Hell of a lot of train journeys, and a lot of marching till we got there. And we went to work then on, we went to work, I think it was on building a light railway somewhere, sort of laying sleepers and all that kind of lark. And we also did other jobs, like, on some farm, that's right, we dug a lot of soil, moved lots of soil.

What soil?

Well to make the ground...

Oh right, yes, yes, I see.

Agricultural land.

I see. And did you...it was your fellow Commandos, but all sorts of other people was it?

Oh a total mix-up by this time, yes, total mix-up.

And then, you got to the camp, the Stalag 383.

Yes, we went...

Is it 383? Yes.

Yes, we went from Damendorf I think it was to Poland, I can't remember the number of that camp but it was in a camp which was, it must have been on the old Polish-German border, because it was where people, I forget what they called them but they were, they had a special name for them, because they had the German and Polish language there you see. And that was very tough, that was a very tough crowd of people there, not at all a pleasant place to be.

And then eventually we were moved from there to 383, which was also another long journey on the train.

And, in between the time when you were first captured and the time you got to the 383, had you managed to communicate with home, had letters got from you there and...?

I think we had managed to...we had managed...yes we had been given cards at the first camp we were at to write home, yes. They came via the Red Cross I think.

Right.

We were given cards at the first camp, yes.

So your grandmother and your mother and everybody knew you were alive?

Oh yes, that's right, yes, that's right, yes, yes.

And did you do some letter-writing, you said you wrote to your half-brother, and did you do...?

Oh yes, but that was from...

That was behind the...I mean when you were in action.

Yes, that's right.

Yes, yes. But you hadn't got time to write any letters except for these cards?

No, we were only had cards, we were only given cards.

And how did you keep...I mean were you given proper rations?

What, as, because of the war?

Mm.

You were given rations, yes, and the limitation of course in what you get because that's only natural in wartime, and, I mean usually it was some sort of barley soup, and a loaf between ten or fourteen according to how many men in the room etcetera.

So then, the 383 camp.

Well the 383 was the last camp we went to, which was in Bavaria, and about 60 miles from Ragensberg I think, I'm not sure of that but it's somewhere in that area, and that was a very good, a different camp, because there were about 5,000 of us in that camp, and we, I think we had become accustomed to being prisoners of war, and had learnt to get the best out of the whole situation, inasmuch that we would...it was all NCOs, and we had started our own school, so that you could go to French lessons or math lessons, or salesmanship, anything you wanted to, mathematics, dancing lessons, slow, slow, quick-quick slow, I remember going to those. And chess. And we had our own theatre. And then you got several things like, there were Australians there and different nationalities who had joined the...we had the Spanish, some Spanish commandos with us, and you had the Irish club and the Welsh club and all these things grew up, and nationalities, and the Yorkshire boys got together for things, and so on. It was quite an interesting situation.

And how many of you were there in a hut?

Fourteen, fourteen in a hut. And then of course one kept yourself very busy, and I started to do French lessons I think, yes I did French lessons, and I did a bit of drawing, because somebody else did drawing in the room, and, a chap did caricatures and I tried to do caricatures and couldn't do it, but I could get a likeness, and that's, and then of course everybody wanted one, and that's how I started to do it, which in turn led me to sit for the local art school, the local art school! (laughs) There were half a dozen boys who had managed to get a hut out of the Germans, a broken-down hut, and they were using that on certain afternoons of the week to draw in, and paint in, and I went along to sit for them, and I saw what they were doing, and rightly or wrongly I thought to myself, well I could do better than that. So they let me go along then after I had sat for them, to paint. I did my first painting in there.

Was that in watercolour?

No, in oil.

In oil?

Yes, they gave me a tube of Prussian blue, and I think a yellow and a white, so, the painting was of a...a chap named Workman I think, had a big chest on him, and he was lying down on the table, and I got the big toe in my eye like that, and his chest coming up over the big toe, that was my point of view, and I didn't know at the time but of course it was about the worst perspectival problem you could have possibly had, and as I had never heard of the word perspective or anything like that at that time, I was naturally copying every shape, and it didn't work out too badly actually, but if I had been worried about perspective I might have got it all messed up you see, because you have to know it properly to use it. And so I did it by eye, and it didn't work out too badly, except the colour of course was outrageous really. But then you have to use the colours you've got, which is quite an interesting lesson, because any arts, you can paint a green portrait if you want to, or a blue portrait or a red, anything, you can do it in anything.

Yes, the tone...

You can do it in anything if you get it right. And I didn't know about that at the time, but I was using just the colours that I had been given, because they were the colours they didn't want, and so, they weren't flesh colours you see, they're not flesh colour at all. So, that probably was a very good lesson for me which I didn't know at the time, and from then on of course, because I could get a good likeness I did about 200 portraits of different people.

All in oils?

Mm, yes.

And was this figure, this man you drew with the big chest, was that a life drawing, was he clothed, unclothed, or what?

Well he had got some...I think he had got his pants on, shorts, something like that. And then of course...

So, can I...are we talking...have we got to 1942 now?

About '43 I should think.

Oh right.

'43 I should think, before we were in Stalag 383.

Right, and who...in this school, who was there, the chaps who had started their own art school?

Frankie Whetton, who was a teacher, or he became a teacher, I met him later, Frankie Whetton from Nottingham; Danny...not, Johnie Rowlands, a chap named Rowlands from New Zealand. I can't remember anybody else now. And then...I of course then drew all the time, everywhere, and I was drawing, sitting down drawing someone when a chap came along and said, 'Why don't you put it on?' And I looked up and that was the first time I met Adrian Heath, because I didn't know him, but then of course he got...he came to see what I was painting in my hut, where I was doing still life things, a bowl and tins and things like that, and he invited me along to see his work. And he was painting a chap named Meakin I think, who was one of his room-mates, and he was doing the figure. And of course Adrian had been to...

The Slade.

The Slade, and Stanhope Forbes, he knew a lot about painting. So he became my tutor as it were, unofficial tutor; never put any pressure on me but he always came to see what I was doing, and I used to go and see what he was doing. And that was the start of our friendship, and also encouraged me to carry on painting forever. And, so one, you know, I learnt not only to paint but to read, because we had people who had been quite well read, and we got one or two books through the Red Cross, and we had a particular chap named Challis who was a professional hobo, and he was a great reader and he used to read these books to us. So we had 'The Crowthers of Bandown' was one I remember there, which is a very good book, and then he read the Henry Ford biography and things like that. But, all very interesting stuff. And then there were other people taking exams you see, a chap was taking exams because he was to do with the railways, so he had to know the capitals of Estonia and all these places all over the world as part of his exam thing, so very often you would take, you would ask him the questions and you would have the map to give him the answers of what was the capital. Riga I think it was of Latvia or something, I'm not quite...I can't remember now, anyway, I knew all the capitals because I used to have to ask him the questions you see. Then the other chap behind me was doing 'Paradise Lost' so I used to have to check that, because he was taking something you see. And then another chap was doing German. Oh, I mean, people kept themselves busy you see, and I was trying to do French, and I had a Spaniard who used to make me tell him stories in French, which was...and he was a taxi driver in Paris, but he was a Spanish commando, a lad of 18 when he got caught, this taxi driver; he got out, he escaped into France. How did he get back in the commandos then? He must have come over to

England eventually and joined the commandos. This man, he was on the wrong side of the Civil War in Spain, Barosso. No, it was a great adventure, in amongst all the problems.

So can you remember, I mean what did you...did you exclusively talk about art and painting with Adrian Heath, or different things? Can you remember what you talked about?

Well Adrian was a great escaper, so we didn't talk about art all the time, no. We did...I really find it difficult to go back on that at the moment. I mean one had a full-time occupation of finding out how to survive and beat the German regulations. I mean there's always a way round things if you work at it. The point was that what with getting the news out, and copying passports for escapees, and making clothes etcetera, and sawing your hut up in little bits and still keeping it standing, you know, was...and brewing your own booze and things, I mean it was a full-time job. My diary used to be full, what with going and painting people's portraits, and I remember painting Mick Moore's portrait, and I didn't realise it but I was, when I was painting his portrait, it was all a fix really, he was the man who ran the camp market as it were, where you could buy anything from an elephant to German defences, he would get it for you. It would cost you cigarettes or a tin of bacon or a pair of socks, something. And I painted his portrait, which was the crème de la crème, you know, that was me, the top portrait painter obviously then doing... But I didn't realise, that was a bit of a fix, because I found out when I was doing somebody else's portrait in the same spot and I had been served with coffee and chocolate, which you couldn't get normally, but he ran the camp, unofficially, I then found out that they had a training place underneath me where the lads had got some weapons, so that was...you see, I was only being used, I didn't find out that till afterwards.

Mm, mm.

Because we had warning that we might, the SS were coming and taking spots around, because we knew the war was going badly for the Germans, and we were having to form into companies; it was all being done very secretly of course, as secretive as it can be. And I then realised that they were training underneath me, they had got these bases under. And I think they had machine-guns and things you see, which had been smuggled in via the French chap and all that. Because we had to form ourselves into working action...we had to be formed with a sergeant in charge of each group in case the Germans turned on us you see.

What, you had organised that yourselves?

That was organised...well it was ordered, we were in contact by radio and things which were built, you know, by the lads who had pinched the various things. And, so that was just...so my big day painting the portraits when I thought I must be the tops was only just a racket, I can see that now, just to keep the Germans at bay when they walked in that part, they would think, oh, you know...

I mean, a lot of...you've been asked about this a lot I know, the prisoner-of-war camp and everything, but what helped you...I mean you were obviously incredibly busy, so you kept sane that way I suppose, did you, mainly? What else did you do to help keep yourselves sane and...were there moments of quiet when you sort of thought, had time to think and...?

Well, I mean we had great discussion on the meal you were going to have when you got home. Everybody in the room lying on their bed in the dark would give either sexual delight, you know, having all the girls in the world, or going out for a marvellous meal, and what they were going to have when they got back. That I think was...people could tell marvellous stories. And of course some people could sing very well, and get near Christmas time they had some lovely sing-songs. And the poetry was quite important too, and music was quite important, with one or two records, and we could go to someone who had got a record player, and had some music which had been sent by the Red Cross. You had to go to the hut to hear them.

What sort of...what sort of tunes did you play? Can you remember any of them?

No, I wasn't into music, I only just knew a chap who was into that and he told me about it.

And what about books? Did you actually have a book with you in your kit that you took with you, or...?

No. No. You might have had a Bible but we smoked that, that was very good smoking paper for rolling you see, it's very thin. I mean, you split that up and had a bit each.

End of F4314 Side B

F4315 Side A

[Terry Frost interview, 20th of November 1994. Tape Four.]

So, when you were in the prison camp, did you actually yourself try to escape?

Me?

Yes, you.

No, I was...in Salonika I was ready to escape, I had done my stuff and I was in the queue to go down into the sewers there, but unfortunately just before it was my turn, and I think we had got about 180 out in a week, and before it was...we were all standing round with the...our Australians used to play two-up or one-up, I mean it's a coin game, you spin a coin. And that, we all stood round playing that game, because the manhole cover was there, and providing we kept a look round it, one could go down there again and the manhole cover would be put back, and again would carry on you see, in broad daylight this was. Of course it was quite an intriguing business going through the sewers to get out. And it was my turn when suddenly there was a bloody raid by the Germans, because they had already caught somebody trying to come out the other end you see, and they had shot a lot of them, you know, so, I'm glad I didn't get down because they had actually shot quite a few of them, they just turned the machine-gun up the tunnel you see. So that was the only time I ever got near it, because... Then when we were in Stalag 383 the only thing I did there was, my job was to just watch the sentries who came down from the, well it was a little place where they kept...prisoners of war were put for punishment, and they used to change the guard there, and I used to be lying, apparently sunbathing, because I was quite near the wire where I was, where my hut was, and I would have to watch to see that there was nothing happening. Well on this particular occasion I saw one of the corporals hesitating his step, and I knew immediately that he had heard something, and all I had to do was to pick my handkerchief up and whoever was in the hut would then bang the floor hard enough for the lads to know to stop digging. But unfortunately he was a bastard that corporal, he was a smart one, and he was round within seconds with their long rods which they could push in to find out where the tunnels were. And that was when Adrian was down there, and several other people, and I got in the hut, because I rushed in, I could see that they were not observing my signal or something, and they said yes, they had actually given the tip, but before they could all get out, because they were within a yard of coming up, before they could all get out the Germans had surrounded the hut you see. And it was quite an interesting situation, because they always go mad under those circumstances and jump on their hats, and fire their pistols in the air. And Adrian was

still left down there you see, right to the end, and when they put their white coats on to go and have a look along the tunnel, their overalls, Adrian was sort of curled up, hanging up on something, and he just barked like a dog and frightened them to bloody death. Of course they brought him out, he got another 21 days bread and water, which he was used to having, and then he was marched in to that little hut you see. So, he was a watch man anyway, and they had people in the trees who, we would spot their reflection on the binoculars, and they would be checking people where they went to with any irregularity you see, and also, if they could see any mud on the boots or dirt. You know, you have to catch on to all these things, you don't realise they're doing it, and they're just as clever as you are really, and so... And so that was really rather a tragic loss that, because they had just about a yard to go, and it sort of, total calamity that was for a bit, but then someone else starts somewhere else you see. And we had quite sort of mad spells with...for instance, I was out walking, just going to see the chap who made my brushes, and I met someone who said, 'What do you think of my duck?' Well of course, I thought, not bad, you know, I said, because he was leading it along.

What, a real duck?

No, he hadn't got one at all. I mean this was the first sort of thing, you had to play along, prisoners can't do that, you know. And then, soon there would be somebody else riding a horse. I mean the whole thing, the whole camp went absolutely what they call 'stalag happy', and sort of finishing up with a big hunt, which went through the camp, and the hunting horn was blown, and they went, the fox went through the pool, which was the fire pool, so the riders went straight through full-dressed, out the other side. And of course the Germans thought, Dummkopfs, you know, absolutely. And from that...and then of course it got very serious, because it took on, this madness took on. We had a train which left for England], which was two huts joined together. And I, I mean I polished up my, put my best...I had got my crease in my trousers, to go home, to go to England, and I ordered a taxi you see, and two chaps would come along with a blanket over their back and a cap on with a flag on, like this. And you would get on the back, and they would take you along to these two coaches there, someone inside was pushing straw and stuff, and the chimney, smoke was coming out, and there was a chap in a straw hat leaning out saying, 'Goodbye, goodbye'. Wonderful, to go to Blighty. So we used to go on these cheap trips to Blighty. Well of course they thought we had gone raving mad, so they went to see the medical officer about it. Well he got the tip when we got to see him, so when they got into his room, he was an Australian doctor, I forget his name, marvellous chap, when they got into his room he was under the table playing marbles with his assistant, you know, they had got the chalk[ph]. And of course we had had a big marble competition which was serious, which the Germans didn't understand at all; we had also had a table-tennis championship, no bats, no balls, but you know, played it. And all

the crowd singing out. Well of course it was too much for the Germans, and it was sort of wonderful 'stalag happiness'. And they saw Major Brookmore, that was his name, and they actually gave parole to the eleven companies, we were allowed to go out for a walk.

Outside where?

On parole, you had to sign that you wouldn't escape and all that kind of lark. And I went once, and you got wood when you went there; you went into the forests and the deer and things like that, which weren't far away from us, and you could pull down old trees and bring them back. So they were using it as, usefulness to help us get fuel, to keep you warm and to cook on. So we brought, dragged these back with us you see, these dead trees. And I picked some flowers, wonderful flowers you get in Bavaria, and I put them in a butter tin, a Canadian butter tin, from a Canadian parcel which was red and blue, with these flowers in, and I painted that. But I couldn't go out again because I felt so...I can't describe it, but being free to pick those flowers completely beggared me, I daren't go out again, I didn't want to go out again, because there was this element of freedom without any freedom, and... Anyway I didn't want to go again, I didn't go the next time, I let somebody else go. But then of course people did start, Adrian was one of the ones who tried to escape on that, I mean he got in some hut there, and then they found it was bolted and one thing and another, and had terrible times, but people soon broke the rules and so they stopped it. But it was a nice idea, and it only came out of the 'stalag happiness' you see.

Mm. But getting back to the sort of work that you were...apart from the portraits and things that you painted in the camp, which were oils did you say?

Yes.

There were some watercolours, weren't there, of the camp that you drew, I've seen them reproduced.

Oh, interiors?

Yes, inside of the hut, and things like that.

Yes. Oh yes I did the interior of the hut, great perspective problem that was, all done by holding a pencil up and getting the angle. I didn't know anything about vanishing-points you see.

No. And did you...there's one.

That's right, yes, that's...and that's where I used to lie to see them coming down this road you see.

Ah right. And, for your material, did you ever run out of proper paints, I mean, that you got with the Red Cross?

Well, the Red Cross provided a certain amount, didn't get a lot, but also I had a German under-officer who used to come in to my hut when we were...when we were handcuffed, because we were in the Commandos and that, and we used to have to wear these handcuffs.

Handcuffs?

Yes, because they had found certain Germans with their wrists tied when there had been a raid somewhere and they've landed on the Commandos, because they'd been drowned when the boats had gone down because they had been tied you see. So they handcuffed all of us as a reprisal. And, this under-officer was an Austrian who had been wounded on the Russian front, so he was having a light job as it were, but he was a more active soldier so he was much more friendly, and he saw my portraits and he asked me to his painting, so when he came in I used to do a bit on him, and he brought me some paints from Charkov, because he had been on the Russian front and he had picked these paints up in the art school in Charkov, and he actually taught art in some German school you see. And I did his portrait, and he brought me some paints, so I had some good tubes of paint from him. Sheer chance.

And then the brushes you had made, you were saying?

Yes, well there was a young Scots chap could make the brushes, he used to, they used to cut the hair... When the sewage, the horses came in to do the sewage problems, the old cart horses with plenty of hairs down the bottom by their...

Fetlock.

Fetlocks, and someone would get in while the chaps were busy and cut those hairs quick you see. And then with the tin, the tin where they had coffee in or butter, they would make the ferrule for putting the hairs in, and they made my brushes like that you see. So that everybody had a sort of part in it. The canvas you see you got, you had a mattress which was stuffed with grass, and that was hessian, and so was the pillow hessian, so what I used to do

was, I would do a portrait for a pillow, for a half, they would have to have that piece to do them on and give me the other piece for me to paint on. And then we used to size that with the barley soup as it were, because it was only, it was very thin and it made a very good size actually. And of course any time we had sardines you kept the oil, because that made an oil to paint with you see.

So you mixed the sardine oil with some of the...you eked out the oil paints out of tins.

Yes, that's right, with the sardine oil, yes.

Yes. And did the Red Cross send in watercolours occasionally, paint-boxes and things?

I don't know how I got them, I can't remember how I got them at all. Someone must have given them to me or had them sent to them or something, but I don't remember ever getting any sent to me personally.

Right. And then you communicated home by letter from there, did you?

Yes, oh yes. Yes you did, yes. I can't remember how frequently but you did get letters occasionally, and you sent letters out occasionally.

And someone, am I right in saying someone took some of your watercolours, or something, back?

Oh yes, well there were people who got TB, like the Spaniard who Adrian and I knew very well, who was at Madrid University, and his name has gone from me now.

Zebros[ph]...?

Barosso was it? No.

Oh perhaps it wasn't him, sorry.

His name's gone for the moment. But he was the one who used to talk to Adrian and me about Velasquez, because he was very knowledgeable on artistry, and he got TB very badly, and I used to find poems for him to send to his girl, the pen-friend he had got in England. And he was...what happened was, the Germans sent the people home who had got very bad TB in the end, because they knew that they were in such a bad way, and Marin, Marin I think

his name was, Marin, was one of them, and they took...well one of the sergeant-majors actually took my work home with him; I had painted his portrait, that's right, and he had TB as well, and my work was taken home by that sergeant-major, and it was given to Leamington, it was put on show, the Coventry 'Evening Telegraph' or something put it on show. And that's how my first work got home, those watercolours were the things I sent home. They were all 'geprüft' by the stalag.

And do they...have you got any now?

Yes, I've got most of them, yes. I was turned down by the Imperial War Museum.

Oh really?

Yes, and another one, yes.

What at the time they did that, or more recently?

No, no, 10 or 12 years ago.

Oh really? Oh, I'm surprised at that. And also you were just talking about, talking about Velasquez and people like that.

Talking about what?

Velasquez, that you were...

Oh yes that's right.

Am I right in thinking that you hadn't been exposed to any major painting, sort of Old Masters or anything really, at all, had you?

No no.

So did you see reproductions in the camp?

We had a...I don't know whether it was Adrian had a Velasquez book or what, someone must have had a book, and I certainly was lent 'The Lust For Life'.

The Van Gogh?

Yes. And that was my first art book I had ever read.

And did that have reproductions of Van Gogh's in it, or not, or was it just text?

I can't remember. I know I read it and enjoyed it thoroughly, and... You see Adrian was quite knowledgeable, and must have introduced me to a lot of things without me thinking about it. I don't know whether we had...I don't think we had much in the way of reproductions; I think it was Marin...it was only the Spaniard who knew a bit about Velasquez and talked to us. He must have had a book, because I've almost got a picture of him sitting down talking about the angles in Velasquez, and pointing it out to us. So, I mean I was really getting good lessons in art history, and in reading generally which is quite useful. And discussion is quite useful you see. But I hadn't ever seen any painting, no, not in the way of an art student looking at a painting or anything like that, I don't remember seeing any painting.

But at this...so, these conversations were going on, and were you beginning to think then about the possibility of painting when you got out, or not?

Well I don't know. You see the point is, if you've got a very restricted supply of food and opportunity, and a continual danger as it were, you do, I tended to think you can do what you like when you get out of this lot; you must do what you like, because nothing could be worse, or as bad, kind of thing. So it gives you a kind of, perhaps a false hope in a way, that you think the world's going to be all right when you get out and that you can do what you want to do, you must do what you want to do. So I think I had made my mind up that I wanted to be a painter, because if you were, as I was doing, painting things perhaps a lot better than most people, and without, he never taught me like that, but you know inside yourself you're doing it better than most of the people there, then perhaps you would be able to do that when you get out. And so I definitely decided to take it up.

And did you talk about that with Adrian Heath there?

Well we talked about it a lot, yes, and we continued to write to each other, and he came down...well he suggested I went down to Cornwall, because he had been down there, so it was quite natural that he would suggest that, and it would be a long way away from my parents, who were blatantly opposed to...not opposed to me painting, but they expected me to go back to work, because that's what one had always done.

Yes, well perhaps we had better just...OK, so, can we just get on to that in a tiny bit? We're just trying to fill in the sequence of events. So you got out, the war came to an end.

Yes.

And you were liberated were you, the camp was liberated by Allies, or what happened?

No, we were on the march for a long time, because they were taking us, they were taking us as hostages to Hitler's redoubt or something, whatever it was called. But the war caught up with us, and on one occasion where we were stuck for the night on some farm, we knew the Americans were getting nearer all the time, because we had a few radio messages. And we heard Churchill's speech there on non-fraternisation, which was very interesting, because I did a drawing of that, because I was actually sitting on the pole of the lavatory with the lady from the farm, the old lady heard at the same time, and I was listening to Churchill saying non-fraternisation, and I thought, here I am having a crap with the old lady next to me, and Churchill's talking about non-fraternisation. I mean what can you do under those...they were in the same mess as we were. And I thought that was funny. Then the men, these young...I did a drawing too of the first American, who looked like a Jap, a Japanese, and of course there were a lot of Americans who were from that part; I mean I didn't realise America was such a mixed race, and this was my first American, and I did a drawing of him. And he said, 'I've got 500 Gefangenen here,' he said.

What's a gefangenen?

POWs. And, he's on his radio. And I thought, my first Japanese...my first American Japanese question mark.

What, they stumbled across you in this farm?

They came across us, yes. The Germans had actually, the German guards had actually chucked their rifles away in the stream which was near there, and were about to piss off, but our sergeant said, 'Hey, you bloody well pick them up again, and you stand on guard of us,' because we knew that if any Germans came through and we hadn't got guards, they would shoot us. And luckily for us, there was a German officer came through a bit later on his white horse, and I mean he would have just...but we had got...they were still there, we made them pick their rifles up, stand on guard. And then we let them go, once the Americans...well actually they were rounded up rather smartish. But the point is that, that was a bit of a nerve-racking experience. And then we were eventually taken in American trucks to Innsbruck I

think it was...Ingolstadt, Ingolstadt, where we were picked up by aircraft, Dakotas I think, and flown back to the U.K. Well that was adventurous too, I mean waiting around, hoping for the aircraft, and we actually had to raid a few German houses for some food or hens or anything we could get, because we had no, there was no food being brought in properly at that time.

So then you got back home; that must have been an extraordinary...

Yes, and you got sprayed by lovely ATS girls with DDT, which I thought was quite a nice welcome to England. (laughs) Open your flies, DDT everywhere. And then we were given a big breakfast, which I don't know why, highly dangerous really when you think of egg and bacon and fried bread and all that, which we hadn't had in years you know, but they did.

You survived?

We survived, yes.

Where did you get...where were you taken to then? When you arrived in England, where were you, were you back up near where you came from?

It was May, and the blossom was lovely. I can remember seeing the blossom out of the back of the lorry, the May blossom, but I don't know where it was, it's gone from me. I just didn't notice. It was somewhere I should think in the Bedfordshire and Luton probably area. But in the country.

Mm.

And then they sent us home very quickly.

And can you remember going...what happened, did you just go straight to your grandmother's house, or what? Did you have a bit of time to yourself?

Yes, I went straight to my grandmother's house, and, yes you got a rail pass you see, and I went straight to my grandmother's house. But I don't remember much about the moment of being home at all. And, what did we do after that? Oh I know, then of course we were called up very quickly to report to your regiment.

What, the original one that you...?

No, we were called up to...we had to go to Catterick in Yorkshire, and, I suppose the war hadn't finished with Japan had it? I'm not absolutely sure about that. So therefore one was still in the Army.

Oh God! Yes.

And so we put all the uniform back on and you're up, smartish. Ah, now that's interesting. I remember going into the pub when I got back, the Binswood Tavern, and who was in there but Fred Crosswaite[??] who used to be the art editor with me at the Central School.

Oh, in Leamington is this? Right.

Yes. And I'm doing this. He said, 'Well, you stand to attention when you're talking to an officer.' I said, 'What, in the ruddy bar?' He meant it, I couldn't believe it.

Were you in uniform yourself? Yes.

Yes.

And was he?

Yes.

Oh, blimey.

But, Christ, you know! In the bar at our local? I never forgave him for that. Anyway the poor bugger got drowned in Germany later on, when he was yachting somewhere, but I mean he was a smashing bloke really, but I mean the old Army discipline had turned him, that was all there was about it. I mean, go for a drink in and a bloke said that, you know. Anyway, that was just a little incident I just remembered. And, so I went back to Catterick. Well they didn't know what to do with us when we got there, they hadn't got a bloody clue what to do with us. And they had me in charge of my gang, picking up paper and all that on the... And eventually, after about a fortnight, they said you can go back, and they gave us, we had to go and collect a trilby hat with a suit and some boots. (laughs)

What, your demob suit?

Demob suit and everything you see. So, as I came back, Gran said, 'I've just tidied up the house, I didn't expect you to be back.' She was mad because she thought she had got rid of me for a bit. She said she had just got the house straight. (laughs) Well I arrived back, well I flogged my boots, I took them to Fred Mulley, who became Lord Mulley, had got in to Christchurch, Oxford, and I...

And had he been in the camp with you?

Yes. I took my boots to him, he said he thought he could flog them for me. And he sold my boots in Oxford to somebody at the college, because they were good boots. I don't know what he got me for them, I can't remember what he got, he got some money for them. And then...I don't know what happened after that.

Did you start looking for a job?

Oh no, you had to take up the job that you had had...

Oh I see, oh it was held for you.

They gave you so long, I think they gave us till the January or something; they gave you so long and then, you had to take up your job in that time, and the employer, who had been your employer, had to give you a job.

Right, so you went back to the aircraft factory?

No.

No, no, where did you go?

I was in another job, which I had had just before the war which I had missed out completely.

Oh, right, what was that?

I was working in the radio wholesale business, I had forgotten that, yes, I did work in that I think. That just shows you how memory messes you up. And I had worked in the radio wholesale business, and...

Right, so you went back to that.

Which was at the electrical components at Snow Hill just, their depot was on the Snow Hill station at Birmingham. So I went back there, they had to give me the job you see, and I went for a bit. I left it till the last minute, and I didn't want to do it really. I went back there and I started work, but I went to Birmingham Art School in the evenings then.

Ah that's when you did it.

Mm, because I was working down the road at Snow Hill.

Right.

Because I was selling electric fittings and electric lights, and I was what they call a probationary traveller I think, I was just learning the game as it were. I had been a van driver with electrical stuff just before the war, and then I got this job with electrical components, and they put me on the road, I had to go round to the factories, and because fluorescent lighting was just coming in, and I used to wait at the track where they made the fluorescent lighting and rush it down to the factory and they would buy them off me you see, because I was the only one who could get them, and I actually waited while they came up the track and took them, and they needed them, in industries and... So that's how I survived for a bit. And then I was offered a better job by someone else, a traveller from another firm said, look, he knew someone who needed somebody as a full-time traveller.

Right, selling...?

Electrical goods.

Electrical goods as well, I see.

End of F4315 Side A

F4315 Side B

So you got the job...

Job in Coventry then. So I gave up Snow Hill.

But meanwhile, sorry, can I just ask you, the Birmingham Art School, that was...sorry?

I think it's Margaret Street or something, I'm not sure now.

That was the second time you had been there, or the first time?

No the first time, the first time.

The evening classes you had done before, that was just, when you were on the dole?

Never did any evening classes, only when I was a young lad of 15, unemployed.

Yes, yes. So what...at Birmingham, the classes you attended there, can you remember anything about that?

Oh well that was just drawing still life really, and, I don't think we ever painted anything, I can't remember painting. It was wax grapes and wax fruit, you know, that's what it was, so that you knew that it would be the same as it was when you were there the last time. And a very nice chap, a tall watercolorist used to teach us on that. But that made me very late because I had to get back to Leamington you see; I would be there from 6 till 8 and then I would catch a late train back to Leamington, then I would have to be back in Birmingham the next morning you see. Because I hadn't got a car then, there was a shortage of cars, and my car my uncle had taken while I had been away.

Oh you had a car actually before the war?

Mm, yes, yes.

Oh right.

When I was working on that...I had started to work for Electrical Components a little bit before the war.

I see, yes.

That's why I went back there. And then of course I had to decide what I was going to do, because all the time I was still painting, and I was getting very worried about working, and I changed to this job in Coventry which was nearer for me, and I had a car, and I did a different area which was Leicester, and I liked Leicester, a nice city, and I did Coventry still, and I did Walsall I think, places like... Anyway I did a little area which I quite enjoyed, but I wasn't very well, I kept getting sort of, a bit run down. I thought it was because I wasn't painting, which I had promised myself.

And so, the Birmingham Art School, those classes weren't...they were just...

Only temporary.

Ye, so you weren't doing...yes I see, yes.

Only a few weeks.

Yes, I see, yes.

Then I left there and went to work in Coventry, and by this time I was, I had met someone who did a bit of painting, painted copies of religious paintings, and he was encouraging, but I realised he was an awful painter, but he encouraged me to carry on. And I had met the local art gallery chap at Leamington, I had been to see him, because he had seen my work, the prisoner of war stuff, so I went to see him, and he was very encouraging to me, but he couldn't do anything, it was sort of almost a library more than an art gallery. But he did encourage me to keep on doing it. And, I went into hospital, because I got these pains and things, but I knew what the real trouble was; I thought it was because I wasn't doing what I had promised. And then my boss came to see me from Coventry, and I told him I was going to resign because I wasn't well; I said the doctor advised me to go down to the south-west, that it would be better for my health. Which of course was me just telling a little story to get out of, to give the job up, not to cause to cause any trouble. And so I never went back to my job. I did have actually stones in my, whatever it is, which were very very painful, and they were having to give me morphine and that because the pain made me so sick.

And had you met...sorry, had you met your wife by this stage?

Mm, oh yes, I had met Kathleen, I met Kathleen very quickly when I got back, yes.

Where did you meet?

At a dance, at The Lockhead, which is where I always used to go to dances.

In Leamington?

Yes, in Leamington. And I was with my ex-girlfriend, who I had been engaged to before the war, who was now married to somebody else.

Right, who was she then, what was she?

Pat Hunt her name was. Well she asked me to go to The Lockhead, which I did, because I knew her husband, I had played cricket with him, and she introduced me to Kath and her friend Margaret, and, I danced with Kath, and I think...Fred Mulley was with me as well, and he danced with Margaret, and we went out with them for a bit, you know, took them to different village dances, taking up our life before the war really. And then of course, we decided to get married, you know.

Did you have a feeling when you first met her that you might end up...?

Well if somebody buys you a double gin and gives you 20 fags, of course you do, you know.
(laughs)

This would make a suitable wife.

Yes, obviously straight away, that was my cup of tea. So from then on, we got married in August you see, so, I only came home in May.

I see. Are we talking about '45?

'45 isn't it? Yes, something like that. And so we got married, and Fred Mulley was my best man, and Margaret was the bridesmaid like. And, that was very good, and we had a wonderful little do, bottles of beer and all the rest of it.

Was it in Leamington?

This was in Leamington, yes.

Yes. And where did you have...did you have...was your grandmother and your mother and stepfather and people there?

Yes, they were there, yes. I think my grandmother was there, and...yes, we've got a photograph somewhere and they're all there, yes. Very limited because the rationing in those days was very tight, and we had it at a local pub, they had a big barn in their garden and we had it there. And we went on our honeymoon in Banbury, that's where I painted, had the nerve to paint Kath lying on the bed, on my honeymoon, very brave of me. And I let the Belgrave have that recently for their show. First time I've let it out. And, I tried to carry on in Leamington with Kath, but I couldn't do it.

Where did you live then?

With my gran, we were living with my gran. And, I said to Kath, look, we've got to go to St. Ives.

But you said that, I mean you didn't have that brain-wave yourself, that came from Adrian?

From Adrian, yes, yes.

Adrian before or after the war? I mean, in the camp or after?

Oh after the war.

So you kept in touch with him?

Oh yes, yes, yes, yes, we kept in touch with Adrian.

So did you...what, did he come up and see you in Leamington, or did you go to London, or what happened?

No, he didn't come to see me in Leamington. I don't remember how we did it, but we certainly kept in touch, because I wrote to him, and he wrote to me, but...

And had he gone back to the Slade?

I don't know what he did, I can't remember. He was in Fitzroy Street in those days, and he was also spending quite a bit of time with his mum down in...

Near Bath.

Yes. And, I don't know how we did it actually, but I know that it was his idea I went to Cornwall, and that's what we did. Kath gave up her job and I had given up mine, and we decided to go, and we just went. We had nowhere to stay or anything, we just went on the train to Cornwall.

And, I remember you saying once that your family, they thought it was a sissy thing to do, to paint.

Oh yes, he's obvious to all. Everybody's been apprenticed to 'proper jobs' as they call it; who the hell wants somebody painting pictures? I mean it just isn't on really. It was...you see I was getting on a bit wasn't I, 30, changing my plans and leaving the sort of, the work-place of Coventry etcetera. No, so going to Cornwall was just a...it worked out correctly, because I was moving into an area where painting was...

Accepted.

Part of the game you see. So that journey to Cornwall was quite successful, and it got me away from my old habits of going to work, which was very important, otherwise I would have been trapped back into it.

End of F4315 Side B

F4316 Side A

[Terry Frost interviewed on the 20th of November 1994 at his house in Newlyn. Tape Five.]

So much to everybody's surprise we did pack up and go down to Cornwall.

Yes, but, the link, I mean it wasn't completely your idea that, that was...

It was an old idea of Adrian's that was, but I don't know when I met him to refresh my ideas about that.

Mm, mm. And it was partly to get away from your families you were saying.

That's right, yes. It was that...well it was nice to get away from them, to get away from the...the accepted conditions, which had always been the norm. Now if you go back to that kind of situation you are expected to fall into the norm, and I didn't want to, because I had now travelled around a bit and met a lot of different people with different ideas, so I wanted to go on my own, which I did, by going down to Cornwall.

And can you remember your first impression of Cornwall, of getting down here?

Yes, we went from Warwick, and it was a long journey, and I think we did it by night, night journey. And it sort of got to morning, we were still going and the conductor came round and said, 'Anybody for Hayle?' Well I thought he said, 'Anybody for ale?' and of course I was dying for a drink so I said, 'Yes, me please.' Well of course I had never heard of Hayle you see at that time. And that was, we were practically here then, because the next was St. Erth, but I didn't know anything about that. We changed at St. Erth for St. Ives, which of course is a wonderful run in on the railway. And when we went to get our trunk it wasn't on the train, and all our worldly possessions were in this tin trunk, wedding present of blankets, things like that. So that was a bit of a panic, having no possessions with us, except what we stood up in. So, we went in to St. Ives, walked into St. Ives, which was...it was May I think, early in May, so it was empty, business hadn't started at all, the shops were all closed, what few there were. Totally different to what it is now. And, it was very quiet and hardly anybody about at all, hardly any cars about, no shops open. And we thought, well it's rather beautiful but very quiet, is the impression we got. Then of course we had to try and find somewhere to stay, so we wandered around a bit and walked up the hill to one or two places. We were a little bit nervous about asking actually. Then we went down to the reference library, and the library, and looked through the newspaper, the local newspaper, and found there was a place in Carbis

Bay, a caravan to let, which we felt was a bit better than being in a bed and breakfast, which would be more expensive anyway than what this was; I think this was 30 shillings a week this caravan, which gave us a certain amount of freedom. So we went up to this caravan, which was in Carbis Bay, Headland Road, which we found, and it was...we found the house, the people who advertised it with a name Cave Day, and they showed us the caravan, which was really a very tiny one, just for...you could get two in and that was your maximum really, it was a really tiny caravan. But it was on a nice bit of ground, because there was a little bit of wood down there and a few gardens, and it was next to the allotment on the entrance to this wood really. And then the rest of the road was houses on both sides. And we took the caravan at 30 shillings a week, and it was quite nice, I used to sit and paint a bit of gorse in a jam-jar and that kind of thing, I've got the painting somewhere, and Kath got a job working for the Hoskins who ran a bed and breakfast place, and they also ran the local post office, so she used to deliver telegrams and things on a bike with no brakes, which was highly dangerous but she did it. And also she found it very difficult when getting a message on the telephone, the Cornish accent was very difficult in those days, so she had great difficulty in getting that. And then, I used to stop at home and paint, and that was when the lady whose chickens had been eating my sausage out of my frying pan came and accused me of feeding her chickens or something, which I wasn't doing, they were actually robbing me of my breakfast. And she saw that I was painting something, and she said, did I know that Ben Nicholson lived in that road? Well, unfortunately I had never heard at that time of Ben Nicholson or Barbara Hepworth, so I said no, I didn't know, and she said, 'Well, they live just down there,' which of course is next to her, you see. But I never met them when I was in that road, because I hadn't got the nerve, because I didn't know who they were anyway. And, I don't know how I got...oh I went down into St. Ives because I was, I met Sven Berlin, because one of my old wartime chaps had mentioned him to me.

Where did you meet him? Did you go and seek him out or bump into him?

Oh I don't know how it would have been. When I told you that I couldn't think how I met Melville Hardiman, I couldn't think for the life of me how I met him.

Met who, sorry?

Melville Hardiman, I can't remember whether Sven put me on to him or Melville put me on to Sven, I'm confused about that. And certainly when I went to London I went to see Melville, so probably Sven put me on to him. So I certainly met Sven very early on. Why I met him now I can't remember. And, of course when the season came round, the caravan, they wanted to let it, because they could get more money, so we...but Mrs Cave Day found somewhere

else for us to go, which was a place called Rottaruer, which was a little bit further out towards...well it was near the village hall in Carbis Bay, but I can't remember the name of the road. And we had a room there for a time then, and, funny old dear, she said she was a Commando in the nursing side or something. I think she was a story-teller, and she used to make her husband go and smoke his pipe in the garden, which I found strange in those days. And we stayed there for a bit. And then I got a job, we took a job, Kath and I, in what was called domestic service. I don't know who recommended us for it, but we were still pretty desperate for somewhere to live, because they didn't want us at this place, they stuck us for a bit but they didn't like having us there really, we could tell that.

And where was that, was that in Carbis Bay or in St. Ives?

In Carbis Bay. And then we found a job at a place called Liscorvah, which was a, Mrs Finlay, Colonel Finlay's wife, he had died but she was running it as a guest house, and they wanted someone to do the chambermaiding, which Kath did, and I was the odd-job man as it were, sort of, get the fuel in for the Aga, which used to go out regularly because you hadn't got good fuel in those days, and do the washing up and all that, and Kath used to wash the sheets etcetera. And then they had Mrs Trevithick staying there, who was a granddaughter of Trevithick who invented the steam engine. So, I used to have to carry her downstairs because she couldn't walk properly, down the stairs, give her a change so she could sit in the lounge and that. And then in the evening I used to have to carry the food in to serve the people who were staying there, who were mainly young Commando officers, which was quite interesting for me, seeing these youngsters. And they were only allowed, say, three Brussels sprouts, one potato, because everything was very heavily rationed. And we had a girl from Gweek, who was the chef, a Welsh girl, ever so nice, dark-haired girl, and she loved her food, so while they were strictly rationed we weren't rationed quite as much, which I thought was quite delightful. (laughs) And, we stuck that until Kathleen got pregnant, which then meant that we really had to move. We didn't have to, because Mrs Finlay was quite kind really, and she tried to get me to buy a studio down in St. Ives, because she liked my painting and she had recommended me to people. And she had a Fantin Latour in the house you see over the fireplace, she had some good things there, and she really helped me, and I got into Leonard Fuller school of painting from there.

And was that, had you now...while, at the same time?

While I was working there, yes.

Yes, I was going to ask you, yes.

I used to do half a day, do my early morning work there and be down the school for 10 o'clock.

Oh that's the St. Ives School of Painting?

Yes, yes.

And that was...was that overlooking Porthmeor, is that where it was? No.

It is that, it's in the back road.

Yes.

I used to go there in the mornings, and that's when I started to meet people, because Lanyon used to come in there, occasionally do some drawings, so did Sven Berlin, and they liked what I was trying to do, and that's how I started to get to know them. And from...then, there was someone working there, someone was modelling there, that's right, Tatts Fielding was modelling there, and Pippa Renwick was a student there, and Pippa Renwick owned the house that Tatts Fielding was living in with her son and daughter, and when they realised my predicament, they were very helpful, and Tatts put her son over the road with the lady who has just been here.

Oh.

And she and her daughter moved in the other room and gave Kath and me their room. So we moved into St. Ives. And then, and eventually Tatts Fielding went off to St. Mary's Hospital I think in London, and she didn't come back, and so we got into the house, and Pippa Renwick went away to look after her father or something like that, so she left us in the house, and that's how we came, got in to 12 Quay Street.

Ah, right.

And we stayed there then until we, well, about 16 years, something like that, until we went off to, I got that fellowship...

In Leeds.

To Leeds.

So, did you have a room in the house that was used as your studio, or did you...?

Oh no, I didn't have...I used to paint in the bedroom, I didn't have anywhere else. But I used to paint in the bedroom, diagonally from one corner to the other, and that's where I did 'Walk Along the Quay' in there you see. All my paintings. But I was still painting outside in those days; although I used to do abstracts inside I was still painting the views, because they were all new to me, I was fairly excited about them. I tried to paint hot days and things like that, which is not copying but making a hot day.

And did you go off on expeditions to do this?

Lanyon would take me out on expeditions, he was the chap who showed me Cornwall, because he had a vehicle, and he was very proud of being Cornish and of the landscape. So he introduced me to lots of places, which was very helpful.

So can you remember where the first place he took you to was?

No I can't really, because I don't know the name of it, because we just dropped off and then walked across the fields. And we learnt - well I learnt a lot from that.

And this was still what, about 1946/47 was it?

It would be up till before I went off to Camberwell. He took me to places like Gunwalloe, which I would have never found, and then we both did drawings.

Yes I remember seeing the drawing you've done of that.

And he took me to Porthcurnow, and, there's a little place down there whose name...there are little beaches which, the names have slipped me now, which...

Portreath?

There's about two more small beaches down there which I've forgotten, which I went, which we used to go to, because nobody else went there in those days. And also he took me out Zennor way and places like that. So, I did the sort of 'good guide' for the Cornish landscape. And, I mean I was meeting more and more people, because my work was getting noticed by

them. And at this time I was determined to go up to London and see Adrian. I can't remember whether Adrian had been down to stay with us before then, Adrian did come down and stay, and Corinne did, but I can't remember exactly when that was.

But, had you tried, had you tried to go to Camberwell?

No, no.

Early...

No, I tried when I was in Leamington to get an ex-service grant to go to art school, but I had been turned down by some silly major who said I hadn't got a school certificate so I couldn't go to an art school. And I didn't know any better, so I believed him; if you had been a military chap you were made to, you are made to take what the officer says as the right thing. But, that nearly proved my undoing, and if I hadn't have hitch-hiked up to London, because I wanted to go to the National Gallery, I wanted to see it, and I made the effort of hitch-hiking up, and I went to the National Gallery, and when I came out I went along the street, I had got enough money for half a pint, and I had been to the National Gallery for the first time in my life. So I then went in to this pub, half a pint, and I walked straight into a crowd of Stalag 383 prisoners, about eight or nine of them. John Bode Brown, who was the test umpire in the cricket who was in the camp, Fred Mulley, and another chap who used to be in education, and was in education now, still in education, in the Army, although they were all in civvies, I didn't realise he was still in the Army. And they said, 'Oh, are you still painting?' I said, 'Yes.' Well, and then it got on to, 'Did you get a grant and go to school?' I said, 'No, I didn't get anything like that, they wouldn't give me one.' And this chap said, well, he said, there is a clause that you could go, so he was wrong, there is a clause that you don't have to have a school certificate, exceptions can be made. And he said, 'If you like I'll send you all the particulars, I'm still in the educational department.' So he sent me the booklet, which you would never normally see, which underlined this part which said there was a clause which would allow you to go. And then he...he also wrote the letter for me to apply; when I say he wrote it, he told me what to say. So I then wrote off, knowing this course was available, knowing the position was available to me, to Bristol, and it took about eight months, and they eventually said that I could apply. And Adrian went to Camberwell to talk to Pasmore, the vice-principal there, to let me go there, and it was his advice that I tried for Camberwell, and that's where I went. And I got in, about '48 wasn't it, '47/48.

Yes.

It might have been '48 I should think.

Yes, I've got it written down. '47? '47.

Well anyway, that can soon be corrected; I think it was '48.

But, can I just go back to...when you went into the National Gallery, what...I mean where did you start, what picture did you...?

I don't think I took a great deal of notice of any of them, I was overwhelmed by the whole thing. I mean on a first experience like that it's a bit too much to know where to start, which room to look at. But I know the ones that very soon became important to me, because they always had the Manet there.

What, 'Déjeuner Sur L'Herbe', that one?

No. Oh I get terribly mixed up now. It's the girl behind the bar.

'The Folies Bergère'.

The girl who is serving behind the bar.

The one that's in the Courtauld, and she's...

It used to be in the National Gallery.

Yes, yes.

And then there was the Rubens 'Three Graces' was one that fascinated me, probably because it was three nudes in the first place. And then the Koninck, there was a big landscape painting with a hell of a lot of sky, and I thought that was fantastic, to have a big picture with nearly all sky, and minute the landscape. And so there were things like that that I liked more than anything. And then of course, as I say I went for a drink, because I had done my stuff, and I think I stayed with Adrian that night in Fitzroy Street. And then of course, when I came up to Camberwell that was one of my first jobs, was to do the National Gallery with a bit of, used to a room each week, you know, so I got to know them pretty well. And Camberwell of course was a totally different scene, when you went to a school like that. It was nothing to do with the kind of excitement that was going on in Cornwall. In fact, I had met people who

had, Bryan Wynter and Nicholson, and Lanyon and Sven Berlin, and they were all doing, attempting to do something which they really didn't know about, but they were all full of enthusiasm. And you go to Camberwell and one met a completely different, almost an academic atmosphere, from boys and girls who had been to schools where they had been supposedly trained in art; in my opinion of course the art had been killed for them because it was too much thinks and not enough guts, whereas I was told I had got too much tummy and not enough head, but I think I was right, otherwise you start thinking too much, you start doing history of art and writing philosophy, which is OK, but it's nothing to do with painting pictures. Let's get on.

Before we go on about Camberwell, sorry, can we just go back to, what was happening down here then? Your wife was living down here. Had your first child been born by then?

Oh yes, the first child was born, yes, '47 wasn't it, autumn, or July '47. Well I probably started in Camberwell...

That September.

That autumn, that's right, the very end of September. And we then had to find somewhere to live. No, I don't know how we did that.

But you were living in the house, in 12 Quay Street?

We were living in 12 Quay Street.

And that's where, that was your base you were saying?

Yes, but we went up to London with the child, and I don't know how we managed, or where we stayed in the beginning, but I know, we tramped round in Chelsea, knocking on doors, and asking how much it was, because I was going to get a grant of £7 a week I think, which was for all of us you see, and I think the rents were about £3, which made it rather frightening. Adrian lived in Wimpole Street, and I found a place, I know it was the top end of Wimpole Street, it was a street near there, which was I think £3 a week, but we took it. And we had a gas fire which we had to dry the nappies on, you know, which was quite tricky. Because it was good for them to take us with a child you see. Well we then, she didn't want us there too long, she was only really helping us out, and I was walking around in Chelsea, and I met a chap who had actually been to see me in St. Ives, he was a Cornishman but he was a teacher in London, and I was telling him that we were desperately looking for somewhere, and he

said, 'Well I've got a...' I told him we had got to get out and we hadn't got anywhere to go, and he said, 'Well I've got a room, come and have a look, I'm in Albert Bridge Road.' And we went down to see him, and of course it was a lovely big room, and he let us have that and a bedroom and the use of the bathroom you see, and use of the kitchen, for £2.7s.6d. a week, which was fantastic. And that's where Adrian used to come and see me, and that's where we stayed, and I did a lot of paintings in Battersea Park, and I was drawing in Battersea Park. And, I think we stayed there until I finished at Camberwell.

So your wife and your little boy were with you?

Were with me, they came with me, yes.

I see, so they weren't...I had this feeling they were down there and you were up there.

No no. And we always kept this place on down here, and we came back as often as we could, came back every summer.

So at this stage, so, we haven't...in Cornwall though, before you went up there you had already, you had met Ben Nicholson by this stage, had you?

I know Lanyon was writing to me, and he introduced me to Ben, but I can't remember exactly when it was. I don't remember when their show was in the Crypt for instance.

That was, was it '48? Sorry, I've got to check.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

....I think.

So, sorry, so the Crypt Room was founded in 1946.

Mm. Well you see, I had been introduced to what was going on without knowing really, so to go to Camberwell where they wouldn't even look at analytical Cubism, because the Slade hadn't got that far then, it was quite a different cup of tea, it was a very academic training, which I don't have any regrets about now, because it has held me in good stead, but it could be a damper on those people.

And, Willie Barns Graham was down in Cornwall then, wasn't she, as well?

Yes. I don't know when she came down, she was down just before.

About '46.

Yes, just a bit before I got down I think.

Yes. And so her, Brown, Wynter, Sven Berlin, Lanyon, and you're not quite sure about Ben Nicholson, whether you had come across him then.

I'm not quite sure. I'm not quite sure, because we actually were in, we worked at the, at Keely's in, Kath was chambermaid there for a time, and I worked as a waiter; I think we might have lived there for a little bit.

Where was that, Keely's?

Keely's, I can't remember the name of the house just...it was a hotel on the beach at Porthmeor.

And then, this exhibition you had, you had an exhibition before you went up to Camberwell, 'Paintings With...

Yes, that's right, yes.

With Knife and Brush'.

Yes, I was...

At Downings bookshop.

Yes, I was painting a few portraits at 30 bob a time, things like that, and I also sold a few paintings that I did on the beach and things like that.

And that sold very well, that exhibition sold...

Yes.

It says here, 'Sold £90...'

Yes, something like that, yes.

Quite healthy isn't it?

Yes, it was a lot of money, £10 a time a canvas or about 8 or something like that. Yes, it was... And that did me a lot of good with all the other artists in the place, because, they get to know you you see.

End of F4316 Side A

F4317 Side A

He was never the kind of bloke to go a great deal....[BREAK IN RECORDING]involved with, but if you could find out when whatsaname came down, the lady who used to run the British Council, Lilian Somerville, well she came down, and I went to...I was waiting when....[BREAK IN RECORDING] In that hotel, I'm sorry, whose name, I can't remember, which Kath will know. Keely's place. Sunset Bar I think it was or something. I was waiter there, and I certainly looked after them, and I certainly went out to dinner very soon, I was invited out with Ben to some little do with people like Lilian and British Council people. And what amazed me was, it was my big event, and Ben went to sleep very quick, sitting there. And I thought, oh! Because to me he was a famous artist, you know, and that's, I mean I wasn't doing anything except trying to paint. And I had been included in this little thing, and I was all ears, and Ben was fast asleep in the chair; I thought, bloody marvellous isn't it! (laughs) Few lessons there.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

All right, yes, well I don't know about Charles Gimpel.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

[Terry Frost interviewed at his house in Newlyn on the 21st of November 1994. Tape Six.]

I think last time I asked you whether you had met Ben Nicholson before you went up to Camberwell, and you weren't entirely sure, but you have just confirmed, before we turned this on, that you possibly met, you sort of met him, but you didn't really speak to him much, in 19...

I was introduced to him by Peter Lanyon, yes, but I mean I didn't...that was all, I was introduced to him. And, I don't remember doing much more than that in those days. But that's probably my memory that's gone about it.

Mm. But, that was in probably '47, the year you went up to London, to Camberwell?

It would certainly early, because I played him table tennis when he was still in Headland Road, in his house.

In Chy-an-Kerris.

Chy-an-Kerris, yes, I mean I played him table tennis in that house.

Right, right, right.

I don't know when he left that...

I think, I know when he left that possibly.

Because he was living up there when Barbara was in the studio down there, he was still in, he was still in there.

Yes.

In '51, he was still in Chy-an-Kerris.

Yes. She bought Trewyn in St. Ives in '49, and lived there permanently from '51, which was when they officially divorced, yes.

'49. I remember when she bought it. I must have been introduced to Ben quite early actually, but it didn't...not on an intimate basis at all you see.

Because I think, when you got to Camberwell, it is written that you were, and I think, I might have seen a copy of a letter, you wrote to him from Camberwell?

More letters from...I did write to...yes he wrote to me, and I wrote to him, and he certainly wrote to me because we had the business of Adrian Heath showing the Abstract work you see, and he was in the AIA Abstract exhibition, he sold a painting of mine there. No, I mean there was...he definitely knew me quite well by that time, but the introduction in the first place was just an introduction, that I can just remember being done, but I don't know, I have no other recollections. You see I may have gone piddling off to Camberwell very quickly after being introduced.

Mm, yes, well I think that's possibly what...yes, that's possibly what happened.

And then when you came back down during your time at Camberwell, possibly...

I came down every break you see.

Yes, yes.

And then I would see him then. But, he wasn't the kind of chap who did idle chatter, he wouldn't go into a pub and half a pint for instance like other people, or play dominoes like Lanyon would, I mean nothing like that, because he wasn't that type of person, not because he was being snobbish, that's the type of person he was, he just didn't do it.

Yes. Except he had this thing about table tennis.

Oh yes, table tennis was another matter, yes, any ball game. He was a good tennis player too. But he wouldn't let you win.

Right.

Have to cheat.

And so, the style of painting that you were using as it were, before you went to Camberwell you had that exhibition of 'Paintings with Knife and Brush'.

That's right.

So, what were your paintings like then, really, can you describe what they were like?

Yes, they were paintings mainly with palette knife, because I had used the palette knife because it's a way of keeping the paint clean, I believed in that, and you could put the paint on. I love putting the paint on with a palette knife. I don't know where I got the idea from, but it certainly worked for me, and it made the portraits a little more appetising to most people, because the juicy paint looked pretty good. I'm saying that looking backwards now; I probably didn't think about that at all at the time.

And, so were you mainly doing...you said...were you mainly doing portraits then for that exhibition? There were landscapes you said, or...?

There were local street scenes, and walks along, I don't know what's in the catalogue now but there is a catalogue available somewhere, and I'm certain there were two or three portraits in there, Jimmy Limpotts was one, a local chap who used to sit from the fishermen. But I can't remember what the actual paintings were. Street scenes I know were there.

Right.

Because I've got drawings of...you see there's a 1949 drawing very much influenced by Nicholson.

Yes, but I'm trying to get focused on the pictures you did before you went up to Camberwell, that's what I was just trying to get, because I think you...yes, exactly, your style was changing. I was just trying to ask you about before you went there. Was it...someone said you were painting a bit like Van Gogh, was that right?

Oh I would say it was a little bit like that, yes, I would say so. In fact I can show you one somewhere.

It would be interesting. I mean here is the chair for example.

That's right, yes.

That sort of subject matter, Van Gogh-like.

Oh absolutely, yes. And then in my beret, I mean that's a very...that's done in 12 Quay Street.

Yes, and that is actually 1947, so that looks as if it might well be...

Yes, that was done before I went to Camberwell.

Yes, right.

That was done in Adrian Heath's studio from my drawing.

What this was?

Yes.

Was it? Oh right.

That was the first, I learnt so much about drawing by doing that painting of Miss Humphries.

Yes, we're just talking about 'Miss Humphries', 1948, the drawing was 1948; was the painting the same year?

Done at Camberwell, yes. Well everybody was...Miss Humphries was our favourite model, not in a sensuous way really, or, I mean some of the girls were very beautiful and attractive and knew it, and one felt that, but Miss Humphries was just a real old pro who, she always did her face with flour, I mean she couldn't afford powder or anything like that, and the oldest fur coat that had been sewn up so many times it was little bits joined together really, and she was obviously very poor, but very loyal, a very loyal sitter, and absolutely reliable, so that, which was ripe for us in those days, because you had your head in a chin-strap as it were, and a plumb-line and your feet on the golden section, and, phew! you wanted someone who sat like Euan Uglow likes them, you know, dot-and-carry-one and the Coldstream fear marks. So, I was into that at that time, and so we drew her for about six weeks, and I did lots and lots of drawings, but I had already been influenced by Ben on the linear...

Yes, because...

Drawing, do you see?

Yes I do.

A single line...

Yes, very short, a sort of...

To make a single line in which you read all the form without putting all that bullshit of tone and that on, which all the lads like doing, and were being taught like that. And I somehow, for some reason, got it into my head, you have to do it with a single line, as long as you read all the form it would be in your line. And I did all these drawings very carefully of Miss Humphries, and then I tried to paint it in the studio. Where I got the idea from I don't know. I had probably read that people painted in their studios from looking at landscape, or looking at the figure, almost unbelievable to me in those days but I did do that painting deliberately in Adrian Heath's studio from the drawings. And then I found out that I hadn't got a great deal of information in my drawings about the space, and that was the best lesson I ever had. Nobody ever told me about drawing in that sense; I think you can only learn by yourself what you need, and I learnt from doing that painting that I had so much to put into my drawings if I was going to paint from them. Even in a single line.

And when you were in the class with Miss Humphries modelling, did anyone come round and comment on your drawing? Did they notice it was a bit different?

Not really I think, because I hadn't got any cigarettes or anything like that. The teachers in those days, because cigarettes were rationed, only spoke to the people who had got fags, I mean it was as simple as that, and mostly they were rich young ladies who got all the tuition because they could get a packet off them. (laughs) I mean it sounds terrible, but we noticed it, us boys who hadn't got any. I mean Coldstream only spoke to me twice the whole time I was there.

Oh Lord!

That first one he said, 'I should scrape it all off if I was you, start again.'

And what was that?

That was on a still life with a fern in, which I had spent six weeks on.

Oh no.

Trying to do the Coldstream 'dot-and-carry-one' you see. Well of course a fern will change no matter how you water it or look after it in the heat of a life room, I had a corner in there and I was trying to do this bloody antique and this fern in the ruthless manner. I don't say it did me any harm, but I made him, I made him come, because he never spoke to me so I made him come, I put the pressure on him to come and have a look, and he just sat down and he said, 'If I were you I would scrape it out and start again'. So I thought, well, he's very helpful to me that chap. And the next time I spoke to him I was doing Hump's head, and I said, 'I can't get that hessian behind there, I can't get that canvas back'. He said, 'I should think it back.' That was better. And then after...

What exactly...sorry, what exactly did he mean by 'think it back'?

Oh how the hell would I know? You have to think about it, that's what it meant, not just paint...

Yes, yes.

Which was quite useful, to think what the space was and all the rest of it. I know what he means more now than I did then, I mean that was quite a shock if somebody would say that. So off he trotted, and I think I got him once more after I had done the exam, which was of Paddington Station. 'Good observation'.

Oh yes, I think I might have seen that. I mean did you have that in your studio, have you still got it?

A little drawing. 'Good observation' he said.

Oh, well, you had come along.

Yes. So I must have been...the only compliment, once. And I got lots of compliments in Bertorelli's later on in my life.

Oh well...

He used to be very nice to me after I had left.

Right.

But he had his little Coldstream Guard gang. And I don't blame him, as I taught myself I must have had the same people I found particularly interesting, because they were working in the way in which you would like them to work. Well I was not working in the way in which people wanted me to work; I was working in the way that Pasmore was encouraging me to work, and I was showing him my letters from Lanyon and Nicholson and things like that you see.

Mm. So he saw what track you were on and encouraged you in that?

Yes, absolutely, yes. He encouraged me by making me go to the galleries.

Yes.

And then of course Adrian Heath was always encouraging me, because I had to listen to them writing this bloody book on Abstract art.

Oh 'Abstract Art, Its Origins and Meanings'?

I mean when I went round for breakfast, there it was, all around you know, and Anthony Hill and, a real pedantic really on the words you know, and the dates. So I'm getting all that for breakfast, dinner and tea.

That's the one, sorry, I think I've just said the one he wrote, the Abstract art one, but you're talking about the...

The one...

'Nine Abstract Artists'.

The book on Abstract artists, with the blue cover. I've got that somewhere.

Yes. But, we'll go on to that in a minute. Sorry, I just wanted to check. Coldstream, he became head of Painting at Camberwell in 1948, actual head.

Mm. Wallway[ph] was there. No, not Wallway[ph], the chap who went to the Central, Johnstone.

Johnstone, William Johnstone was there before that.

Yes. Well he had left when I, he had just left that year; as I started he left, didn't he?

Yes, yes he left, he retired in '47 from Camberwell, Johnstone.

That's right, that's right.

Yes. And Coldstream was appointed a visiting teacher at Camberwell in '45, and then he left in '49.

That's right, the same time as me I think.

The same time as you left officially.

Yes, that's right, yes.

Yes. And so Pasmore...who was the first...when you went to Camberwell, who was the first member of staff you came across then?

Jake Drew, who was the vice-principal I think, I think he was vice-principal, Jake Drew, at that time.

Right.

And I had to show my work.

And this was when you had been accepted or this was when you went for a sort of interview?

No I went for the interview, mm.

Yes, right. Although the path had been laid...

The path had been laid, yes, in the sense that I had made my application, and Adrian Heath had been and put a word in for me, but I still had to be interviewed, take some work up to show them, and I did show it to Drew and he was quite impressed with the portraits that I had done.

And was he from the 'dot-and-carry' school as well?

No, Jake was then...vice-principals had a terrible job; no matter how good they might be at whatever they did, they were glorified office boys, doing...

Yes, sort of Nannies.

Like adjutants in the army, they do all the admin.

Yes.

And they really get, it's a tough job and they get no thanks for it, from the students or the top. So they're very good chaps usually but they don't appear to be to you as a student because they're always having to keep their eyes on things. Later on Jake Drew became Principal of Dollis Hill.

Oh, at Willesden?

At Willesden, and that's when I got a job up there.

Oh was it through that?

Teaching anatomy, yes.

Right, right, right. And we'll talk about that a bit later on, we'll just get through this. So, and then when did you first come across Pasmore then, can you remember exactly?

Well yes, I went...I knew that he was there on Saturday mornings, because Adrian had told me all about that, and so I made sure that I went all the week and Saturday mornings; you didn't have to go on Saturday mornings. And Victor Pasmore came in to see what I was doing, he must have heard of me from Adrian, and he said, 'I see you've finished already.' The model was up there. I said, 'No, that's not what I really do,' I said. And I turned...because one always painted on both sides of a bit of board, I turned it round and showed him what I really painted like. Because I was trying to do like the others were doing there you see, I had never been to an art school to do that kind of thing. So he said, 'Come outside.' So he took me outside and he said, 'Don't come here any more.' I thought, that's marvellous isn't it, I've just spent two years to try and get in the place, and that my god, the chap I wanted to see, tells me never to come here any more. So I said, 'Well, I have to come, because,' I said, 'I've just got the grant.' And he said, 'Well look, go round the galleries, the National Gallery, and the modern galleries, and see what's going on.' I said, 'But I have to sign the book.' He said, 'Well get somebody else to sign it,' which I never thought of things like that you see. So when I got back in, the boys, the rest of the boys said, 'What did he say?' I said, 'He told me not to come here any more.' They thought I would have something wonderfully intellectual to say about painting, you see. So of course I followed his advice really, quite well; I knew he wasn't there on certain days, he was only there about twice a week, so I could go in the life room pretty safely on those days. But I remember a bit later on he came in when I was in the life room, he put that beard round the door and he looked, and he saw me in there, and my heart sank to my boots because I thought, I'm in trouble here. 'What are you trying to do in there?' he said, 'What are you doing?' I said, 'Well, I'm trying to learn to draw.' He said, 'What do you mean? What do you mean?' I said, 'Trying to learn to draw right.' That's all I could think about. He said, 'Look, if I gave you a table to french polish,' he said, 'you wouldn't make much of a job of it, but if I came back in fifteen years' time, and you had been doing it for a time, you can be pretty good,' he said. I thought, well, that's very good isn't it. He said, 'Draw the shapes you want to draw, just practise drawing the shapes you want to draw.' Well of course I didn't know much about it in those days at all,

but, I was never...he never caught me in the life room again, I always made sure that I was in there when he was not there, not present. And then of course they asked me up to, he liked what I was doing, he didn't say a great deal about that but he did invite me up to his place in Blackheath.

Oh right, well that was an honour.

Which of course was quite exceptional.

Mm.

And, I was favoured, I know that, because all the students used to say, 'What did he say to you?' every time we had a talk. And he asked me up to Blackheath, and I saw the work, and I had tea with him and Wendy and all that, which was lovely, and I would be discussing with Victor, and Wendy would say, 'Well you're against that Victor'. So I was obviously putting my foot in it really, but Victor wasn't telling me. And, it was quite interesting really, and I went up there quite a lot of times. And then I saw his little constructions he was making very early on, and his geometrical sort of changes through Cubism to a kind of linocut affair that he was using, and you know, it was quite early I was seeing that, which of course definitely influenced me and Adrian Heath into constructions, apart from the fact that Ben had made them and it was all so related to the Russian constructivist period which we were both very interested in.

Mm, mm, mm.

So everything was linking up.

Mm.

And so, it was a very important period with Victor. But also, I mean I had good instruction at Camberwell from people like Monnington, Tom Monnington.

Oh right.

Damn good draughtsman, Tom Monnington, and he was very helpful. And we had about 80 students, far too many ex-service people in the place, you couldn't move for people, and I mean the model was a million miles away; I used to have to walk up to the model and walk back to do your marks, it was so far away, trying to look round people. And I was saying to

Tom Monnington, 'It's very difficult,' I said, 'I'm right at the back, and I have to keep walking...' He said, 'Very good for your memory,' he said. (laughs) Well that was...that was very good, the staff. And then of course we had Carter who went to the Slade, and he was a mathematician chap.

What was his Christian name? [JOHN]

Carter, and he worked on mathematics, went to the Slade. He didn't have a lot to do with me, but his influence on the geometrical division of an area came through to me from the other people that he knocked about with, which was the Bryanston boys.

Oh right. And who were the Bryanston boys then?

Well, Patrick Symons we were talking about, weren't we?

Yes. And Anthony Fry.

Anthony Fry, and Hoyland, and...there was a whole gang of them, I can't remember the names.

Was Hodgkin briefly...?

I've a feeling Hodgkin was there, yes, Hodgkin was there, he was in the drawing, one of the drawings in that book that I did in the...yes, Hodgkin's there, yes. But Howard was in a very...he was very tied up, he couldn't get what he wanted, but of course I did...you don't know at the time what a bloke's trying to do, except he struggled, and he struggled at Corsham, he used to come into Corsham in '52 still struggling.

Yes, he didn't seem to last, stick anywhere at one point of his life.

No, well he couldn't find what he wanted obviously, because he didn't want to draw in the same manner as everybody else was trying to draw, academically in a sense; I'm using academic in the best sense in that way, of being able to put an arm and a leg and things in the right place as it were. But he never did that kind of drawing really, he didn't want to, and that's very difficult if you're in a class where everybody else is and you're struggling away trying to do something which...

And you were struggling too, but I suppose you were a bit more mature and you could cope with it.

Well yes, I was a bit more mature, and I could knock off, if I wanted to, a Coldstream-type drawing. I mean you could do a dot-and-carry-one if you want to, it's just like bloody logarithms, there's laws to that stuff. But if you really want to draw of course, that's a breathtaking experience; if you're really drawing a line and reading all the form, not just that bit, then that's a different world altogether, and that's what probably Howard was trying to do in his way, and I was trying to do in my way. And you didn't get much appreciation, I mean you were told it was too much tummy and not enough head and things like that, you know.

So, perhaps we can talk a bit about some of the work you did there.

At Camberwell?

Yes. I mean this, did you do that when you were there? 'Self Portrait', 1948/49?

That's right, yes, didn't I have that in the Leicester Gallery? Oh yes, I know why I did that. Lawrence Gowing, I think Lawrence Gowing was there when I first went there, and he came to the Leicester Galleries and I was in there, I don't know whose show it was, or whether I was in the 'Fame and Promise' thing I think or something like that, and he said, 'You should go back and paint a portrait'. Because I had got my beard because Pasmore had got a beard, that was the reason I got my beard, and he said, 'Just go back and paint your portrait,' because I had got my shirt out and my beard was slightly red and green or... And I did. (laughs)

It's rather good, isn't it, actually.

So, there you are.

And then, so you did Miss Humphries. And did you actually line it up, do any sort of grid, or you just did it?

I've got the sketch-book somewhere with the drawings in for it. Yes, oh it was gridded up, you knew all that kind of stuff, that was very important.

So even, you did that when you did your own thing, with that, in Adrian Heath's studio?

Yes, I had my drawings and Adrian Heath lent me his front studio; he himself had...

Was this in Fitzroy Street, or not?

Yes, Fitzroy Street. He had a studio upstairs, and Patrick Dolan did.

Patrick who?

Dolan had a studio up there. He was a diamond sorter, but he also painted. But he became an art historian in the end, I learnt a lot from him. Anyway there you are, I think they had Hodgkins in that one down there, the corner.

'Camberwell Life Drawing', 1947/48. Oh yes.

That's a bit of 'dot-and-carry-one', except slightly influenced by the Cubist type of thing.

And 'Camberwell Anatomy Study', that shows you can just draw, yes. 47/48. OK, and can I just ask you, when you went to Pasmore's house, did you see his work was changing? Did you see the old, the Hammersmithy type things?

Oh yes, beautiful. I knew the flower barrow and all that kind...in fact I did a flower barrow in Battersea, which, a flower seller, which I based on my influence of Victor, but, yes, I mean the Chiswick paintings were beautiful paintings. And of course Adrian Heath owned a couple of those paintings you see, and Victor had a big mural on his wall too, and so I saw all that. But I also saw the geometrical work that was going on, and of course, not forgetting dear old Kenneth Martin who was still doing his straightforward stuff when I went there, Kenneth was moving over, like Victor, and when I went to Kenneth's he was working on algebraic equations too on graph paper, and trying to weld up on his gas stove, you know, kind of thing. No, I was very lucky, because I couldn't...I didn't know what analogy meant, and I remember Kenneth explaining to me about a circle being the sun, or being a ball, and it's interesting that he just, Kenneth was helpful to me, because he was interested in me trying to paint abstract paintings. You must remember, I showed my final exhibition of pure abstract painting you see at Camberwell.

Oh did you?

Oh yes.

Which one was that?

`Madrigal'.

Oh `Madrigal', yes, I was going to come to...I was going to talk about that in a minute.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

There was the summer...Claude Rogers set the...

Was it a summer composition type thing in your holidays?

Yes that's right, they write down... I know there was, two things were pinned up, Joseph's Coat of Many Colours, and `Madrigal' by Auden, and, I thought oh dear, two things we had to do in the summer. You must remember that I had worked in a cafe in the summer to earn some money, and...

Down here?

Yes, down here. So I had to look into that, and first of all I went to see my mother in Leamington and I went to Leamington reference library to look up Joseph's Coat of Many Colours, because although it was a biblical reference, I told you I couldn't play chess and things like that, and I was not very...I'm not very good at thinking laterally and all that kind of lark, which I know you're supposed to do, and so I went and looked at the reference library, and I found that all the experts disagreed about what Joseph's Coat of Many Colours meant. And I never, I thought it was...I really though it was a coat; I never realised it was an old philosophical statement. And by the time I had finished reading various experts, I was so dumbfounded I gave that up completely, because no one agreed about the interpretation. Well, so, Joseph's Coat of Many Colours went out the window, and I read Auden's `Madrigal'. And I had always had a weak spot for poetry; not a weak spot, I had always liked poetry, not knowing about music or poetry, I didn't like it in a posh way, I just responded when I happened to read poetry. So I read `Madrigal', and as I was married to Kath, and he came up out of the mine to see his Kate, which, Kath was always called Kate by her parents, I responded to that. And as I was into pure geometry at that time, into the Golden Section and Fimanati[??] proportions and things like that, I divided that, that is divided up absolutely on the Golden Section and all the diagonals and things that go to it, so that every little area is a positive relationship to the other area, they're all related you see. And so, I worked on that, and I just did the simple thing of going down the mine where you see it gets darker, and where the colours are cooler, and then.....

End of F4317 Side A

F4317 Side B

So when he came home at lunchtime I had brought in the warmer colours, because that would be his love-making period, and so that was quite simple. So, I think Adrian was always right when he said I made up stories to myself to paint my pictures from. But then I made this up from my response to his poem you see.

That was from the...yes, exactly, so that was...mm.

And that was shown in the, with the rest of the students who had done their summary work, and they were all put up, and Daniels was the principal at the time, and, I had already been in a spot of bother because I had been not conforming to the rules and regulations I suppose, and that being up, I know that he wanted to ignore it, but he couldn't because he had got people like Martin and Pasmore on his staff. But he spoke about every...tough job for a principal really, to try and speak about every painting and say something about them, all the summary compositions, he came to that last of all, which, he said, 'This is all right, as long as it is not an end in itself'. That's all I got from Daniels you see. But you see, you must remember I had people like Kenneth Martin there you see.

Yes, so they were on your side.

Yes, and Victor. Claude was on my side, although he didn't understand what the hell I was doing half the time. And, I tried to pinch another year out of my grant, because I hadn't taken the intermediate, I went straight into the painting you see, I felt I couldn't fiddle about on that lark.

What, the intermediate being a sort of foundation equivalent?

Well no, you did...oh I forget because I did do anatomy and all that stuff, didn't I, I did the anatomy and perspective and...

Yes, but that was all relating really to painting.

I think it was related to what I did there, I'm confused about it, but I know that I tried to get a bit of extra time there. I got an extra 12 months somehow or another by being sent for, because I tried to do some lithography, that was right, with La Dell was the prints man. And I went in and I tried to do pure abstract, and La Dell said, when he came to see, 'That's all bull,' which of course is quite hurtful when you're taking things seriously. And so I didn't do the

print, but I was then sent for by the Principal; Jake Drew said, 'You've got to go up to see the Principal,' he said. 'You're in trouble,' he said. I said, 'Oh yes?' Because I hadn't been following the course; I had been doing pottery and trying to do some printing in the extra 12 months rather than...

Oh in that...yes, I see, yes.

I thought, being, having been in the services it would take them 6 months to find me out before, I'm not carrying on with what I was supposed to be doing. But I wanted to learn pottery, I was very keen on pottery, in fact I was quite good at it.

What were you doing...oh well, I'll...

At Camberwell, yes. And so, I was sent for, and luckily for me Daniels had got the, I think there were some Rembrandts open, Rembrandt photographs on the table, and he started to ask me about things, and I just looked at these and I said...and he was asking me about abstract art and all that kind of thing I was doing, and I said, well, I was talking about all the shapes and how Rembrandt had repeated all these particular...I remember talking about the furrows in the brow and the way in which the neck was repeating the same shapes. And I pointed all these various things out to him, which were structural organisation by the painter, and he was so impressed he rang up Dickey at the Ministry of Education and he got me the extra 12 months on my own terms, which was fantastic.

Oh that was marvellous, yes. And so, the pottery that you did, what was that, were you throwing, or building the clay?

I was throwing, yes. When I was there, Hamada came there.

Oh right.

And, that was quite an interesting experience, because I was working with Jock Purdy who was my mate at that time, we used to get there about 6 in the morning, before the school started, because we knew the chap who was in charge and he would open up for us very early and we would get on the wheel, because you could never get on it in the daytime, there were too many students who had to go and do a certain amount of pottery, therefore they were entitled to the wheels. But, we used to get there early, because Jock was a ceramic lad, and we used to get a couple of hours in before anybody came you see.

Oh that was good.

It was absolutely marvellous. And I was there when whatsaname was there...

Pleydell-Bouverie?

Sabuki[ph]. Oh, well, what's his name, Bernard Leach's friend.

What, Hamada?

Hamada. And, you know, having spent about twelve months on that damn wheel, centring and getting my half a pint out of ten ounces of clay, I mean you had to cut it so that the clay was about the same thickness all the way up, and you had to get half a pint in that ten ounces, that's what it was all for.

Who set you that problem?

The chap who ran the place, Kendall I think his name was, who did marry one of the Leaches I think, yes he did, Dick Kendall. And then there was also a chap who was a nice old boy who didn't show up at all, but he was obviously a professional from Staffordshire who, probably very commercial but he knew all the tricks of the trade, and he taught me how to make a palette of colours and put them in the kiln in different places so that I knew what colour I could get. And they don't bother with half that nowadays you see. And I was throwing these things, and I Hamada came in, and of course he didn't bother to centre at all, which shook me to the core to think I had worn myself out getting that stuff right, and his clay just wobbled about all over the place like that, and the pot came off all crooked, and he didn't bother with a bit of leather to clean the top off or anything, and so the top was like this. And of course it was the most wonderful asymmetrical pot you had ever seen, and there was me always trying to get every side absolutely equal and immaculate, you know. So, it's quite a good lesson. Very difficult to lift a pot off like that you see, that isn't straight as it were. So that, I was lucky enough to hit that. But, I couldn't keep on with the pottery in the end, the painting gradually began to take over from me.

But in between, while you were doing the pottery in the daytime and things you were keeping up your painting?

Oh yes, and I was also doing some sculpture.

Oh sculpture as well?

I had got interested in sculpture, and I think people like Monty Sunshine, I think Humphrey Lyttleton had just left but Monty Sunshine and one or...oh God, I've forgotten the name of the jazz people, but they were in the sculpture school the same time as I was. And they, I thought they were terrible, because as soon as the model got down, they got their instruments out, and I was still working on it because there was such a lot to do you know, and I thought, well, the buggers, they're not very interested in art, what the hell are they doing? One with a trombone and another with a guitar and another with a clarinet. I thought they were idle bastards quite honestly, I thought they're not really interested in art, because I wasn't into music at all. Well when we had the school dance, which went on all night of course, and we had wonderful subjects, Balthazar's Feast, something, which we did all the decoration for, made a wonderful... And those lads were the band, and they were absolutely outrageously marvellous of course. And I think Humphrey Lyttleton joined them for that you see. And of course they still are bands, have become quite...is it Chris Barber? Isn't it Monty Sunshine? I forget all the names now.

I'm not very `au fait' I'm afraid.

I know that they...they were there, and I realised that...and we all know now that most of the good film-makers and singers and writers and people like that go to art school, because it happens to be the best place, and that's what the Government's never understood; they think it's expensive, but it's one of the best places for people who want to do something.

So what was your sculpture like then when you were...?

Oh bloody hopeless.

Was it carving? What was it?

No, I was building with clay in those days. I did try carving, and I had a nice big piece of stone, because I tried to do a cat, because St. Ives is always full of cats and we had two cats. And it was about, I suppose it was about a foot by nine inches the piece of stone.

What stone was it?

Oh God knows, I mean you had to have what you could get. It was pretty easy to hit. And I had just finished up with a cat that I could put in my jacket pocket, just, it wasn't like painting

where you could scrape off and put a bit on, because if you are carving and you knock it off, you can't you it back on. So it was an invaluable lesson to me, I was not a natural carver by any means at all, I didn't learn to carve till I worked for Barbara, and I very soon learnt then otherwise you would have got the sack. So that was my, my experience of carving was not very good.

Right. And who taught you then, at Camberwell, the carving?

Well I don't know, he was a Czech. Vogel I think his name was, something like that. He was very depressing to me, because he hated abstract art, and he was, I mean you know that Prague is very beautiful, and, is it Rococo or, what do they call that type of, very pretty sort of...?

Yes, Baroque.

Baroque. Well that's what he was into, and he was very good with it, when he did a model you could see that that kind of feeling was what he was full of. And he was absolutely anti abstract art altogether, and I tried to reason with him, and it totally depressed me, and I was walking to lunch with Kenneth Martin, I said, 'I've just been to the sculpture classes, and I don't know what to do,' I said, 'because I've tried to reason with him, and I can't handle him at all, and it's really depressed me. I feel that I should commit suicide, I shouldn't carry on working.' And he said, 'Well, you must never waste your time talking with people like that,' he said, 'or debating with people like that, because their mind is so made up. You must only talk with people who are after the same kind of truth that you are after, because none of us know, but at least, talk to people like that.' And that was Kenneth's advice to me as we walked up to the ABC restaurant for our cup of tea in Camberwell. And that's how I never argued with that chap again; in fact I stopped going to the classes, because he was so depressing to me.

Mm, probably the right advice. And then, so the lithography you were doing under La Dell...

No I didn't go to him any more either.

You didn't, no, that was just...

I finished with it. I wouldn't...if someone was so ignorant as to say that to you, then they're not worth going to.

Right. And, what about the things that you did while you were there but not in the art school, like when you went round the galleries?

Well we were supposed to do lithography you see, and that's why I was...

But that was on your extra year wasn't it.

I was sent for, you see, and that's why I never went again. No I should have been doing painting you see.

Mm. But when you were going out on Pasmore's advice round the galleries and things, where did you go, and did you go by yourself, or did you go with friends, or...?

Mainly by myself, because if you go with other people they always want to see, stand longer in front of something which you are not particularly interested in, and I couldn't do that; I could only do that with Adrian Heath, because we had great discussions in front of every picture, because Adrian knew the art history. I went by myself, and I did each room. But you see the reason I did each room was, I wasn't very good at art history and I wanted to learn by seeing the paintings, not books, because reproductions are not very good really. And so I learnt the things I liked in the National museum, because I knew I would be asked questions; I didn't think they would be so bloody awkward as compare Rubens' technique with Van Gogh or something, I forget. No, Rubens with Ingres.

Who asked you to do that?

That was the history of art question I had. 'Compare Rubens with Ingres', his technique or something. Well I didn't understand the question, because I knew about Rubens because I had copied 'The Three Graces' and I loved it, so I wrote a hell of a lot about Rubens but I ignored Ingres completely, because it wasn't my cup of tea, that was cold...

Classical.

I mean I do realise that it's lovely drawing. At that time I didn't want to like Coldstream's ideas, and all that gang, and that's what they always talked about, was Poussin and Ingres.

And were you consciously reacting, were you against what they liked?

I was consciously reacting against their metal track that they were in; it was like, as if they were in an antique...

Time warp or something?

No, what's that metal things people wear?

Armour?

Yes, antique armour they were in, and they would not move out of it at all, and it had to be Poussin, Fra Angelico, Ingres, nobody else had a chance. Cézanne was about as far as they would get. And I was fed up with that, because there was so much going on in the world that I was so excited about it, because I hadn't been trapped in their bloody time warp. So I had a tough job really at Camberwell. It's good to react, but it makes it hard work. But I went to all the museums, I mean the V & A I used to go to quite a lot, because if you live in London you can do those things.

And what did you go and look at in the V & A?

Well I looked at the sculpture mainly, that fascinated me more than...particularly the French sculpture, it was so different.

Can you remember who, which...?

Well I really was looking at the features I think, how they always looked very French, the noses were a different shape and all that. No, I mean if you go to the V & A you are actually bewildered if you're not careful. Like the British Museum used to knock me out too, because I could never get, I used to get lost in the Egyptian part, not wanting to stay there really but fascinated. So I didn't study properly in those places, there was so much, and I didn't learn how to study there. But there was...where's the other place? Doesn't it begin with W?

Wallace?

Wallace Collection, that's right, I used to like that.

Did you?

They had the Velasquez and things in there, I thought that was...and it was a bit quieter when you went there, and I love that museum.

What, did you like Boucher and Fragonard and things like that?

Oh yes, I love Fragonard.

Did you?

Yes, I love Fragonard. I think there's a place for that kind of painting, I mean, everybody is so different, and... I just liked the...I liked the...oh, name's gone. [BREAK IN RECORDING] I just enjoyed the galleries. I got my...I really do enjoy the galleries just as much now, and the Duccios and 'Saint Jerome in his Study' study, and Bellini and people like that, I mean I really love those works. And I wasn't...I never have been an expert on dates or names, and I don't want to do that, because I know I haven't got the ability to do it, or I'm too lazy to want to use that ability; I would rather put it on to just liking or not liking a painting, and looking at it and thinking about it, and if I've spent my time remembering the dates, then I wouldn't get anywhere. Like when I like Richard Wilson's 'Cader Idris' I went to the British Museum and I got special books to find out how he did it, and I found out how he put a.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] No Richard Wilson, which is a lovely little painter, and the blue was so wonderful in it, and so I went and read what his palette was, and the colours he used. Of course you we couldn't get lapis lazuli or anything like that, but the point was he used about six coats of gesso burnished underneath and then a brown, and then the blue, so that the light refracted through and you got the most wonderful colour. And, you see that's how I did my sort of study, and I went and looked at...I remember at the V & A I used to look at the all the miniatures, which you used to have to pull the covers back over. And of course there were a lot of Constable drawings, small...

And those studies.

And studies.

Cloud studies and things.

Really beautiful studies there. Things like that. So that, those were my delights really. And of course one could go every Saturday or every Sunday.

And what about the commercial galleries? Did you go round them?

Oh yes, I think one of the first shows I saw was Prunella Clough at the, which was a marvellous exhibition.

Where was that, the Redfern or somewhere?

No, it was Roland Browse and Delbanco. And she was still figurative then - well, figurative in her way, which has always been quite unique; in fact she's one of our best painters, no doubt about that.

And still going.

Yes, marvellous girl, straight as a die, wonderful, very helpful. So I saw her work. I didn't know her then of course, I mean, I'm talking about '47 or something like that. And the Redfern of course I used to go to, because that was next door, and they were...they always had interesting people, because Rex Nan Kivell had a wonderful collection of Utrillos, Vuillard, all those people, prints, and I was a keen fan of Vuillard because of his quality of tonal painting, and also his selection of the blouses and the pattern and the carpets and the way in which he could get the delight of things. Even if he was doing a Proustian type of thought about the painting, the analytical was rather Proustian, but the actual...there was also a Matisse element of colour in it which I liked, and also he could use greys beautifully, they were all clean and colourful greys. So I used to go and look at them. And then the Leicester Galleries was a very distinguished place in those days, where you could see people like Ginner and people like that, Bevan and Sickerts.

Yes, all the Camden Town, mm.

So that one had a very good grounding in those days at your own time as it were.

And did you go into, because the Leicester Galleries offered you, we'll get to that a bit later, your first solo - well, excluding the one you had had down here in St. Ives, show, didn't they? But the first commercial gallery in London that you showed your work in, was that Gimpels?

(laughs) I wish I knew. I think Leicester Galleries 'Fame and Promise' was my first I think, it may have been. Gimpels certainly showed me in an Abstract thing, but they were going to take me on when I did the 'Walk Along the Quay' but they didn't, you see.

Why was that?

Well because I asked them for the rent. (laughs) The reason they didn't take me on was, I asked them for the rent, and Charles wasn't having it. I showed the letter to Victor, he said, 'I'm afraid you've had it.' (laughing) I was very disappointed because they had been down to see me you see.

So that was when you had left Camberwell, when you were back here.

No I don't know whether I had left.

Or not?

No. After I left Camberwell I got stony broke, and I went to get an overdraft if I could, and I had got a halfpenny left, he said, in the bank, and he said, 'I can't take any more paintings,' the bank manager said, 'I've got a load of them already,' he said, but...so that I was in trouble. But, I did get an extra two years I was offered.

An extra two years, sorry, where?

Well I was down here, I had got that studio, and I was stony broke.

Right.

So I had to do something, and, I can't remember exactly how I did it. My friend Fred Mulley was at that time assistant to Tudor-Ede?

Assistant to...?

Tudor-Ede, I think his name was. I think he was educational Minister, Minister of Education, and I think Fred was his first secretary or something like that. And I remember saying to Fred, well I'm in the soup, I don't think I can carry on painting. He said, 'Well why don't you do your intermediate?' I said, 'Well you have to do that if you want to go teaching, and I don't want to do that.' I said, 'I made my mind up in the prison camp to be a professional painter.' He said, 'Well why don't you apply to do your intermediate? It will give you breathing space.' Oh, pedagogical stuff, I thought, oh God! Anyway, I applied, and I got an interview in London; whether Fred pulled any strings or not I don't know, but he certainly advised me what to do. So I went up to London and I applied. Well the intermediate was really a two-year course, so they offered me two years, and I wouldn't take two years, I said

no, I'll have twelve months, because I have done perspective and anatomy and all that. So I took the twelve months and went to Penzance College of Art in desperation.

Ah right, I see, so that gave you a small income to help support you.

Yes, it gave me 600 a year, or 300 a year, whatever, I can't remember what it was. £7 a week wasn't it.

And had you had any more children by this stage?

Oh we had got about three or four by then. So I went...I had to go then to Penzance, leave my studio in St. Ives and go over to Penzance, and I wasn't very popular in Penzance because I had just been shown at the Leicester Galleries and I had been written about, and Tunnard was teaching there, and he saw what I was doing and he said, 'Your work is only fit for lavatory walls'. And this is my introduction to Penzance.

Oh right.

And the Principal always looked at his watch; if I got there five minutes late, 'I'll stop your grant'. Because they knew, I didn't realise this, I was quite innocent, I was already part of the Nicholson thing, and I didn't know anything about these isms, and Tunnard and Nicholson had fell out years ago, and I didn't realise what I had dropped into. And so that I was really getting into trouble, not for my own fault really, it was just they were prejudiced against the type of art I had got interested in. Anyway I stuck it out and I did my intermediate drawing there.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Sorry, I think we were leaping ahead a bit then, and I just want to drag you back.

Well it was perfectly true.

Yes, no, it's really interesting.

The move from there to...

To fill in...yes, how that happened.

Well Camberwell...

I just wanted to ask you, apart from...so you were going...you went round the V&A, Wallace etcetera, and to the commercial galleries that you talked about.

Yes.

I just wanted to go back to ask you about a couple of other people who were teaching there that I just wondered whether you knew, and then talk about some of your fellow students possibly. I mean Minton, do you remember him at all, John Minton?

He was there when I first went there, only in about my first term or two, because he went to the Royal College. Yes, Minton came in for one life class I saw him only, so I never really had a lot to do with him at all. I don't think he ever spoke to me personally.

Right, right.

He spoke to the whole class on one occasion. I think that must have been his last term, when I would have been actually a first-year, doing silly things like composition they called it.

And then, we've talked about Coldstream, your couple of encounters with him.

Yes, yes.

And, what about William Townsend, did you know him?

Oh yes, William Townsend was the one who set, he set...they suddenly had a brilliant idea, like you have to get rid of your teaching just to save yourself from the boring thing about it, and they gave the idea that we should copy an Old Master. And I know he interviewed us each, each one of us to see what we would do. Well I did Rubens, just to be awkward, I wasn't going to do that Poussin and Ingres stuff, not at any price. And I did Rubens because I liked the juicy paint, which I did try to use a little bit, and I liked the pendimenti, all the way that the paint was used, and the girl with the chapeau, you know, and also in the...and I liked the way in which 'The Three Graces' was, the reds were used and the way the girls were turned in it. I liked the composition, which, and I liked the structure which underlay the whole painting. So, I'm grateful to him for suggesting we did that, because I learnt so much from trying to do it. Because you see, I think they were a bit strict about drawing from paintings in those days, only certain days when you could actually do anything, so...

In the National Gallery you mean?

Yes. So one used to sit there and try not to be seen. And I don't think we could afford to buy postcards, and postcards weren't so fashionable as they are now. And so I did it, and I've still got it, there's one there, there it is, right down there, one of the copies.

Oh.

Can you see it?

No. I'll have a look in a minute.

Behind the light-box there. That's one of the original ones I think.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Right, so that was 'The Three Graces'.

(laughs) Bloody Adrian! I can't believe it. [TF LOOKING AT 'CORSHAM A CELEBRATION' CATALOGUE]

And there's this...I've just opened a book with a reproduction of this 'Women in Quay Street', that was quite...

Yes, well that was the house opposite. It must be in one of these catalogues. [REFERS TO CORSHAM CATALOGUE ABOVE] Oh there's me in the bloody thing.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

And I was just wondering, the students that were there, were you particularly friendly with any of them?

Yes, I did have a particular friend, but he had...his name was Paddy Gault, and he was an Irish lad, and he's still painting, he lives in Blackheath, and he does very well, and he still does his Irish kind of romantic, Yeatsy-type landscapes, which he does very beautifully. I don't see him, I get a Christmas card now, and he's...but at Camberwell he was my great friend, because we both smoked Golden Virginia tobacco in those days, and dust, and we were very hard up,

so we were great friends. But, the other boys, yes, I knew them all really but, Tom Epsley[ph] and Steve somebody whose name has gone; they were all a pretty strong gang.

Anthony Fry?

Yes, yes.

Patrick George?

Yes. I was never an intimate friend of theirs, I was just in the same class. My friends were very limited. I don't make a lot of friends.

But anyway, you had your own family and your own friends in their own right anyway, didn't you.

I had my own family, and Adrian I used to see quite regularly, and Corrine [ADRIAN HEATH'S WIFE] and Anthony Hill, Paolozzi. I didn't really knock about with people there; I was a bit older I suppose, that's what it was.

Mm, mm.

And I didn't have any girlfriends there, because I was just married anyway, and...

What did you do, when you came back from a day at Camberwell back to Albert Bridge Road, what did you do?

Well normally one would do some painting in the evening from out of the window, and in the mornings I would go in the park early and do some drawing in there of the trees, and also with perspective problems of railings that were going round the lake and that. And I wanted to learn how to do it; I've been trying to remember how I did it, because there is a way of taking a line up and keep taking it up, and it does do the perspective for you, and I've forgotten it because I tried to do it the other day. But on railings which are going in a curve, it's very interesting. Problems like that I would solve. And then I used to paint the trees in there.

End of F4317 Side B

F4318 Side A

[Terry Frost interviewed at his house in Newlyn on the 21st of November 1994. Tape Seven.]

Sorry, you were talking about going in to Battersea Park.

Oh yes, well I did paintings of the trees hanging over the water, the lake, and got the reflections and all that, and the swans. And really I was out in the park early every morning because we had Adrian, the first child, who cried like the fury actually, cried for nine months non-stop, and if you are sharing a house and being privileged to have a room in a house where two chaps are living, they don't want that kind of noise, as teachers. I used to be in the park at 6 o'clock in the morning wheeling him around to keep him quiet, and if I could get him to sleep, the quicker I could get him to sleep the quicker I could do some drawing. And I learnt all kinds of tricks, because in drawing I used to not only do the drawing but put the colour notes and the tonal notes. And then I thought, well this is a bit silly, doing three drawings to get all these things, so what I did was put some duplicating paper in so that I was able to do my drawing and then make my notes on the one that had come through, I thought that was very good. And, you learn all kinds of things like that. But I found Battersea Park wonderful, because it has undulated areas and it has different types of trees, and it has water, and it had little buildings, it did in those days, it's got bigger ones now. And it was a very beautiful place to go, and being just opposite the house where I lived in Albert Bridge Road. And I also did, you asked me what I did when I got back. Well for instance I would work out of the window, and I did, I remember when it was raining and two chaps came along on their bicycles with yellow macs on, and so the reflections on the road, and the way in which they were wet, and that was one of the best little paintings I did; I don't know where it is, somebody bought it I think, but I did that from Albert Bridge Road. I also did a lot of drawings of Kath looking in the mirror, and when she was knitting; I did my Cubist, Analytical Cubist drawing of her, which I did a painting from.

Oh, have I seen that? Was it at the Belgrave a few years ago?

It must be somewhere, yes. Where she was knitting you see. And I did the flower seller, because a chap used to come along selling flowers on Saturday mornings, or the weekends, with his horse and cart, and I did that, I did him carrying his bunch of flowers in a Cubist manner, I was trying to learn to do that. So Battersea Park was heaven to me.

And did you actually miss the country, the Cornish landscape, or were you...I mean being in London, so you appreciated the park even more?

Well I didn't miss it, because I was too busy to miss it. If I had have been bored I would have missed it. But, no, I mean it was such an exciting time for me. Like Adrian and I would go down to the docks, and I think the V & A have got a couple of those drawings I did, not, I don't know whether they ever show them or not, they've certainly got a couple of the best single line drawings I was trying to do of the dock gates. And Adrian knew his way around and took me down, and we did a lot of drawings we used to do down there, and go to a pub called The Grapes I think, a wonderful, well-known...

Where was this, in Rotherhithe or somewhere? You mean those kind of docks?

I mean Adrian took me down the docks, and used to see the gates that came across, and I remember doing those gates. Wonderful shapes. So, although one was into abstract and constructivism one was always looking at things. You see, you do see wonderfully clear when you've done abstract art, whereas before one gets wrapped up in the figurative art of other people too much so that you really can't see, well I couldn't see clearly for myself. Whereas when I got into pure abstract art, pure geometrical division and pure abstract art, I could see for the first time, and I could make my own selection from the visual experience, because you see every shape. It isn't the shape, it isn't just the branch, it's the shapes between the branch you begin to see.

Yes the sort of negative shape.

That happen, that they're real shapes, that the branch doesn't exist without them, and unless you can get that equality in your drawing, it doesn't matter how much you draw the apple or the branch, it doesn't work, because you haven't related it.

And so, you were talking about doing, working in the Cubist manner, or the Analytical Cubist manner.

Mm.

What...whose work had you see by that stage in...had you see it in real life as it were?

Well, yes, well, Jacques Villon was our god at that time, because we had...we used to take...

When you say `our' god...?

Well Adrian and...Adrian and me particularly. Jacques Villon was one of the Duchamp people, and he knocked about..I can't remember, I forget the relationships of these people, but certainly his drawings were very analytical, and we could see, and I had the book, and Adrian had the book, and we both studied that quite seriously and talked about it, and it was very helpful that kind of selectivity of shapes. And of course Juan Gris became a particular favourite at that time.

Rather than Picasso?

Oh yes, yes. Picasso was a bit dangerous for us, well was for me, because the only way you could, I could be influenced by Picasso was to draw like Picasso, and I think, he was so powerful that you became imitative if you weren't careful, and one wanted more freedom than that. It wasn't abstract enough. I'm not talking about the 1911 sort of Cubist period of Braque and Picasso which was a different matter, I mean that was very beautiful, 1908 and 1911 stuff was very beautiful, but, I mean the later work which one was seeing more of was not to my, I didn't want to do that.

No. And then, so was it very hard for you to keep body and soul together at that stage when you were at Camberwell?

Well, I don't remember that; you live on a...you live on what you've got, and if you are happy, then it doesn't matter. And I think we survived very well.

And did you go out in London, did you...I mean you sound as if you were actually based at home quite a lot, because you were working and...

Yes, we didn't...

And you couldn't leave your baby.

Well we walked everywhere, we actually walked in the town; it's not far from Battersea. And Kathleen would walk up to Camberwell to meet me, and we would walk back together pushing the child you see. Couldn't afford to take buses all the time. And, I think we generally enjoyed London very much. We would walk to the V & A on Saturdays you see, and walk to the Tate Gallery, could do that from Battersea.

Mm. And then, did you go out and have meals with friends and things like that?

No I don't think so, I don't remember that, I don't remember that at all. I don't remember even going to Adrian's for anything like that. I mean if you went to Adrian's in those days you had to take your own bit of sausage with you or something like that, I mean it was all sort of rationing days as it were. No, I don't remember, I don't think that kind of thing existed so much then.

No.

You were just lucky to survive on what you had got you see, and I don't think you expected anything from anyone else. Might go to Lyons Corner House for a cup of tea, and you always got a good cup of tea at Lyons. There was one at the top of Cork Street in those days, the road that runs...opposite the end gallery of Waddingtons which he didn't have in those days, on the right-hand side.

Clifford Street.

The one at the top, yes, Clifford Street, used to be a Lyons tea shop there. And then the other one we went to was opposite the theatre where the 'Mousetrap' was on forever, used to be, near Whitehall, one there. That was when we were on our way to the Tate, after we had been to the National Gallery, that was a great tea shop.

And do you remember in the Tate a particular painting that struck you?

Well at that time we were heavily into Seurat, because we had been to Kenneth Clark's talk on Seurat, which was a mathematical talk really, but it did confirm all our ideas about the division of the area. And, it was a wonderful talk by Clark for me. And we were...I think Adrian was copying Seurat at that time.

Yes, I've seen a slide, Margaret Garlake showed something just...

Yes. And, so, the Tate, I don't think the Tate had any particular...at the moment I can't recall any that stopped me in my tracks. I know that I was very...the one...Joseph Wright of Derby was one that fascinated me, I thought he was a marvellous painter, and the Gordale Scar was... But, I mean, Turner of course I was told to look at, which makes a big difference if you are told to look at; you've got to be very careful about what you tell people to do, because people over-praise people. And Turner, I liked the things with nothing on more than I liked his Italian, academic pieces which he put everything in, and was to do with myth and all the

rest of it, I wasn't so keen on that stuff. But I liked the things with nothing on, those are the ones I liked of Turner's. And there was a portrait, 'Robin' was it, by Augustus John?

Oh yes, or Caspar...the one that became an Admiral.

Curly-haired young boy.

Oh yes, cherubic sort of...

And then there was a portrait by Degas of a girl's head which was wonderful, retroussé nose and lovely lips, that was another one that impressed me very much. But I don't remember anything else particularly.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

OK, so, when you...you left Camberwell and you came back to St. Ives.

Yes.

And then you've explained that you signed on...

I got a grant. Yes I had to get a grant. I signed on the dole for a bit I think, but then I had to get a grant.

Yes, and that's when you attended the Penzance Art School.

Yes, yes.

Which you mentioned.

Yes. But the least said about Penzance Art School the better.

Right. And, had you...you were still based in the house in 12 Quay Street weren't you?

12 Quay Street, yes, that's right.

And had you then got a separate studio? Did you get hold of the one next door to Ben Nicholson quite soon?

Oh I had that, I had that in about '51 didn't I.

Right, so this was '50 really when you were back, when you had finished at Camberwell was it?

Yes. I got that studio pretty quickly. There was business going on, White was the Arts Council chap I think, Gabriel White.

Oh yes.

And I think that they were trying to purchase those studios at that time, and I had to put my name in at, Lanhams were the agents I think, and I put my name in; I think Ben backed me for that, I'm not sure, when I had that studio to start with.

And then, you were working...you said you worked in 12 Quay Street when you started doing 'The Walk Along the Quay'.

Yes, well I did, I worked in the bedroom, yes.

Yes, because actually, the famous one, the E.C. Gregory original one that Adrian Heath I think possibly ended up with...

He bought it, yes, at Christie's.

That one is 1950, but this one, owned by Willie Barns Graham and David Lewis, that seems to be dated '48, do you agree with that?

Oh I don't know, I couldn't argue about it. But certainly by, I was certainly doing abstract art, and they bought it, they would know, I should think either Willie or David have got that, and they would know the date more than I would. I should have thought that information would have been on the back of it.

Yes, so that must be right. So that really is early, isn't it.

Mm, yes, it sounds very early to me, it sounds too early to me, quite frankly, it sounds too early. But I don't know, I couldn't swear, because I was doing...you see I was doing abstract things at...

Camberwell.

At Camberwell, and I may have been fiddling about on bits of board doing that, that's on a bit of board you see. But it sounds early to me. I wouldn't have thought I did it before 1949 actually, unless it's written on. Because David bought it and Willie, you see.

Mm. And did you, I know you've described it beautifully, and it's all been written down, how you started doing 'The Walk Along the Quay' series, and you probably don't want to talk about it again.

Well it's only exactly the same thing as what I drew in Battersea Park, because that child cried for two years, and I had to take him out, because if you live in St. Ives the houses are so close down along, that you wake all the bloody neighbours up, and if they've got a few holiday visitors they go mad. So I had to take him out, so I had to go down the quay, further away as possible and he could make a noise like the seagulls, it didn't matter. Now that's why I walked along the quay every morning.

And then, did you actually happen to have a long thin piece of board?

By sheer chance, I mean I actually begged, borrowed, sometimes bought, any stretchers that were in Lanham's sale room, because you could pick up a bundle for ten bob, or two bob or something like that you see, and I happened to get one that size, with a frame as well I think.

Right, I see. So that is actually canvas. I was thinking it was board.

No it's canvas.

Yes, I see, I see. So you had that shape anyway, did you, before you started doing...?

Yes. I had that shape, yes. Well I mean I couldn't say whether I had found the shape afterwards, but I didn't have it made. That was a shape I had got, and it was the same shape as the quay, I mean you know, you put the lighthouse at the bottom and you walk along the quay to the lighthouse, just like that.

Is it Smeaton's pier, is it, is that what you did?

Mm, that's right, yes, that's it, that's where I used to walk. Because my house was just near there.

And so do you think...those walks started, you started thinking about the idea for the painting, and then thought, oh yes, I'll do it on the long thin...

I didn't see there was any other way to do it. If you walk along a straight line like that, like the quay is, if you walk along it, that's the truth, and so, and you pass all those things on your way, and you come back and do something about it. It isn't like looking at boats on the water from sitting down and having that viewpoint; this is a viewpoint above, from above, and it's a truth, and it is a walk. And then later on I did ones which encompass the square of the quay, which you go right the way round to the other side where the blue lamp was, and I would do that, but that would be a locking process where you lock the quay so the water just comes in that little entrance [INAUDIBLE].

And was that 'Blue Movement' that came out of that?

'Blue Movement' was that, that's very much related to that, yes, it's in the book somewhere.

There it is. Do you mean that one? No.

No not that one, no not that one so much, no.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

'Walking Along the Quay, Blue Movement', 1952.

You see you actually do a bit of locking in on that you see, and so you really are in a contained harbour, which is a totally different thing from that, which is just the one...

Yes, the one straight...

One walk that way. This is a case of thinking about that walk which one did quite often, but standing here to think about it, so one sees the whole lot then, a sort of aerial view of it. But then you see, that's only a way of thinking as well as looking.

But it's...I mean, it's not...I mean it's not entirely abstract is it, that?

No, but it's not done in front of the subject. The thing is that, you've got the golden section running down there, and immediately I can see that without even bothering, and a square within a square basis, and then my rhythms will be, if you were to follow them through you would find they connect up. And then once I've got that structure in, I'm at liberty to do exactly what I want with my colours if they make the painting work. So there is a freedom in it which is totally abstract, I'm not bound to do it, to try and do what I thought I saw; instead I'm more inclined to do what I think I want to do about the situation. And it makes a blue evening, or whatever I want to make it.

And it's sort of, am I right in saying it's sort of recalling an experience that you've had?

It's like, it's a capture not just of a moment but many moments, because you walk by that, not once but many many times over months, and so it's an experience which happens in a moment but quite frequently, and then this is, one takes the sum total. It's like writing a poem about it or a piece of music about it.

And then, this one, 'Green Black and White Movement', 1951, owned by the Tate.

Yes, well I had all three versions...

And they also own the other one, 'Black and White'.

I did two versions of that. But then of course, that is, I am really again using a purely geometrical division of, all the lines are based on the, start off with the golden section, and all the curves, I mean that curve there would be made from this, and every curve on there, every curve, because I'm not very good at geometry, I would take a piece of string on my golden section and then I would let that drop into a curve, and I would kid myself that that must be related.

Oh I see, you literally go like that with a piece of string.

Yes, the curve...

Oh I see.

And therefore it must be...people tried to teach me how to do it by mathematics, but I found that boring.

Yes, so you didn't hang it, sort of pendulum type thing?

And also it doesn't give you the privilege that I've got. If I take that as the golden section with it and I do that with it, I can put it where I want, and in my mind it is then related to the whole. Now, that's enough for me. And if I want to make it a bit more of a curve, I move it a bit more, don't I, and if I want to make it a bit slimmer... So therefore I've got the privilege of using things which I think are totally constructed and related to each other, and yet I can make them any shape I want, and get any rhythm I want, almost, except they're all related to, you can see the lines coming through.

Mm, mm.

And then of course one's got the privilege of taking these areas, which come through like that and leave you a little area like that, of getting that colour against that colour. So there's a great deal in it which...there's a certain freedom in that, a freedom to make the colours work to the shapes which you...if you are copying, you know, if you're not careful you get muddled up by trying to copy what you think you see in front of you, which might not relate to what you thought you saw over there, whereas in actual fact on a flat surface you're looking at all these different shapes, they have to relate in colour and shape, otherwise it's not satisfactory. So it's just a different way of painting. It doesn't make it any better, but it is a different way of doing it.

And these colours, did you choose them on purpose, or did they...?

Well I liked Windsor & Newton's terre verte at the time, or...no that's wrong for a start off, it's Rowney's, Rowney's was the best, Rowney's Naples yellow and Rowney's terre verte, yes. I didn't...Windsor & Newton's was a bit too green; Rowney's was more earthy. And it's put on very thin, because there's a very good...the canvas was prepared by myself, because I was into all that game in those days, because we had been taught by Lucas at Camberwell who was a National Gallery chap.

What was his Christian name?

Lucas. He was the cleaner and restorer at the National Gallery, he taught us at Camberwell. Very nice chap.

On technique?

On technique. Max Derner's book was our god, you know.

What book was that?

Max Derner, I think on art, I don't know what the title is, but it's the book on the chemistry of paint and all that kind of lark, and how to do your grounds, hard chalk grounds and all the rest of it, which I was doing in those days.

And meanwhile, you became...can you just tell me how it evolved that you became Barbara Hepworth's assistant, one of her assistants? This was around that sort of time, wasn't it, 1950?

Yes, '51 wasn't it, something like that?

'50 to '52?

'51 wasn't it, '50/51? Because the 'Contrapuntal Forms' was the first thing that we worked on.

That's for the Festival of Britain.

Mm, and that was '51 wasn't it?

Yes, that's when the Festival of Britain was, '51, so I don't know whether you had started on it...

Oh yes, well I was there when the stone arrived, so I must have been there quite early.

Yes, I think possibly '50 to '52 you were working for her.

'50 I should think. Denis Mitchell was a friend of mine, and had been very very helpful to me. I mean he was catching mackerel to sell in those days, and he gave me a couple of mackerel, that's how I met him. And then he became a life-long friend, a real help-mate. And he knew that I hadn't got any money, and he said, 'Would you like a job?' He said, 'I think I can get you a day at Barbara's.' So, I mean 18 shillings a day was like gold, and so I took the job, which was just sweeping up really and cleaning up and all that kind of lark at the beginning. Then eventually I got given the tools and a little lesson on how to carve, you know.

Who gave you that lesson, did she?

I think she didn't give lessons like that, she just carved a piece of stone in front of me, and I was...I can't remember any lessons at all. I think if you watch somebody working, watch Denis and Barbara working, that is the way you learn, and then you have a go. And I seemed to be able to pick it up pretty quickly.

And you had had that slight experience hadn't you at Camberwell.

Yes, but I didn't have to make this big enough to put it in my pocket. (laughs)

But you weren't nervous about...?

No I wasn't nervous about it, because it's a big piece of stone and there was a lot to knock off it at the start. The high points are all marked, so you don't damage that.

What, so she does that?

All the high points are marked in ultramarine blue with a big stick of colour. And you just have to...by the time we knocked the rock off I could have carved anything, you soon learn.

And 'Contrapuntal Forms', that was the sort of standing...

Yes, two standing figures, yes.

The size of virtually a human.

Well they were bigger than a human I should think, yes, I should they were bigger, taller. At least the stone was when it arrived. And we had gantries round it, I mean we had the scaffold and everything which we stood on and that. Oh it was a bit job that was.

And what was she like to work for then, Hepworth?

Well I think she was a very difficult person to work for, but on the other hand any artist could be quite difficult, because they are professional, and it's their work, it's not your work, and it's quite difficult to be as good as people want you to be. And also it's very difficult to work with the intensity that they work, because it's not your work. You may try to do it as well as you can, but there are times when you get a bit tired and bored and want to have a chat, and she couldn't stand that at all, she wanted you to work non-stop the whole eight hours, you

know, which is the last thing she would do because she would be on the phone and doing all kinds of different things. So she was quite difficult to work for, but on the other hand I understand it perfectly, totally professional. And if you weren't working properly she could tell by the sound, because if you're not carving properly, if you're not following the form, then it comes through, you're just bruising the stone really, just knocking it off, without any feeling for what is happening, or what should be happening. So you very soon learn to carve so that you're actually turning the form the way in which her one claw mark has been; she put one claw mark through, which would turn the form so that it was relating to the whole, the top, the bottom, each side, and that takes a bit of understanding for someone like me. But once you get her claw, one claw mark through, then the rest of the area you are working on has got to relate to that, so all the time you're working to that.

And what...can you just remind me what material it was actually, what stone was it?

Connemara blue limestone. Ten ton I think, or, I'm not sure of the weight, it was a hell of a weight, because I know we had to get it up, which was a big job for us.

And this was at Trewyn Studio was it, when she had bought...?

Yes, it was in the yard there, yes, we did that. But we worked on other things as well, I mean, little things going on all the time.

Did you work on that other piece for the Festival of Britain, 'Turning Forms'?

Oh yes, yes yes. And the eleven little figures.

Oh yes.

Which were done in, the little one, white, I forget the name of the Italian white marble but it was done in...very tight that was, and I worked on that personally, it was one of the jobs I did do most of.

Right.

When you say most of them, you are actually taking the rough piece and bringing it to something like the shape she wants, and then of course she takes over for the final thing where she can make all the alterations she wishes. And then you may get the job of polishing it up.

And, did you overlap? When you were working on those pieces, were you working literally at the same time as Denis Mitchell?

Yes.

Yes, the two of you.

And Johnny Wells.

And he was there at the same...?

Johnnie came shortly, for a short time on that. And Owen Braughton, an Australian, worked on it too, there were four of us. We weren't always there on the same days. I was there with Owen sometimes, and occasionally with Johnnie, but he used to come on a different day to me I think in the main.

But with Denis you actually were there together?

Yes, yes. Denis taught me how to use plaster properly and how to make anything. How to sharpen tools, but I'm no good at sharpening, I'm not a natural sharpener of tools, and Denis is. I always make mine round, go round, I don't know how to do it properly.

And, so did...how did it affect your work, your own work?

Well, it was strange in a way, because it was such a lesson. If you are making a hole through a piece of sculpture, which we did in that instance, you are making a physical fact, and it made me think that all I was doing was illustration and illusionism on a flat canvas, on a flat board, to try and make shapes and space. It wasn't the same as actually making it in the physical fact.

End of F4318 Side A

F4318 Side B

So I tried then to do a little more sculpture myself with some wood that I had got, and I made mobiles.

And, with wood, but carving with wood?

I did carving with wood, and I made mobiles.

What were the mobiles like?

Well, they were the semi-circular shapes.

In wood?

No, I cut metal. I think we had some copper and things like that, so that they could...and I used, I don't know whether I used...I don't know what I used, maybe used cotton I think. But they were only small things with bamboos with cross pieces, and then the cotton with the semi-circles on them. And I tried that, and I enjoyed doing that kind of thing, and I enjoyed making the linocuts at that time. Anything that was physical, that demanded a bit of cutting, seemed to be nearer to the sculpture you see, and so, I didn't paint for about nine months I reckon properly, with any confidence. Well no, it wasn't to do with confidence, it was the fact that sculpture had upset me into making physical fact, and then eventually I got back to it, and cutting the shapes I got back to collage.

Yes. There's something...

So collage became a much more important thing to me, because it was a fact. Although I had always done collage up at...

Had you? When had you started doing...?

I mean I had done collage when I was in Adrian Heath's studio, because Victor was into collage, Victor Pasmore.

Is that when he was doing those sort of newspaper...?

Yes, that's right, and Cubist kind of collage he was doing at one stage, which he showed at the Redfern. So there was an influence, and there was also the fact that I had done the sculpture, and so I got back into collage, and that actually made me deal with positive shapes, which freed me to put any colour I wanted in those positive shapes, there was a certain freedom about it. And also I could relate every shape to each other through the geometrical division of the area, and the flat surface, and that seemed to be the right thing to do at that time, to suit my philosophical thinking about things.

And did you ever, under the influence of Pasmore and people like that, did you ever sort of rotate bits of square card through to get a circular form and things like that?

Well what you do, you...yes you do do that; I mean you take the semi-circles, which are all related, and I know I cut certain shapes in about '51 which were very much related to the rhythms that I had seen. Yes, well that's the kind you see, that is actually about the time I must have been doing collage.

Yes. 'Blue and Yellow Collage', 1951.

Yes. Now that gives a very good demonstration of what I actually did; every shape was worked out geometrically, and then that would be my pieces of string which I would bend, which if you straighten them out would probably be that, to there, or one of these you see. It would be one of the lines that were in the thing. And, I felt a satisfaction about that, because it was true, it was a positive thing, and not so much an illusion of making a false perspectival space and all that, it was true.

And this is also really very very purely abstract.

And it's very flat too.

Yes, yes.

The colour. You see you can't paint that actually when you come to...because as soon as you put two pieces of paper on, they make their own space by proportion, or their own colour. If it's a warm piece of paper and a piece of cool paper, colour gets a subjective response from every person, and every person's response is different.

And did you, when you were making collage like that, did you paint the...did you start off thinking what colours you wanted, and therefore paint, you know, bits of card or whatever, or did you...?

I always painted lots of paper; I could never waste paint, like you waste Colman's mustard, I never like wasting paint. I always had bits of paper around, not very good quality paper in those days but I had paper around, and I would, rather than waste any paint I would put it on the paper, so that I always had bits of coloured paper around, and I would look round for the yellow I wanted, or the blue I wanted, and hope I would find it in the paper. Now if I didn't...

So it was like having a palette as it were, because there they were.

They were there, all the different colours were there. And in that case, that's pastel.

Oh right.

Because I needed the light through.

I see. So what colour is the canvas then?

Oh it would be normal canvas.

Oh I see.

It would be normal canvas.

And then...this is collage on...so the canvas isn't visible, it's all...

No, that...

Oh I see.

No that's all paper. And that's pastel on it. And that I think is Ingres paper.

Oh I see, right.

I used to like that.

Is that that paper that's sort of laid is it?

Yes, beautiful, Ingres is slightly scrinkly sometimes, very slightly, but it has its own lovely range of colours.

And so you didn't paint that you mean, it was pure, as it came?

Well I'm only guessing, I'm only guessing.

Mm, yes, I just wondered, no I just wondered.

I'm not sure, I haven't got the painting in the house. I should imagine that's what that is.

And this...that one was '51 and this one, 1950, oil charcoal and collage, which is at the Pier Gallery, Stromness.

Mm. Well that's one of my very pure ones.

Yes, that's quite...

You can see all the marking out on there.

Yes.

Oh it's a very good feeling you see, because even when I was working in a cafe I could have my notebook under the counter, and I could cut out some of the tea packets and things, and make a little, I could have the geometrical division on my bit of paper and then I could sit down and I could do my stuff.

And did you ever collage printed things on, like, say...like Margaret Mellis for example had done, you know, she put a label of, I think she used something that looked a bit like a driving licence, sort of printed material, or had you...or were you always painting over?

No, I didn't...I don't think I used...I don't think I used names and things.

No, no, no. Right.

Not then anyway. I mean if I used a type of tea packet or something like that I would be using the colour bits of it really, I don't think I used words.

And then, around this time, when you were working for Hepworth, had you...there were people coming down to St. Ives quite a lot, like you were saying before, apart from people like, say, Lilian Somerville and Herbert Read and people, that the other artists had slowly, other artists had slowly been appearing, hadn't they?

They had always been appearing.

Yes.

They always came down, just for a quick visit really you see. I mean people like Reg Butler, Ken Armitage.

William Scott?

William Scott, yes, well of course he was down here quite a lot, but I mean, people I can't remember now, but I mean, if you come on later on, people like Alan Lowndes and the Americans came, Jack Bush and Frankenthaler, and...

And Rothko later.

Oh yes, all those people, that was the mid-Fifties that was. They all came down because there was something going on, which we didn't realise but it was going on. And, I mean most of the people, Bill Brooker came down and, most of the people from London would turn up, and I would feed them in the little cafe where I worked, which was very nice, they would all be sitting there having my special sandwiches, which I used to have to put a lot of weight on, because I could never get them to look very neat, so I had got to press them right down, I put so much stuff in them.

But, your work was exhibited in London in 1951 I think, wasn't it, in the.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] The work shown in London you were saying, 1951, that year, at Heals Mansard Gallery, '15 Artists from Around St. Ives', in that group.

Yes, that's right.

And that the AIA Abstract art exhibition, and then the British Abstract Art, at Gimpels.

That's right.

And then, what happened, how did your first one-man show at the Leicester Galleries come about?

I don't know. I think that...

Oliver Brown?

No, Philip James had bought a little one of mine, he had seen what I was doing.

He was from the Arts Council, he was at the Arts Council then, yes.

Arts Council then. And he recommended me to - is it on?

Yes.

He recommended me to the Leicester Galleries. And they asked for, they wrote to me and they asked for a grey painting which he had seen, and a green one, which I think was the...

That...

The one in the book, yes. And, a pink one, which unfortunately, the green one I had swapped with Ben Nicholson for one of his diamond paintings, which was over the damp patch in his room where...

In the next-door studio to you?

Where I used to sit when I played...no, in Trewyn, when I played table tennis. And I decided I liked this one, because it was over the damp patch, and I think it was a very early one, diamond thing, and he said, 'Oh yes, I'll swap that with you Terry for your green one'. I said, well, I said, this was an honour, absolutely fantastic. So, we shook hands on that, and then, I got this letter from the Leicester Galleries wanting that picture, and wanting the grey one, which I had actually scraped out the night before, because I wasn't happy with it. So that was two out of three that Philip James had recommended, were gone. So I went to Ben and I said, 'Look Ben,' I said, 'I've had this letter from the Leicester Galleries.' He said, 'Look Terry, do you more good to show it at the Leicester Galleries, we'll forget that.' So I never got my Ben,

which would have fetched me fifty odd thousand pounds and kept me going. But I mean I wasn't thinking about money at all in those days. And so, he released me from that, and I sent that picture to the Leicester Galleries, and I re-painted, sat up all night and re-painted the grey one, and sent that up to him. And a chap named R.D. May I think or someone like that bought them, because they finished up at Gimpels where he sold them back to them or something eventually.

I see. But, and so did those paintings form part of your first one-man show at the Leicester?

No I think...

Or they had gone in...

I think it got me the show at the Leicester, because they sold them.

I see.

And then I was offered the exhibition at the Leicester Galleries.

I see. And then, through you having met Pasmore at Camberwell and got to know him quite well, it was through you wasn't it that he came down?

Oh yes, he came down, he stayed at the cafe where I worked you see, I got him in there, of course you could get them in special price, I mean they loved having the artists there. Because they gave wonderful fruit on the side table there which you could help yourself to, so everybody took the fruit so they didn't have to buy any lunch, so we all did that.

Where was it, was this the Sunset Cafe or something?

I can't remember, Kathleen with remember.

No, it doesn't matter.

Because we both worked there; she worked there as a chambermaid and I was a waiter for a time you see. No, Victor came down, and he did his drawings round the island and that then you see.

In the sort of...the waves, spirals and things.

That's right. Well of course he had got into that spiral thing then, but of course which was really, I think, a lot to do with Leonardo da Vinci's storm paintings, which had impressed him at that time, and certainly impressed me, because I did that little spiral construction at that time, late '51 I think.

Oh yes, because we haven't talked about that, yes.

So, one never knows how you're influenced actually, you will probably say you are influenced by something because you happen to see the picture afterwards, one doesn't know for sure.

Mm, mm.

Because we were always nosing in those days into everything.

And, so also, I believe...why did you finish working at Barbara Hepworth's? Did you volunteer to leave, or did something happen?

No, Peter Gregory asked...someone suggested I apply for that Gregory Fellowship.

But you didn't go there straight away, did you?

1954.

Mm, but now we're talking about '52.

No, well...

There was Corsham wasn't there.

Ah, well I...ah, that's right, Bill Brooker and William Scott came down to my studio, and they saw some of my life drawings, they were in my notebook and that, and they said, would I like to go to Corsham and take the life drawing, because they had a little problem, they had a wonderful bloke named Ellis, and Rosemary Ellis and, I've forgotten, Clifford.

Clifford and Rosemary, yes, who ran it.

Were trying to run it free of the constrictions of the educational, the Ministry of Education, and therefore they had a wonderful school. But of course eventually, because of the money thing, and the war time gradually, the freedom for everybody which they had obtained through the war, bureaucracy, the Civil Service, the Establishment, was taking control again, which meant the money wasn't going to get there unless they all passed their exams; never mind them being any bloody good as artists, that didn't count, they had to pass the standard exam, which is what they're trying to do again, the bloody education departments. Kill creativity, that's what the idea is. Anyway, poor old Clifford Ellis and Rosemary then found that their students didn't pass the drawing exam, because they didn't draw in that way, they had freedom. So I was asked to go and teach the drawing.

And had they seen those drawings you had done in the Penwith, those...?

They had seen the drawings I did at Camberwell in my notebook.

Oh I see. What, they saw...because they were nosing round your notebooks then?

That's right, yes, when I was down in my studio.

I see.

And also, there was a leaning towards this way, because Lanyon was already there.

Oh yes.

And Scott was interested in people in this area. Bill Brooker was very taken with my drawing, and so I was given a job teaching the drawing.

And had they also seen your work at your first one-man show at the Leicester Galleries?

I don't know.

You don't know?

No.

But William Scott...

I had a studio full of work.

Yes.

And I was making a bit of a stir, because Ivon Hitchens had written to me and people like that. And John Berger had slated me like hell, but he liked my drawings, but he didn't like abstract art, he never did, and I don't blame him for that; I mean he had a sort of pseudo-social conscience by marrying a millionairess in the end or something didn't he, living on the estate in France and pretending still to be a strong socialist. Lovely idea. But anyway, that was it. And, the stuff had been noticed by other painters you see, and therefore the work was being talked about. And Clifford Ellis always liked to have people who were a bit in the news, and particularly if they were young and up-and-coming, because he knew there was enthusiasm in that person which he would give to the students. I can see his plan, and it worked, because you weren't a boring old teacher who's waiting for their pension, you were trying to do something, and therefore you might get the students to do something. Very sensible the old boy. So I went and took the drawing, and they all passed after twelve months, because I was able to enthuse them, and able to introduce ideas to them, and not making a miserable lesson, but making an interesting lesson, and talking about all the spaces between, which, and making them see them, and running cottons from their big toe to the various other things so that they could see all the spaces and see all the forms in between, which was a bit like analytical Cubism really, except they finished up drawing the muscle, but they did see all the form, they did read all the form; they didn't just sit down on the bloody seat when they came in and start drawing half asleep, they had to walk round and find the best place to be in to suit them before they even started. So that was, you know, it worked all right, and I enjoyed it. Plumb-line Frost I was known as.

That's right, I've heard that, yes.

Very interesting.

There's that photograph of you, isn't there?.

Yes, yes yes. I was very strict at drawing, because I believed in it, and I liked it. I still do.

And so, we might get on to the other members of staff. So there was.....

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F4319 Side A

Yes Alastair Grieves was it who wrote about...? He put that right. He wrote to me and apologised about it. I said, 'You just didn't include me, I was in every one', and he said he realised he had made a mistake and he put it right, I've got it somewhere, the letter he sent me.

[Terry Frost interviewed at his studio in Newlyn on the 22nd of November 1994.]

Right, before we get on to talking about Corsham, we were just talking about this 'Construction' that you did, 'Construction', 1951/52, painted board, card and twine, and yesterday you did mention it, but very briefly.

Yes, well I think it was the general influence of constructions which had been with me right from the Gabo touch, but then Pasmore started to come off collage on to constructions at about that time, or a bit before that because I saw him when I was at Camberwell. And Adrian started doing them, and we were all into this idea of constructions.

And then...sorry.

So that was the, probably one of the first ones I made, although I did quite a lot which I didn't keep in those days, I didn't think it was worth it.

And you were in...Adrian Heath organised these exhibitions, three exhibitions.

That's right.

In Fitzroy Street.

Yes.

And you...you were just saying you were actually in all three.

Yes, I learnt quite a lot from that, because it's quite unique for me to see people come in, like Paolozzi, to do...and he got the bit between the two windows which was just a narrow strip like that, so he brought a roll of lining paper with him, pinned it up, took a bottle of ink out his waistcoat pocket, took a brush out of the other, and did it, which absolutely shook me to the core, but all valuable lessons you see. And of course young, who's the chap who became the Habitat...no...yes...

Not Conran?

Conran, had two stools in there which he had made.

Oh right.

So he was a young lad at that...a young student I suppose. And he got himself included with two stools because one of the Dannatts had made a table.

Oh the architect Dannatt?

Mm. And so it was all quite an interesting thing for me to meet all those people. And Kenneth Martin was trying to hang his first mobile up, which I was giving him a hand with, and that was hell, because he wasn't very experienced with them either, and they're quite tricky to put up.

So was it the whole...it was in one room, or a double room?

Just the one front studio at Fitzroy Street.

Right. And was it...what sort of house...was it similar to the houses in Charlotte Street? Was it sort of Georgian, kind of late Georgian, early...?

Yes it was, but it was...

With long windows with sashes.

Yes, long windows, beautiful proportion windows, not like the silly things they put in nowadays. Beautiful long windows, nice big rooms, high.

And did they have dados or...?

Yes.

Or cornicing up and above?

That's right, yes. But this was used as a studio, and I had a bed in it actually.

Was it the room you actually used to work in?

Yes, I used it, I used it for a time. Bryan Wynter had it before me, and Adrian used the studio at the top there at the back; there were two studios upstairs you see.

And so was it, I've never...was it...so that room during the three exhibitions, was it all painted white, or was it always white?

Yes it was all white, yes.

What was the floor like? I mean was it a whole kind of environment? It was meant to be, everything...there was furniture, and...

There was furniture, constructions. There are photographs of it about somewhere, of that, of the different shows.

I think there's an article isn't there, which I've never seen, in the Burlington, by Grieves, Alastair Grieves.

Yes that's right. Oh yes I think there were quite a few photographs. I think Adrian had quite a few of it, and I certainly had them at one time but I don't know where they are now. Anyway, we did three shows like that.

What, and each one had the furniture in as well?

Well I couldn't guarantee that, I couldn't guarantee that, because I don't think, Conran didn't show again, and another young chap whose name as gone from me, who I met recently strangely enough at Chelsea Arts Club, used to show with us. And Anthony Hill of course was there you see. We were a very powerful little group, but then we hadn't anywhere...the galleries wouldn't exhibit us with the art we were doing at that time you see. It's getting back like that again now. (laughs)

And so the first...I'm just trying to find out...yes '52 to '53 was...sorry. [BREAK IN RECORDING] Sorry, 1951...

Well we showed in the AIA in 1951, and that I think is documented isn't it, somewhere?

Yes, yes yes yes yes.

And I showed 'Walk Along the Quay' there. Kenneth Martin was included; Roger Hilton was just about included, because he wasn't doing pure abstracts then, he was doing the sort of French landscape shape, long things with the light sort of coming in. But he was included. And certainly, I sold my 'Walk Along the Quay' to Peter Gregory there, because Ben Nicholson arrived in a taxi, and he had picked my little painting up that was in there, and it had got £12, because he taught me to always put the price on the back to save any embarrassment, and when people ask what it is, they just turn it round and the price is on the back, and it's very sensible. And he said, 'How much is it?' I said, 'Well it's got it on the back,' and it had got 12, so he altered it to 18, because he bought some money in a bit later on and sold it for me. And he also sold the 'Walk Along the Quay'. Now people didn't say things like that about Ben very much, but he was very good on doing things like that. And so, Peter Gregory bought my 'Walk Along the Quay' from there. Now what I'm trying to get at is that that was, I'm sure that was after, because...after Adrian Heath had shown in his studio. I mean maybe he did a private show first, I couldn't be exact, but certainly we had shown in his studio before we showed in the AIA.

Right. Oh yes, because it says here...yes well anyway, you're right. Anyway anyone else can check that Alastair Grieves one.

Yes, Alastair Grieves would probably sought that out, because he did interview Adrian and he would get it...Adrian was really good on things like that, I don't think he would make a mistake. He couldn't count his change sometimes but he might not have made a mistake on that. So, also at that time Sam Francis was showing at the, in Dover Street at the Contemporary Art...ICA. Sam Francis had about six pretty pure canvases with, I should think about nine-inch or ten-inch pink brush-strokes, just like that, which was the first time I had ever seen anything like that, which rather shook me, considering all the, we were in the constructivist, geometrical sort of basis of structure, and here was a chap came along with six slapped-on pink brush strokes.

So did that rather appeal to you then, that...?

Well it knocked us out; I don't know about appeal to us but it was very exciting. And he came round to the AIA show, Ben.

Right.

So it was all going on in those early days.

And what was the reception like? Who came to those Fitzroy Street, and indeed the AIA Abstract shows, can you remember? I mean was there an opening, and were people rather excited by it?

Oh yes, there was an opening, but I can't remember that, it was one of the first openings I had ever been involved with in London, and I probably didn't stay very long because I had hitch-hiked up to Adrian's and I had to get back in those days. No I didn't know much about the opening.

Mm, mm.

I know I was very thrilled to get a third of £40, which I think is something like £26 or something, which was big money.

Mm. And then that year, the Leicester Galleries, your first one-man show in London, that must have been exciting.

Well it was, it was interesting, but of course again I hit that problem of people thinking that because I knew Lanyon and Nicholson and co, there is a sort of prejudice against those, the Nicholson gang, and I was obviously innocently one of the gang, because, I can never say her name but she was John Piper's wife.

Myfanwy Piper.

Myfanwy Piper. Used to write for 'The Guardian', and it was my first show and I met some chap there, and they used to wear short blue overcoats and bowler hats in those days, the businessmen, and he was in there, and I just spoke to him, and he said, 'Well I wouldn't have come in, but I've just read 'The Guardian' this morning'. And, he said, 'It was very interesting, so I had to come in and see the exhibition.' And I got 'The Guardian' and she said, 'This is the biggest bore in town,' like, this Abstract art, you know. And I thought, well, at least it's sending the people in. But she really was scathing. I then, I don't know, but someone told me it was to do with the fact that Ben and the Pipers had had a little fall-out over the 7&5 or something which...

Oh way back, yes.

Way back, and you know, that's why I got attacked by Tunnard and why I got attacked by Myfanwy. It was just, nothing to do with me really, I just got caught in the cross-fire. Wonderful innocence really, you can blunder into all these things. Which are important, because people think arguments like that, or...they're very important to make the artist more determined to do what he wants to do. And if you give up because somebody says silly things about you, well then you're not worth carrying on at all. Good experience.

And so were some people quite jealous actually, some of your...some people, some artists?

I don't think so.

Of your friendships with Lanyon and...

No I don't think so, because people like Ivon Hitchens wrote to me, congratulated me. And...no no, they weren't...they would only get envious because they would like to do as well, but that's quite natural. I mean I was flying five minutes from leaving art school as it were, you know.

Yes, because that was very unusual in those days.

Not now, not nowadays.

Now they just go, whit!

They sell them now as they do, but, well they don't do so much, but they did for a little while.

Mm. And so, it has been said that, you got the job at Corsham, sort of...I don't know, it's implied somewhere that you got it after, sort of virtually because your work had been seen at the Leicester Galleries. But I don't think that's...you were saying that that's not right.

Oh no, William Scott and Bill Brooker came and visited me in the studio, and they saw my life drawing...

Down in St. Ives.

Yes.

Yes, exactly.

And they were in trouble because Ellis eventually had to pass the more academic type of drawing really.

Yes, which you said yesterday.

And they had to do that, and I went to...they saw my drawings, William Scott and Bill Brooker, and they said would I come and teach the drawing. And I did.

Yes. And...

Because I loved drawing, and I always have done, making good shapes. And it worked.

And as you were saying yesterday you got them all through.

That's right, yes.

Yes, yes. And so, that job, for that job, were you teaching in blocks?

Yes. Yes I went for half a term.

Right. And the other half of the term, where were you?

Back home working.

Right.

In the early days, then I was...

Then the Willesden, what about the Willesden job?

Well, when I got...Bill Brooker was at Corsham...moved to Dollis Hill.

To Willesden Art School.

Willesden, and they got me in there to teach anatomy, and do an evening class.

Yes, because, that's right, because I think Brooker left Corsham in '53.

Yes.

Yes, yes.

So I went to...I did about twelve months there, when I used to come...I stayed with Adrian...oh no I didn't, I had a room with his brother-in-law, Mickey Lloyd. I had a room with Mickey Lloyd further down the road, in the house which Adrian eventually bought.

Oh right, in Charlotte Street.

Charlotte Street, yes. And I moved there, and I used to travel on the train down to Corsham with people like James Kirkup, the poet, which was rather wonderful, except I found him slightly embarrassing for a man with red braces and long flowing hair, who used to have a fancy waistcoat on and take his jacket off and lie back in absolute glamour on the seat. I thought, oh my God! you know, I wasn't used to all that. But he was a wonderful chap, and I liked his poetry too. So, James was, we used to go down to Corsham together sometimes, and I taught the drawing there. And the painting of course, I got involved in painting as well there.

And did you ever...did you also have some sort of work space down in Corsham, or did you share a house with any of them down there occasionally?

Oh yes, well eventually...no, well there was a time when I didn't...I mean I'm slightly confused about this. I certainly worked at Willesden and there, but I also had a room in Bill Brooker's. Bryan Wynter had a room, I had a room, well it wasn't Bill Brooker's house, it was a nice lady's house who let us all have a room.

In the village?

In the village, in Corsham.

Yes.

But I don't know how long I had that for, but certainly I had a room there, but I worked in Corsham itself when I was there, I had a space in a big room, which was probably Bill Brooker's, and I painted quite a lot of paintings there.

Including Corsham...

That's right. And the one that's in Canada, in the museum at Vancouver.

Which is that.

One of the best paintings I ever did actually. Well there was a little linocut of it there with the semi-circles, you showed it to me yesterday.

OK, we'll just get that one in a minute. OK, so, 'Corsham Silver and White', 1953.

That's right, yes.

And what was behind...what was behind that one?

A crunchy cold walk.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] No that came out because, evenings at Corsham, cold winter evenings are beautiful when it...I mean when it's really sharp and it's different to cold, and the moon, and you walk out of Corsham, which is a lovely long walk with the...

The avenue.

The vertical trees either side you see, and you walk through them, on the snow, which was crunching beautifully, and you're walking into a big moon, and the verticals, and it was just a gorgeous feeling, and I've always worked on moments like that. But you see I never think about it too much at the time, otherwise you would kill it, you would start looking for the branches on the trees and all that bullshit, and you wouldn't do what you really, what really had moved you. And so I just remembered the noise of the crisp snow, and the feeling of it, and I did the painting. I had to do that separate from the thing, and feel it again.

And did you, for a painting like that, did you do any sort of sketches?

No, only sketching in your head, and in your tummy, and in your thoughts.

Yes. So that just came out straight away.

And in your feet as you walk along. You have to work at these things.

Yes, yes. And then there was...I think that one was owned by Roger Mayne at some point.

That's right, yes.

Then there was that wonderful, what's it called, 'Blue Moon', is that what you mean?

No that was a litho wasn't it?

The lithograph, and it had linocut in it.

Oh it had a little bit of linocut on because dear old Harry Cliffe didn't really like me doing as modern as that at that time you see. And like most printers at art schools they don't like working for anybody else because they're all artists themselves really, and they get a bit fed up, so they make sure that it blanks out after about nine, you know, and they've always done that, and printed on lousy paper so they know it's going to ruin, you know. So, I always found that with printers at art schools, because they really wanted to be printing themselves, which is fair enough.

Yes. And he was in charge of lithography wasn't he?

Yes, but he did it for me because William I think persuaded him to do it.

William Scott?

Yes, it was my first print.

Although you had done a bit at Camberwell?

Oh, I was thrown out, wasn't I, immediately.

Yes, yes, yes.

I didn't learn much there.

So did you used to go into the lithography studio and just, on your own, or was he always there, giving advice?

I've never been technically any good, I've never worried about the technique from the point of view of being able to do it all myself. I always have to have a good chap there like Harry, who was very good, he would say, 'Well just treat it like watercolour,' he said. And he gave me the stuff and I did, did it like watercolour, and it worked, on a plate actually, not on a stone. That was the first time I worked on a plate.

And did you work in your head what you were going to do, before you did it?

Yes, because I had been in love with the moon for a long time, and still am, and with the shapes that go with it, so I just did it, in blue and yellow I think it was.

Mainly blue wasn't it, and black.

Yes.

And, you were just talking about another, a linocut.

Of yes, that...

What was that?

Yes that's that little square one of '52. [BREAK IN RECORDING]at that, look.

Yes, OK. So, hold on. What, this is called 'Blue Movement'.

No, it's...is it?

It says it is here.

It probably is, but I don't think that's the right name. Oh well, probably it has got blue in it then, I don't remember, but that is the same as the linocut exactly. And, what size is it?

It's 43 x 48.

Yes. Well it's one of the best paintings I ever did, and I did that at Corsham, most of it at Corsham, in the room that Bill Brooker let me have. And it came, I did the linocut first so that I was using all these shapes, I did the linocut first, and then, because, the linocut I did square, and then I just turned it round and painted it again that way you see, and that's what

gave me this. So what I did then, I did a painting from the linocut, because I liked the idea, so really, then of course it became different in the painting but...

Yes. You didn't sort of square it up or anything like that.

Oh no no no no. What I did was, that particular piece, particular basic things, but of course this is not a square, whereas the original was a square. And I mean if you change your format like that then you've got to pull yourself together to get something out of the different shape you see. It's always a good idea to switch things round if you want to carry on using an idea, change your format; I think Ben taught me that at some time.

So this 'Blue Movement' is the one that you've talked about?

No, that's not the one.

Or that's not that one?

No no, that's not the one at all, that's a totally different scene.

Right, right.

This is a much more abstract painting. The 'Blue Movement' was definitely very much a blue movement painting which was related to, like that little one.

That one we're talking about.

To that particular quay, yes.

Yes exactly. So this one, what is it? It was all done, the linocut itself was done in Corsham as well, was it?

No, the linocut was done in Cornwall, and printed on my own little press.

Right, right, I see.

I know I did that. I mean I think they've all gone now.

So what does this 'Blue Movement', which might not be called 'Blue Movement' but relates...

I don't know, I don't know at all; I probably had a bit of blue somewhere so I called it 'Blue Movement'. After all a lot of things at that time were untitled; there was a complete mix-up in my mind, because we were having quite a battle of not signing paintings because that interfered with the things, not signing them on the front, and also one wanted to be a bit pure about things and so you kept them untitled, a lot of things. But somehow or another I usually slipped something like that in to remind me of what it was, which I immediately forgot, so it wasn't very helpful really.

And that, this particular one is now in Vancouver.

Yes. I think...

And the CAS, Contemporary Art Society, bought it and presented it to them.

It was bought by the CAS, and they gave to Vancouver, yes. And, I couldn't find it when I went there, anywhere, and I did get the director to take me down to look for it, and they had all these racks which they pulled out, and they couldn't find it, but eventually we found it in the Canadian artists, because I had been going to Canada so often that I was put in the...

Honorary Canadian.

Yes, honorary Canadian, which I don't...but I was very...I was furious, it looked so good. I tried to buy it back from them, but they wouldn't let...I suppose they couldn't sell it to me because it had been a CAS, and I don't think they were allowed to do it. Well I offered them a good price for it. I would have loved to have had it back, it was one of my favourite paintings. But they never show it.

You ought to get the CAS onto it.

Mm, yes that's a good idea.

And so, your colleagues at Corsham, well that must have been very exciting having so many people you could discuss things with and...

Well, yes it was exciting. I mean people like Kenneth Armitage, James Tower, Peter Potworowski, very lively people, and we all used to go in the pub in the evening. The most difficult times are the evenings; it's great when you've done a lot of work and you've got busy

with students and doing your own work, but then, you've got to have a relaxation period or something to eat. And they used to be quite good spells.

And William Scott as well, who you knew, who was head of painting then.

Oh yes, William was a great lad. And, of course it was always an intense situation there, because Ellis, both Clifford and Rosemary were hard task-masters to the students, they had to work very very hard, and in fact I've never, I don't think I've ever seen students work so hard, possibly because it was residential and I've never been at another residential place, because they had to work all night to make sure they got enough work to present. I mean they had to have a big portfolio of work each term, no messing about, and very serious reports by everybody who taught. Even James Kirkup used to have to write one, and he was fantastic I know. Anyway it was...it was a wonderful period, because they did music as well you see, and we used to have to do a keep-fit movement, me and Bryan Wynter, with hangovers, going round with these girls in their one-piece bathing costumes, and the boys in their shorts, doing keep-fit movement to Litz Pisk.

Oh yes.

Used to have...and of course it was so exhausting after a few pints the night before. But this was all before we did the life drawing and that you see.

Because Litz Pisk did sort of movements of theatre didn't she.

Oh yes, I've bought a lot of her drawings. She lived down here somewhere.

Yes. Is she still alive actually?

She was a couple of years ago, I don't know whether she is now out at Trencom, and she had a show of drawings.

And the potter, James Tower, he was there; you didn't ever do any pottery again, did you?

No I didn't do any pottery with James, no, I mean it was a very exclusive site, James had. I think Peter Potworowski was up there, I forget the name of the place now.

Beachfield was it, or...?

Where the girls were mainly. Monks wasn't it?

Oh Monks...yes, Monkton or...

That was Monks Court or something where the girls were. No I didn't do anything with James, James was quite an exclusive character really, I mean compared with the more cavalier attitude of Armitage and co.

And did you notice something was happening to people's...like William Scott and Armitage, the shape, what they were doing at that time, was it...what were their works like?

I can't remember. I can't remember at the moment, I couldn't switch on to that.

Because you had known William Scott through his visits to Cornwall, hadn't you?

Yes, yes. I had known William, but I mean William did marvellous paintings, I had always enjoyed his still life objects, but of course he was a bit...he had moved into abstraction perhaps a bit later you see, about '53 wasn't it or something like that?

I think he did that harbour, sort of slightly related to a figure, possibly...

I mean, Kenneth Armitage was definitely still doing sort of figures at that time, but I think...

Walking figures and...

Yes, flattened-out figures like...and they were pretty consistent, and I think, and Scott of course used the figure quite a bit, but figure and sculptural type of forms, because he was doing some sculpture at that time.

Yes, because he went to the Royal Academy Schools and did sculpture to start with and converted to painting.

Was that it? Oh, I know he did some, because I was surprised when I went up to see him in London one time. But I was very busy when I was there teaching, you know, I didn't really look a great deal at what people were doing.

And then Lanyon was there as well?

Yes, Lanyon was there. But I don't think he was there the same time as me; he was probably the next half of the term you see. I don't think I ever saw Lanyon there.

But you knew him fairly well by this stage?

Oh I knew him well then, yes, yes. I mean after all he had six children the same time as me, so we both had large families on the way, and we used to celebrate that together at different times.

And so, how long...how long did you stay at Corsham?

Till '54.

[BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE]

So you stayed there till '54, but did you find you really had quite enjoyed the teaching aspect?

Yes I always enjoyed the teaching, yes, very much so, particularly as I was still drawing objectively as well as doing my abstract work. I mean at that time I didn't...I didn't get worried about doing a figure, or doing an abstract, it never has worried me actually. I don't get the difference that critics or historians tend to make. I've always done, if I wanted to do a portrait tomorrow I would do one, and if I want to draw a tree I will draw one; I still like doing things when I want to do them, I'm never worried about being one thing or the other, as long as I do it well. So, at that time I was quite busy. I mean when I was teaching I always drew the model myself as well, but I never drew on other people's paper, I didn't like that, I didn't like that when teachers did that to me and I didn't do it to anybody else, because I think each person has to do their own type of thing, find out, and you can only find out by doing lots of work. You do 200 life drawings you will find out, if you look at them you've got a bit better, and it's rather, you don't think you are but if you were to lay them all out you will see that you are beginning to look better and to see better. And we used to do that, and I always used to draw when I was there. So I definitely enjoyed my teaching at Corsham.

And had your time at Camberwell with the 'dot and carry one', the Coldstream Guards, had that actually, did you use some of their methods when you were teaching, or not?

I think I probably emphasised it in a different manner, because I was more interested, possibly because I had worked for Barbara; you see you never know how much things have influenced you, but looking back, if you couldn't make a piece of sculpture from your, if you couldn't

think that you could make a construction or a piece of sculpture from your drawing, then your drawing didn't work, there wasn't enough information. Now, you might not believe it but you can do that with a single line much better than you can with a load of tone.

End of F4319 Side A

F4319 Side B

Well I think we've given Corsham a bit of a bashing [INAUDIBLE].

Yes, yes they have.

I think we can leave that little lot.

Yes. So, so 1954 comes along, something happens, I don't know how it happened. Can you tell us how it happened?

I wish I could, I wish I could, but I should imagine it was the influence of working for Barbara, meeting Peter Gregory, who had bought my 'Walk Along the Quay'. I was stony broke, and I think that, there must have been a bit of chatter between them to help me out. So it was suggested I apply for the Gregory Fellowship, which I did, and I had to go up to London to Peter Gregory's flat, and I think Henry Moore was there, I can't remember, two or three people, and I was asked to dinner. Well they gave me a couple of gins before we started. Well in those days I didn't drink anything but perhaps half a pint, I was only into beer, and a couple of strong gin-and-its and I had had it before we got to the table, and I go to sit down at the table and I knock the wine over immediately. I thought, oh bloody hell. For my interview, this was, the wine all over the table at Peter Gregory's flat. So I didn't know, I really didn't know how I got on that night at all, but I did get the job.

Right, and that was to be Gregory Fellow in Painting.

Yes, and I remember Fish who ran the studio along Back Road, said, 'You had better have some clothes to go in, you know, some decent clothes, going up to university,' she said, and she lent me, she gave me her husband's suit, which was pin-striped, braces, and a jacket and all that. Well the only thing I got out of those trousers was, I had got an itch on my leg and I remember I rubbed it like that, and of course it sent it septic, and I had this great big boil very quickly from this fantastic suit I wore to go to Leeds. (laughing) Oh dear oh dear!

And Peter Gregory, he was, his firm was Lund Humphries, the publishing firm.

That's right, he was the director of Lund Humphries, which was one of the best, or the best printing on art. He really was top class, and he, I mean he gave all his money to support the Gregory Fellows, and I mean there was a musician, Kenneth Leighton I think his name was....

A poet.

Heath-Stubbs was a poet.

And a sculptor.

Butler was a sculptor and...

And Armitage was, wasn't he?

And Armitage took over, and then Dalwood from him, and I was one of the painters. I took over from Martin Froy actually.

Oh did you, right, who had also, he taught at Corsham didn't he, a bit later than you.

Yes later, yes.

Yes. And then at Reading, didn't he? Like you.

That's right, that right, yes.

Yes. And, and who took over from you, was it Davie, Alan Davie?

Alan Davie, yes. Because, I can't remember all the choices but Peter Gregory had dinner with me and we talked about who we thought should have it, and I liked Davie, because I had met him when he was at the Central School, and he had taken me around on his little motorbike to look at various shows and things in order to show me the jewellery he was doing and things like that. And also he had been to see me once down in Cornwall, because he was trying to get somewhere, and I was very impressed with his Zen attitude of, if you think you should put red there, that's a lie, you put it over there. I mean it was quite, a different attitude to the construction I was going through, and yet it was quite, it was quite as definite as the constructive idea; it was quite definite that you didn't do what you thought you should do. I mean it sounds stupid the way I'm saying it, but it was quite set in its way, just as set as I was. And I found him very interesting as a painter, and I recommended him very strongly.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

So that the point about the Gregory Fellowship was, was it not, to help...what did it do, what benefits did you get from it?

The idea was to give you a couple of years to paint, and it was very good like that. I can't remember, it was about 300 a year.

And free accommodation, did it give you?

You had accommodation. You got accommodation, yes.

Thrown in, so that money was just...

To live on. And I had a big room for a studio, I mean it was a quite big old-fashioned house.

Yes, and so what, the studio was in the house that you lived in?

I had to make one of the rooms a studio, you name which room you liked to. But as we had got about, what, one, two, three, I can't remember, three, four children at that time I think...

One, two, three, four...

No that was down in Cornwall.

Oh sorry.

There were about three at that time I think. I don't know, we had got Adrian, Adrian and Anthony, and Matthew, and Steven, we had four, and... That's it, that's it, that's the room, that's the room there look, we had four I think at that time, yes. And we used that, I used one room as a studio and we had two bedrooms. We hadn't got any beds of course when we got there, and the university turned up with some terrible things in the end. I mean, Gregory's idea was marvellous, but the university was slightly apprehensive I think. Although they gave you the house it was very limited in the fact that there was no...I mean the bed problem was terrible and things like that, and, of course we had nothing really you see, because the house we were living in in Cornwall, it didn't have any...it wasn't ours, the furniture, the beds were there you see. So in the end we really, we were helped very much by some people in Leeds, the Gillinsons, who came to see me, and because I was working, and that does affect Leeds people, if you are working you can't be bad, and Bernard said, 'Would you...you need some beds'. I said yes. So he took a couple of paintings and sent me a couple of beds round

you see. And then, the Mansons, who were another Jewish family, they came to see me and they went away and came back with a full lot of saucepans with a full meal in, and we had a dinner together. So I had very kind people who sort of helped us to get through those very difficult first days, because Kath had just got another young baby and it was all a bit tricky, a bit cold and a bit tricky.

And, as a matter of interest on that...we're talking about your children, did your wife come from a large family?

Yes, yes.

So it was in the...I mean you had lots of children... Because that was a contrast to you, because you were one.

That's right.

Although you had your uncles.

That's right, yes.

So, were you very pleased to have a large family?

Well it was always an accident, nothing was ever planned. We were just romantic I suppose and that was it, bob's your uncle. But I mean, I've no regrets. I don't know whether Kath, although I don't think so, because the children are marvellous.

You seem to be a very close family.

They're a great worry, but they're marvellous. Very expensive to run. (laughs)

And, right, getting back to Yorkshire, was it a terrific...the landscape particularly up there, how did you find that compared to the...?

The difference is of course that it's...that down in Cornwall, and I've said it often, that one was like a giant when you go out down here, and you stand alone on that landscape, and the wind's blowing from every direction, from Land's End, and east, or south and north as well, whether you're west, south and north, and you get the wind from every direction, the rain from every direction, and you feel like a giant standing on that narrow bit of land. But the

difference when we went to Leeds, and going out to Otley and to Ilkley Moor and places like that is you suddenly become minute in, walking in this vast landscape which comes up to places like Gordale Scar and thing like that. I mean there they are, standing up right in front of you, and you are just nothing, you're like a pin-head. And that made a difference to me, and I think helped me to flatten up, to bring the canvas up much closer and flatter. And that I think helped with that yellow triptych which they've got on show at the moment, because that came right up to me and I painted standing right up to it, I didn't stand back and look at it, came right up to it, because that's what I did in the landscape in Yorkshire.

And that one, 'Yellow Triptych', 1957-59, that was a bit later during your time there.

Well it was done in my house in Kelso Road. I don't know why the '59 bit's on, whether I touched it again I don't know, I wouldn't be surprised. Because you know, you must remember you paint when you fancy it; if you want to do... You see all this business about the dates is very tricky with someone like me, because I pick up a painting and I'll hit it if I feel like it that day; if I feel it's worth making a move, even if it's going to destroy what I've got, I've got to do it, and that's why I put them up around here; although they've been shown some of these I might probably move them if I want to. And that's how they get a different date on.

Mm, mm. And so what was...can you remember the first painting you did when you were up there?

Well that's one of the first drawings, when we went to the River Nidd, and we went to...I always remember, I can't remember the name, what's the things that hang under the ground, are they...?

Stalactites or stalag...I never know which way round.

Well one of the two of those. We went to see them, and then there was the River Nidd which was flowing past, and we were having a little picnic, and Kath had her costume on and sat with her feet in the water, and I did the drawing, on the spot I did a drawing; I didn't do that actual one on the spot but I did a drawing on the spot, and then when I came back I did this from the drawing with paint, that's oil paint on paper. And you see, there's all the lacing there which, I wasn't thinking of using that ever again, it was a true fact, but it had...and then I couldn't do the speed of the water so I put a couple of chevrons in just to remind me you see. And then I found that those became my symbols, do you see?

Yes.

But not intentionally, and so is that, but not intentionally, and so is that, which became 'bikini' paintings, which became pure abstract for me, and for other people. But that was an inspirational thing. And I did a whole lot of, at that time, paintings which these verticals were developed, yes, yes.

Yes.

And so it just happened to be a mixture of events. And that's a Yorkshire one too, because that relates very much to that sun element. And of course again the big shape which contains the light and the sun.

That sort of hexagonal shape.

Yes that's right, which I used.

And then there are these sort of...

Yes, well that's a little more related to the locking thing of the rocks and that you see, which, and this is very much related to the verticals again, and which you've got that kind of area of landscape pushing into the hills and then the dales. So I just sort of put it together.

That one that we've just been talking about, 'Abstract with Red Verticals'. And then there's this fantastic one.

Oh yes, well that was when I went to lunch with Herbert Read and I drove through the snow, went off the road a couple of times, which is quite interesting, because there was nothing about so I was quite safe, but, it's quite a strange feeling when your steering wheel doesn't do what you expect it to do and you slide. But luckily I was sliding onto the verges which were all covered in snow, and I just rested there and managed to get off again. And when I, I mean it was a big day for me to be going to lunch with Herbert Read.

Yes I was just going to say, had he beckoned you, had he invited you?

Yes.

Had you met him?

Yes, I had met him but I...it was the first time I was going to lunch, and it would be the biggest snowstorm for years I was thinking, and I never really, I wasn't experienced at it. You've got to be quite good at driving in snow, and my van, well probably the tyres weren't very good, and the first vehicle I had you see. Anyway I got there. And then we went for a walk, and that was a true experience again, of walking in the snow in the wellingtons I had borrowed, and walking at quite an angle, because there was this hillock which had trees on the top, and I'm really walking in a total white situation, desperately trying to stop myself falling over. And then when I look up, there's this blinding circle amongst the verticals. And that was it just for a moment, because you can't keep looking up there because you would fall down. We were walking on quite an angle. And I just thought about it, and then you think about the thing and decide to do something, make a painting about it.

So that, was that...I mean you've been talking about, you've talked about the moon that you've been using, and affected you for quite a long time; was that the beginning of the sun for you? I mean had you...no.

Oh no, right at the beginning. I've always been a sucker for the sun.

No you had done 'Hot Days' and things, yes.

Yes. I've always been for that. Now those are the little drawings for the architectural...well...

For a decorative screen for a factory canteen.

That's right, that's right.

And this one...

Oh yes, that was done...I think Alan Bowness that I think.

Oh really? Mm.

Yes. Or it might be a drawing, I can't remember whether it's a drawing or a painting.

It's charcoal, drawing...

It's a drawing, on well I don't know where it is now.

It's a dealer owns it.

Does he?

Andrew Usiskin it says here is the credit.

Oh my God! has he got that?

It's lovely.

So-and-so! (laughs) Well that, yes, that's right, well that was done up in Leeds, yes, after one of my trips across the moors I think with Helen Kapp who used to run Wakefield Art Gallery, and we were right out on the moors, just sitting there, and with this wind blowing, and it was totally white. And then these sheep had their heads down in the snow, which were lovely, for me lovely little triangular shapes, black and khaki, and then their tails were blowing in the wind making spirals you see. So, that's what I remembered and used, and made that space really you see.

And then there's this...is this one owned by Roger Mayne, is that one?

No, it's...it was, I swapped that for my first car, because I got a Ford for that.

This is 'Red Black and White Leeds', 1955.

Yes, yes. And Tony Johnson, who owned a garage at that time amongst his other business things, took that for the deposit on a Ford Cortina I think it was, or, I don't know what they were, but it was a Ford car anyway. And I drove all the way to Goole to get...I went to Goole rather to fetch the car from his garage there. And I think one of his relatives has got that picture now. Serle[ph] I think. And, it was around 8 foot by 4 wasn't it?

Yes.

Something like that. And, then I was really doing a much more abstract painting, using the verticals again, and they really making it stand up. Actually, a good stripe painting, what date was that?

That was 1955.

Oh dear. Don't let Pat Heron see that, he'll go bloody mad! (laughs)

These are going the other way though aren't they?

Well, yes, very interesting isn't it.

And, did Leeds itself have an affect on you, being a northern town, Yorkshire town?

Well I think the effect is that, the effect is that people knew more about abstract art than anybody else at that time, but the fact that you...there is a working atmosphere amongst people, there is a vibrancy amongst the people, that, everybody wants to do something and get on with things, and the fact that I worked made a lot of people interested in art who had never made the effort before, and so, I actually sold quite a lot of small paintings to people who had never bought a painting before, and they really enjoyed it.

And was one of those Ronnie Duncan, was he...?

Ronnie Duncan, yes, he came to see me. Lots of people like that. And, it sort of opened the door for a lot of people anyway, and so I think the old Gregory Fellowship worked quite well.

Mm, because it worked both ways.

It worked very well...yes. It worked very well for me, because I was encouraged, and also it worked very well at the art school. I didn't want to go to the art school, because they didn't want you do that anyway, but Harry Thubron was such a persuasive person when he took over, and of course Victor Pasmore was in Newcastle and he had got me to go up there on a visit, and he had worked with Thubron at Scarborough and they were so enthusiastic about these new ideas that Harry put the pressure on Gregory to let me go in for a day to Leeds College of Art.

What, to do your own thing or to teach?

Well to help with the first years with Harry.

Right, yes.

And the teaching with Harry was an experience, because he was just the best chap for art schools that ever existed, but he got crucified by the Establishment of course in the end.

And what was he trying to teach?

Well he had picked up an idea I think mainly from the Bauhaus, but, it had been developed in the Thubron manner which was unique. He was quite a surrealist character, and he was able to find the best in everybody, and he took on the most amazing people, and staff who were dead when he got there, he found out what they could do, and brought them to life, and they turned out to be heads of departments all over the place, people who were useless when he got there, because they had been treated so badly by the school. He could pick people up and find out what they could do, wonderful chap, I was glad I met him.

And who were they, some of these people?

Well, they were working in the sculpture school, I can't remember all their names now, and the lithographer and people like that. And they developed into being very good at photography or something else, and he used them to help the first year on photography, and he got them to use plaster for students to make shapes which they could handle, and, because they had the technique of knowing how to set the plaster and do all that, and so they became totally involved with the first year courses. And from that they became truly involved in art, and grew in strength and became quite good, strong individual characters.

And was he...am I right in thinking he was interested...it was colour, colour theory was particularly his...?

Oh no, I don't think Harry was particularly interested in colour theory, he just...he was very interested in encouraging people to find out what they could do, which is a really remarkable thing, and takes a lot of guts. And he actually made people draw and work like hell, but he wasn't particularly...I did the colour, and then the other... At that time, I started up the colour thing, because we did that thing at the ICA.

What was that?

Oh, I don't know, there's a catalogue of them.

An exhibition you mean?

I wrote the thing on colour, only because Victor Pasmore came and said, 'Look, you've got to do a thing on colour,' and I was at Leeds College of Art, and I said, 'Look, I can't do...I've never written anything.' He said, 'Well you do it now, I'll come back...' And he kept coming back in to see how I was getting on, I had to write it, I had to write one. Because I was using colour with the students on an analysis from nature, and it was a real tight analysis from, you actually did the front of the flower, the inside, the back, the proportions, everything, and you related your colour to what you thought it was, and, whether it was a shell or whether it was a flower, and therefore there was always proportion, proportional relations of cool and warm etcetera, as well as proportions in growth. So we did all that, and that was what he wanted me to talk about, which I did, under pressure. And, actually it's not too bad, I've read it since, somebody found my catalogue for it. 'Developing Process' it was called.

Right.

And, this was just a mad period, you can't keep that kind of thing up, and of course what happened eventually, it became academic, because it was taken up by all the schools and it was soon killed, because it's only in the first beliefs, those moments when it's really your discovery when you're teaching, that's when it's important. After that it becomes a bore, like most of the life drawing does.

And, I've just noticed, this 'Red Black and White Leeds', and that triptych that's now up in the Tate, they're on board; were you doing...

That's right.

Oh, and so was that...were you doing quite a lot of work on board?

Yes, I was doing quite a lot on board, because my...it was nice working on board, Lanyon worked on a lot of board in those days. It was difficult to get canvas, and board was the best thing to work on, because it was...you could scrape it around and push it around, and we used to put six coats of gesso on and burnish it and make it really good. And it was lovely to work on, because you could really push it around. But also my step-brother was in the woodwork business, a timber merchant, and he handled hardboard, and he sent me a crate of hardboard to work on. And also when Francis Bacon was next door to me, he always had his canvases sent, and they were packed in hardboard, and he always gave me the hardboard.

Oh right. And when was he next to you then?

Oh that was a bit later on, down in Cornwall.

Yes, right, right.

And the point is that I always had the hardboard from people who had any...it was packing you see.

And which way...did you do it on the smooth side or the rough side?

The rough side, you put your six coats of gesso on there, and not necessarily all the time but that's what we did a lot. If you use the other side you had to sandpaper it first; I forget what we used to treat it with, we used to treat it with something, I don't know whether it was ammonia, I can't remember.

And, another person you met up...I don't know whether you had met him before actually, had you, Roger Mayne?

Oh Roger Mayne had been down with us in...

He had been down here?

I think he had been down with us in Cornwall; he must have done, he took those photographs didn't he.

Yes, I was just looking to see which way round it was.

I don't know which way round, whether I met him in Leeds. I know he...

Oh yes this is later.

His parents were in...well there's a '51 painting in there isn't there? Oh that is later.

Yes that's later, that's down here, that's Quay Street, that's 61, but these wonderful ones of you in Leeds.

Ah yes, he took them in my studio. Yes I think that must have been the first time. I met him because his mother lived in Leeds, that's right, that was probably the first time I met him then, I didn't realise that.

And he also went and did photographs of Armitage in London, and Patrick Heron and people like that didn't he, later on?

Yes, he did those down here though.

Oh yes and here, yes, yes. And he went to Corsham.

He went down to Corsham, he lived in London later on.

He lived in Addison Avenue in W11 near Patrick Heron I think.

Yes that was later, yes, because I went to visit him there, yes. How's the time?

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

When you were in Leeds, you had finished the Gregory Fellowship in '56, and then, well you stayed on an extra year.

That's right. I stayed on an extra year because I had a good house, and also they gave me I think three days at Leeds College of Art, which was the best pay I had ever had in my life, and the most money I had ever had. And then of course I gave it all up to come back to Cornwall, and I managed to live off my painting somehow or another, I can't remember how I did it but I did until...

Were you paid a retainer by your gallery or something?

Not really, no.

Had Waddington appeared on the scene?

No, he never came on the scene till 1959 I don't think.

Right. But, while you were up in Leeds, were you maintaining contact with all your friends down here in London and things?

Oh well I used to have, I mean Hilton came up and Adrian Heath came up, and all kinds of people came to see me; John Hoskin came up several times, the sculptor. And Steven Gilbert

came over from Paris, and... I mean one had a pretty good contact all the time, I never lost contact with people in London. But I don't remember how I lived, except that I was managing off my painting till about '59.

But, meanwhile, when you got back here, there was, Heron had appeared.

Oh yes, he...

Well he had been down here?

Yes, but he was now living down here.

But now he had lived...

He had bought that place.

He bought Eagle's Nest, yes. And Roger Hilton, where had you met Roger Hilton then?

Oh, '51 at the AIA.

Oh I see, yes.

I tried to sell him Ben Nicholson's taxi.

What's that?

I tried to sell Ben Nicholson's taxi to Roger.

Oh.

Or was the other way...? No, Roger came in a taxi, and he, Ben Nicholson wanted a car, so I took Ben out of the AIA to meet Roger, because I knew Roger wanted to sell his taxi, but Ben didn't want a taxi, I didn't realise that, he wanted a sports car. Well anyway I introduced them and we had a little chat about it, and that was that.

And so, then, Hilton was down...also came down here, didn't he, and stayed with Heron.

Yes, he came on the odd visit, but he didn't come down to live here till much later.

Mm. And so had you...when you came back here, you went back to 12 Quay Street?

Oh yes, I had 12 Quay Street all the time you see, we kept that on all the time. I just had to tip the people out who were inhabiting it, only because they never left in time for me to get back in again, because you would tell them you were coming back and you would find all the beds full of different people who hadn't gone until you got there.

And what about the studio to work in?

Oh well I had let that, I had sub-let my studio to John Forrester, who worked, that was the one next to Nicholson. So I always came back and worked in it and somebody had to get out for the summer when I came back, and of course he had to leave when I came back, because that was the understanding.

So were you pleased to come back to St. Ives?

Oh yes, I had been coming back, I used to drive down from Leeds, used to take us about 14 hours with all the children in the van, and the washing machine. The police stopped me one night, it was a plain blue van, stopped me about 2 o'clock in the morning, and looked in the van and there was a baby in a cot and a washing machine, and so he said, 'Oh, carry on,' you know. (laughs) I think they thought I had got some contraband or something. Anyway, no, I don't remember how I survived, and I must have survived all right. I don't think I did any cafe work or anything like that. And people were coming to see me, you must remember, like, different people from all over the world were popping in in those days, particularly from America, and dealers were coming to see me and buying the odd one. I remember Roland Browse...Delbanco came and bought one, a couple of things for himself. And, not Delbanco, Dr. Roland, that's it, Roland, Browse and Delbanco, he bought a couple of things for himself. Gimpels came to see me. All kinds of people like that were visiting.

And then what about...

And then Victor Waddington came down, but I can't remember exactly when I went to Waddingtons. I thought it was about '59. [BREAK IN RECORDING] Yes, so I think that, I didn't get any...I don't think I got any money from Waddingtons until much later, until I was in Banbury I don't think. I mean I got so desperate that I had to move in the end, because, although I sold and managed to survive in my place in Cornwall, the children were growing

up and I couldn't afford to send them to school, and, I tried to get a bit of teaching to survive,
and William Scott.....

End of F4319 Side B

F4320 Side A

.....doubt about it.

Mm, so busy.

But, and also I've got a great problem of not wanting, of wanting to say no to everything, can you understand, you know, after six shows, and trying to get a rest and trying to say no to everything. And so I got quite confused, because if you.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

I don't know what to say, but.....[BREAK IN RECORDING]

[Terry Frost talking to Tamsyn Woolcombe in Camberwell in London on the 18th of December 1994. Tape Nine.]

So last time you had touched on the move to Banbury, when you said you were about to move to Banbury, but we just might go back a tiny bit if I may and ask you more about your friendship with Hilton who you had met earlier that decade, hadn't you.

I met him in '51, yes, and we saw the Sam Francis at the ICA in '51, and when we were in Paris we certainly had lunch with Sam Francis in his place, which was above a carpenter's shop I think. And we had seen his exhibition at Duthuit is it? I forget the name of the French gallery now but they were the large paintings with the...

Was this a commercial exhibition or in a museum?

Oh a commercial exhibition, and it was the Matisse, I think it belonged to one of the Matisse family, a big gallery. And they were beautiful, big paintings of the tachiste period with the blues in the centre and the gold round the edges, and they really were superb. And we went to that, and then we went and had a word with him at his place, and we went to see Soulages, who was in in those days, and we had rather an exciting time with Soulages.

What did you do with him?

Well he was showing us his work, and he gave us some advice on how to deal with dealers.

What advice did he give you?

I've probably told you that, did I?

No, no, no.

Well, he said that, something like, this American dealer came over and he offered me \$200 for each one of these, and so I let him have them, something like six of them. And he said to me, 'Never sign a contract for more than two years.' Now he didn't speak very much English, I didn't speak very much French, but between us this was the language. And I noticed he called the dealer the merchant, and I like that; a marchand. He said, 'Never sign a contract for more than two years,' he said, 'because,' he said, 'I found out that, he bought those things for 200, and then he sold them for 1,000. So when he came back in two years' time I said to him, he wanted six more, I said, "Yes, 1,000 each" you see. And he sold them for 2,000. So when he came back the next time, I said 2,000 each.' And he said, 'Just give you a little tip about this.' After all it was very nice of him, because I didn't know, I had no thoughts of commercialism at all in those days, because it hadn't happened to me in that sense. Then he said, 'Well what do you do?' Well I must have been so sort of innocent in a way, and I saw all his beautiful...he used Windsor & Newton blue-black which I used and was very fond of, and he used big palette knives and stirred them, because he did those big strokes, and it was all there. So he gave me some paper, and when he asked me what I did, I did one for him using his tubes of paint and everything. And when I think, I wouldn't have the nerve to do that now, but I did it for him, and he was rather pleased about it; I expect he's still got it somewhere.

I wonder, what was it? Can you remember what sort of thing it was?

Well when I was using the verticals, and so I could squeeze the paint, I could paint with the tubes you see very quickly, and, I was full of innocent enthusiasm, I hadn't been knackered by dealers then, I hadn't got the greed evil in me or anything like that. And, I just did it honestly, and he loved it, and we got on very well together. Roger was of course keeping rather quiet during all this, which is most unusual for him. Any rate, but of course Roger was absolutely bilingual in French, which...

Because he had been at the Académie...what was it, the Académie Ranson.

Well it was...it was the one at Matisse's place, but, I think Bissière was one of his, or whatever it was and things.

Oh Bissière, right, right.

So we did that. We went round the Salon de Mai where I saw the people that I had only seen in the magazines before, people like Mortensen, I think Veira Da Silva I think, Burri, and we...Tapiés, Tapiés I think was in that one, because we marked up Tapiés; I don't know whether that was that year, but I remember we marked off Tapiés, Mortensen, and people like that, we marked them up pretty...it was exciting for us just to see them. It was a very mixed exhibition, but we did mark off about half a dozen people, I can't remember them all. And, the other thing we went to see was the Nagushi sculpture in a gallery. Well I hadn't seen any Nagushi work before, and...

I don't know him.

It was absolutely fantastic, beautiful sculpture.

What, can you describe it? What was it like?

Well he was the one who did the rocks, he did the garden in the UNESCO gardens, for the UNESCO building, but I don't think I saw that until after I saw this little exhibition of his, which was, you get a single shape, beautiful. And, of course I knew, I can't remember that well about that exhibition except that I was impressed by it, but I do remember the gardens much better because that was the, the stones were much larger, I mean larger than life size, and they were rocks with the water running through, and it was a wonderful scene with semi-circles of sand around, and reeds coming out, and so it was very sensuous. And a bridge over the water in which the form came through your feet as you walked on it, and you had to stop, and I realised then you had to stop because you couldn't go any further because that was the end of the garden, but you didn't know that when you were walking up the bridge, but it worked. And so you felt all the form through your feet as well as the water through sand, and it was one of my first understandings of Japanese way of doing things. And of course Nagushi eventually went to live in America, didn't he? Yes, he lives in America, and made a tremendous reputation. Although he may have had a reputation amongst a lot of artists then, it was my first experience of him, seeing his work. And, Roger also took me to see Bonaparte's bits and pieces that are in glass jars somewhere and I can't remember where that was. But he knew Paris like the back of his hand, but of course he said, 'I'm just a fucking guide for you,' because he used to be very rude. But he still did guide me all round everywhere. And then, to the Deux Magots was his main place to guide me to, where we sat, and the drinks there used to be brought to you, and every time they brought you a drink they

put the saucer there with the bill on, so we had a Tower of Pisa, because we had a lot of young French people come and sit with us, some were jewellers, some were designers and painters, but they obviously knew Roger, and so we were all, we got involved in a wonderful session there. And it became one of my regular places to go to when I went on my own, because I saw all the people that I had seen in, 'Art Aujourd'hui' I think it was called, I saw them there, all the sort of intellectuals as it were, sitting there having their coffee and drink, you know. I only knew the photographs then you see.

And did you get to know them as well?

No, Roger of course would speak to anyone, I mean he rang up Soulages and he rang up people, and we went to various people, people he knew years before. There was a marvellous lady painter whose name's gone from me now, who we went to see, and she wouldn't let Roger talk to her, because I was trying to say something, you know. I did know at that time just enough French to be able to stagger along, and he was trying to put me right, but she stopped him, she wanted to hear what I had got to say. Oh, she was such a lovely lady. Perhaps her name will come back to me. And, she had known him when he was a student you see in Paris. And so that, with Roger I met people as well as seeing works of art; I mean he took me to the Orangerie to see the Monets, which of course is tachisme before...who was it we were talking about?

Tapies?

No, Sam Francis. It's interesting that I linked that up immediately, that that is tachisme on there in the Orangerie, the big mural in there. And, we also went to the Bois du Boulogne to the...I get mixed up every time, the Monet.

Oh right.

There's a house full of paintings there.

Giverny has the Monet.

No no no, this is the Bois de Boulogne.

Oh right, oh right, right.

This was a financier's house and they had turned it over completely.

Oh there are Monets in the basement, is it that place? No, no, anyway...yes.

They're all Monets there in the ground floor.

Mm, yes, right.

But I may not have gone with Roger that year to that, certainly I've been there several times since. So Roger's...the event with Roger was really easy for me, because he knew the way into all the restaurants, he knew the way to get everywhere very easily, so that's why I never learnt my way around Paris because I was always taken. And, we went to the Assassins for our meal, and then I learnt that French people eat so much more comfortable and easier than we do; they don't fiddle about trying to get those lovely bits off a lamb chop, like I had always been taught, they pick them up and bite it off, which is so much more common sense, and talk while they're doing it, and that was all new to me, I loved that. And that was my first trip with Roger. He was very upset with me, because I had worked up enough courage to go and ask for a newspaper from the little kiosk there, because I had to get the test, the cricket score, and Roger couldn't understand that, first time in Paris and reading the bloody test! (laughing) Upset him that did.

And that year was '57, I think, we were saying, yes.

That's right, yes.

And so, in England, the next year you had your exhibition at the Leicester Galleries.

'57 at the Leicester Galleries, didn't I?

'58 according to the...

Was it? Oh it's got '57 'Yellow Triptych' in it.

Yes, that we talked about last time, yes, and there are these photographs that Roger Mayne took of you standing in the gallery.

Oh with Pat Heron.

Yes.

That's '58 is it?

It's dated '58.

Oh well that's fair enough then.

Yes. And then, I believe you had another, an exhibition at Waddington, a mixed show at Waddington the following year.

'59?

Yes.

Mm. Was that with Adrian and Roger and...or was it...it was Patrick Heron, Bryan Wynter, that's four of us, wasn't it? 'The Middle Generation'.

'The Middle Generation'.

And we were named, 'The Middle Generation', yes.

Yes. Did you mind that label?

Oh I thought it was terrible.

Could you do anything about it, or was it just...? Did you know it was going to be called that?

No, I don't...I don't think it matters really, just irritating that's all.

Mm, mm. Yes, I'm just going to look it up, sorry. Yes. And then, you were saying, you were making your living, you were earning, making your living at that point when you were based in St. Ives back from Leeds, from selling quite well.

Oh yes, I was back from Leeds in '57, that's right. Well I was living off my painting in those days, yes I was. I don't know how the hell I did, but we did. I can't remember whether Kath was working or not; I don't think she was, because I think we had got three or four children by then. So I must have been...yes I did, I sold enough paintings I think to survive.

And can you remember what sort of, what you were doing at that time late Fifties? Was it...because coming back from Leeds, how did it affect your work going back to St. Ives? It changed, did it?

Well I think we were still...there was still quite a bit of the...the linear, I think there was still quite a lot of the vertical strokes in the paintings at that time.

Yes, oh yes, here we are, here's one.

That's right, and I did a...that was done in Leeds wasn't it? I should think it was.

Well it says 1958 here, but it looks more like Leeds-ish, because there's that sort of hexagon kind of thing, yes.

I still carried on, I did black and whites and I did a lot like that. I thought they were shown at the Leicester Galleries but I've probably got muddled up.

And there's this one, this looks a bit more...

Yes well then we've got the linear side in, but also...

You've got a chevron on here.

You must remember...yes, but there's also the element of the lying down figure in that, which actually was, there was terrific correspondence with Roger about that time, not only correspondence but arguments when we met. No, not so much arguments as very tough discussions, about him trying to bring the figure back and me, when he said he had done abstract art I said, nonsense, you know, I mean it was such an exaggerated statement to make. Well I got quite cross with him about that. But he did, he was determined to bring the figure back. But I couldn't see how you could bring it back without sort of imitating Picasso or something like that, and I didn't want to do that, and I liked the clarity of abstract art, I liked the freedom it gave me to make the shapes I wanted to make. Whereas immediately one starts to bring in a little bit of a figure, which I'm sure I did there, I mean it's very much influenced...

Yes, this is called 'White Painting'.

Mm, yes, well I might have called it that, yes.

I mean I'm just, so that people...

But I think that, that is the way I worked, and I did have a very good run into that kind of thing. And, I don't know how I got out of that spell actually.

I was going to ask you about that.

But I think, is 'Force Eight' and...is that around that period?

Yes it is. 'Force Eight'...'Force Eight' is '60.

Yes, well now we've really moved then a bit, yes.

Yes. 'The Three Graces'.

Yes, well that's still a pretty tight constructive one, like the white one we saw earlier on. I mean that construction went right through, but then I'm involved with 'The Three Graces'. I'm never consistent on a line, because 'The Three Graces' of course came from copying 'The Three Graces' when I was at Camberwell. So it takes a long while for it to go through to be able to use it, or to have the courage to use it. But then the chevron and the verticals, and the horizontal, are all about painting anyway, whether it's Cézanne or whoever it is. So that's my construction, which seems to go through all of it, whichever the period is.

Mm. So, how did the exhibition come about in New York, the Bertha Schaefer show?

Oh, well, I wish I could remember. I think it must have been done through Waddingtons.

Oh right.

She saw the work and, did she come down to Cornwall? I can't remember. She must have come down to Cornwall to see the work, because I was still down there then. And, well of course another, at that time you must remember that we were getting quite well known, because a lot of people were coming down to Cornwall, from Motherwell to Jack Bush, Frankenthaler; I mean a lot of people came down to Cornwall, so they knew of us, and they knew particularly of Nicholson and Lanyon and people like that, and Hepworth, and I was just, just a part of it as it were.

And did you all meet...and there's a photograph I think of Rothko and you and Lanyon.

That's right, yes.

Having lunch.

That's right, yes. Oh yes, and, I mean they all came to my studio because I was one of the gang as it were.

Mm, mm.

And, I never thought much about it then, they were just other painters as far as one was concerned. But I'm sure...and then Bertha must have come down and seen the work, and offered me a show, via Waddingtons of course because Victor Waddington was a marvellous old boy at things like that. And, so I went out to New York for that exhibition, and that was quite interesting because, I had a lady who had already bought something of mine from the Leicester Galleries, who was a critic, and she introduced me to Motherwell and Frankenthaler, she arranged for me to meet them all, and Barney Newman, and somebody named Green, Will Barnett. I mean I met so many people I can't remember all the names now, but they were all the painters who were on the go at that time. And that was all done through this lady, whose name has gone from me now.

And had you actually seen their work when, there was an American exhibition wasn't there, American abstract painting exhibition at the Tate, wasn't there, around that sort of time? Had you seen it, or was the work new to you in the flesh?

No, no, it wasn't new to me. Obviously I saw books, or magazines. Although there weren't as many as there are now, but, I certainly saw the American show, I can't remember whether it was '56, '57 or when it was.

I think around that time, I think '58.

I certainly went to the Tate, and I remember being very impressed by a chap named Tomlin, who had lettering in his big paintings, and I think there was a Mark Tobey in it as well, which was very nice. But the thing that impressed me most was Tomlin and Motherwell; Motherwell with his Elegies and his black and white, a feeling in those paintings that fascinated me. But strangely enough I didn't think anything about size, like everybody talks

about the size, I never thought about size, because if a painting's right it doesn't matter whether it's small or large, if the scale's right, and I didn't know about a feeling[??], because after all I had seen large paintings before that, the Veroneses in Paris and things like that; but whether I had seen the Carpaccios in Venice before '57 I don't know. But, I mean once you've been to the Louvre you don't worry about large painting, it's been done a long time before, you know. But I was impressed, definitely impressed with Tomlin and Motherwell, are the ones that stick in my mind. But Pollock fascinated me by the way it was done, but then I had heard a lot about Pollock, because Ken Armitage had been out there and told me about that; Scott had been out there and told me about that, so, so we knew what was going on. Scott said I said, 'Was there any intellectual talk?' He said, 'No, it was all money,' from the artists. (laughs) Which is always the way. All about money.

And is that, did you find that when you got there, that it was all about money?

No, I didn't find that. I was very lucky to go to Barny Newman, who was just a story-teller, and loves doing it very slowly, had a great sense of humour, and shows you his paintings also very slowly, but it unfolds beautifully. And Motherwell put me through all his paintings too.

Really?

Yes, unrolled them.

Gosh.

They were all on a big roll and he just took one down at a time for me to look at. And he worked on the floor, which fascinated me.

Did you see him actually working then, or not?

No, but there was one down there. And he told me, I mean, how he...the whole arrangement of the way in which the wires came from the side to pull the canvases tight all on the floor and that, which I wish I knew how...wish I had took more notes on how to do it, because it was rather good. I did, I met de Kooning but I didn't to his studio unfortunately, because he was in a bit of a state in those days because he had done so well and the tax was worrying him. He did talk a bit, only from the fact that he had sold out, and he knew he had got to pay a lot of tax, and it hurt him, because he had had all those years with not doing so well, you know.

And Rothko, was he still alive at that point?

Oh yes, I had lunch with Rothko, yes, Rothko came to Cornwall.

Yes I know, yes.

So I went, and we met for a couple of lunches and things like that. Yes, and he had just refused to, he had just decided that day to take his, not to let his work go to that club, you know...we've got them I think in the Tate. He said, 'I've just turned down 30,000,' he said, and I thought, bloody hell, I've just sold two things at about 100 and he's turned down 30,000, and I'm having a mighty whisky while we're having the tea, the lunch, you know. But, he was very worried about that at the time, but he decided that it wasn't the place for his paintings.

And were you pleased with how your exhibition went, the New York one? Did it have a good reception?

Well, I don't know that it had a good reception. It's very difficult, I mean, if you are English you are treated, I mean with an almost, with contempt. I don't think English painters have any reputation except for Turner.

I just wondered there, with all the American painters supporting you, which they obviously were, whether that sort of spread?

Oh yes, they were interested in what we were doing, but I don't think it was, that was...that's a very limited thing, that was just the painters.

Yes, but I just wondered whether it percolated through to the critics at least if not...

Well, I don't think it did. I was stiff...what did they call me? Stiff English upper lip or something, you know, all that kind of lark, which I've... De Kooning was my best, spoke to me most about my painting, and he really was excited about one of my paintings, which the Imperial Tobacco Company out there bought; whether that was due to his influence I don't know, but I could quite believe it would be, because he did talk to me a lot about it, and about the space it was making and all the rest of it.

Can you remember which painting that was?

Oh I wish I could. It was 8 foot by 4 I know that, and it was vertical with bars across. Almost black and white, and it was a kind of big figure space. But I can't remember enough about it and I don't think I ever had a photograph of it in those days. But I know Imperial Tobacco had it.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

I'm trying to think of the lady...yes, I went to Helen Frankenthaler's studio, because she was painting beautiful stain paintings in those days. I also went to Clem Greenberg's, because I had met Clem, he had been down to Cornwall, and he showed me all his collection, which was quite, I mean he had got a big Olitski in there, which I didn't fancy but it was, he liked them. And there was also, he showed me my first Nolans, targets, which were not in those days stretched, they were rolled, and Clem had got a stack of them and which he had obviously, they were the early days of Nolan you see, and they were only about 4 foot square most of them, and he unrolled them saying, 'This is a good lad,' kind of thing. So I saw them before they were really over here and pushed around. Well of course, I'm talking with hindsight now; at the time I'm just being shown them, never having heard of him. And, also Clem showed me his own paintings which were very good landscape paintings at that time.

Oh really?

And he had a lot of David Smith drawings. So, I got a pretty good treatment, looking back. But I never thought about anything else but just going to see these people, and enjoying the business of seeing them, and drinking with them at the Cedar Bar, and meeting people like Ginsberg, the big poet, and going to the performance with Larry Rivers, who was in the play, and I had a seat next to Ginsberg to watch it being performed. Because you see, I didn't know who Ginsberg was, except he was one of the gang that day, and so one saw all these people doing this play, taking the mickey out of Eisenhower and things, as a sort of...it was like 'This is the Week That Was', very early on you see. I did meet the whole gang. But, one never thought anything about it, it was just, it just happened.

And when you came back, did you feel a bit deflated, having had that wonderful time in New York, or was it...when you came back to St. Ives, or was it...?

No, I never had those kind of problems in those days. There was so much excitement in the art world, amongst the artists, in having found this territory to move in, there wasn't enough time really, what with doing the work and going to Paris and going off to New York and having your exhibitions, and having the correspondence with Lanyon and Hilton and people

like that, it was all go, and discussions were very tough and militant, likes and dislikes were very strong, and if there was none of that going on then there's not much going on at all, if everybody's very happy and easy with each other, means they're not painting very well either.

And can you remember, what did you correspondent with Lanyon about at that point then?

Well the correspondence with Lanyon was a bit earlier than that. I mean I was seeing him in the Sixties, I mean I was actually down in Cornwall again from Leeds, and so therefore I saw him as often as I wished to, as often as he wished. So, the correspondence was carried on with Roger from Leeds, and then Roger came, and I think I got him into Trevor Bell's old studio, house, and Ruth bought it, Ruth bought it, his first wife, I think they bought...

What, up in Leeds are we talking about? No, sorry.

No, they bought Trevor's old cottage down in Cornwall.

Oh right.

That's when he made his first move down there, it would be what, about '57/58 wasn't it, about?

Mm.

That's when he moved, started to come and use it as a holiday cottage.

End of F4320 Side A

F4320 Side B

Sorry, so that was Roger Hilton down there more often.

Yes.

So you didn't correspond with him while you were there because you saw him.

No, well, because, well by that time of course he was...he was a little more difficult than he used to be, inasmuch as he was drinking a little bit more, and...he was still very good to have in the studio or anything like that, he was still very sharp and able to put you in your place as it were with what you were trying to do. No, I had no problems with Roger.

Who do you...and, Lanyon, had Lanyon, going back to him for a second, had he...he had started his gliding by then, hadn't he?

Yes, and I used to go up to Little Park Owles when he was working at the, right away from the house at the end of the, there was a huge garden and he lived right at the end, he worked right at the edge of that in what was originally a garage, and he was doing the first paintings that he had done from the gliding, which of course was a bit of a shock to me, and I didn't like them at all, because they were so pale and spacy, and I didn't understand it when I had been used to his heavier and tougher work, which was to do with the rocks and the landscape, and the scraping off and the making which was related to constructions; suddenly all that had gone for all these marks in a blue haze, which didn't actually thrill me at all; I thought he had lost the lot. But of course they have proven to be, the best of them have proven to be rather powerful paintings, which shows how wrong you can be. I didn't like them at all.

Did you discuss them with him, or did you keep it to yourself?

Oh yes, oh yes, oh yes. I mean he was very disappointed that I didn't be enthusiastic; I mean I...obviously I would look for something that I liked in certain of them, but I couldn't be enthusiastic about them at that time.

And Hilton's work, how did you, what did you think of his work at that time? Was he becoming more figurative?

Well I think he was working more in Mousehole at that time, I think he...I think he had a place in Mousehole in '64 or had he got one...had I left? You see I left in '64.

Yes, he...

I can't remember where he was working.

He went...hang on.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

So he was in Newlyn.

Yes. And he was working mainly on hardboard I thought in those days, and some of them were very nice, but I don't remember a great deal about that painting period of his, I don't know why, I can't remember what I was doing in '57/58/59.

Well you were very busy, it sounds as if you were.

I would only see him on occasions, he would come over to the house because he used to like to come and see Kath and that.

I suppose it was the summers, according to this, that he wasn't there all the time, he hadn't make it his permanent base down there.

No he hadn't made it his permanent base, no. And he was working on board I think mostly in those days, and they weren't very good some of them, but, I can't remember. I think he was drinking far more than I liked at that time, I found him quite difficult to handle.

So when you first, when you had first met him in the early Fifties and '51, was he...he wasn't a great drinker particularly?

He wasn't drinking, half a pint would be the maximum then. Oh no, I mean he was...he was still in a sort of landscapery way of painting, Bissière way of painting. I mean they only just managed to put him in the AIA show because they were a little bit too delicately based on landscape at that time you see, they weren't abstract enough.

And had you maintained contact with William Scott still at this time, or not?

With William? I didn't see William so much, only when he came down where we always saw him; he used to come down and stay in Sennen, and we would always see him and talk to him, but, he would come and visit the studio, that's all. I don't know whether, we worked pretty hard at...and we would only meet in a social way, you know, as much as anything in those days. I think we were all getting a bit into painting seriously.

And did you want to actually, did you ever think you didn't want someone else to see your work, because you didn't want them to get...?

I never really had that problem, no, I didn't have that. Some people had that problem, and it does worry them, but, it never worried me. If they can do it better than me, God bless them. You use certain shapes and people think, well they've pinched it, but, when you think about it honestly, those shapes have been used for ever by everybody, so it's not like that really. But just... No that didn't worry me very much; it certainly worries a lot of people.

And your studio at that point, was that still Porthmeor?

Yes, that was next to Nicholson, and then of course there was Francis Bacon for about six months on the other side, which made it interesting, different cup of tea. But, no my studio was always open, and you always knew when you had done a good painting because they didn't know what to say, because their envy, or jealousy made them talk about anything but the painting, and it always did the same to me. It's quite tricky when you see something which is really good and you haven't done it. I mean I'm talking about painters working at the same time and around you, that you want them to do a good painting of course, but you want to do one better yourself, this is I think quite natural.

Mm.

It is amongst most people anyway.

And so, then, Nicholson actually had gone, hadn't he, he went.

He went in about '57. He fell for the...I forget her name now.

Felicitas Vogler.

Oh yes. She walked in with big eyes drooping out and looking handsome, and Ben was just in the right mood. Been away from Barbara for about five or six years.

And did you keep up with Barbara? Actually did you keep up with him in fact when he had gone?

Oh I went over to see him a couple of times, yes, yes.

Did you? In Switzerland?

Mm, yes. Probably three times I think. And, of course Ben was always sparse with his words, you would get a postcard with three words on and that's about it, with a little drawing, the picture had been altered on the front, you know, with a pen drawing or something. Never said a lot.

And Barbara, did you keep up with her particularly?

Occasionally I would go round to see her, and sometimes she would come round to see me, but it wasn't frequent but we were always good friends. I didn't go and see her too often because she was always busy; I used to go in the evenings sometimes, sometimes I went at lunchtime, after she had done her morning's work. But then she had started to drink a little drop then, and you used to go and talk and have a drink with her. And I was trying to get her on to milk with her whisky, to ease the situation, but I could never remember what you put in first, the milk or the whisky; if you don't get it right it can curdle you see. I remember the first time I was showing her how to do this, we finished up by drinking a pint of milk, which meant we had had a bottle of whisky, you know, which I thought, well that's not really the way to do this, I was trying to ease off the situation. Kath had to come and fetch me, absolutely tight I was. I was supposed to be trying to, I was trying to ease her off the drink you see. Core, stone the crows! What with that and 100 Churchman a day, it was quite, no wonder she had a bit of a chest, you know.

100 Churchman? Oh, cigarettes, oh right.

She changed her stove, because she reckoned it was the stove that, the fumes that made her cough. Well of course there was nothing wrong with the stove at all, she was smoking no tips on Churchmans you know, and you were smoking them, 100 at a time, you just pick them up, you're bound to cough a bit. But she was always worth going to see, because the work was all around, and you didn't really have to say a lot and it was beautiful work all around where you were sitting. And the forms were so powerful, beautifully powerful, that you read them all the time you were talking.

And was Denis Mitchell, was he still her assistant then, or had he started...?

Oh yes, Denis was still her assistant, yes, her main assistant. I think Brian Wall might have been doing a bit by that time but I'm not sure. Well I think we've done very well haven't we?

Oh yes we have, we have.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Sorry, can I just ask you about 'The Three Graces' that you did around this time?

Well it started because I was asked to make a copy, or we were all asked, I mean, the poor bloody teachers have to think of something to put over, and I think Coldstream and co. had had a little chat together, and it was suggested we did a copy of an Old Master, something like... And I happened to like curves in a landscape, and in people, and it is a universal form, and I liked the Rubens 'Three Graces' which I had looked at often enough when I used to go to the National Gallery. And, it's the same girl in three different poses, which turns and makes a semi-circle, the form, and it has the three reds, top left, the red cape on the middle girl and then on Paris. So that one again made this wonderful shape in space by the three reds and the three forms turned. And I did this copy, really from memory you're supposed to do it, but I did little notes in my notebook while I was there, and of course I also had the postcard as a reference, which was very useful. But it was very interesting because it taught me so much about the juiciness of paint, and the delight in the making a connection right across through the eyes to Paris and back to each girl, which I drew lines across which made a sort of structural form in space. I never thought too much about it, but I did it, and I know that, now I'm able to look back and know that that kind of construction in painting, which has always fascinated me and which is really part of the abstract thing, is the total construction you have between shapes and forms, which I certainly got a lesson from in Rubens' 'Three Graces' and I seem to do a 'Three Graces' every year, and I love putting three things together. I know that two's company and three's not, but I mean, I don't know, I like the idea of three.

And when you were doing these, did you consciously, these ones in '59 and, circa '59/60 whatever, that you called 'Three Graces', did you know you were doing 'The Three Graces' or did you call it 'The Three Graces' afterwards?

Oh, no I knew I was doing 'The Three Graces', yes.

Oh you did, yes, yes.

Yes I knew exactly what I was doing. It was my way of paying homage to that particular idea; it wasn't particularly to Rubens by that time, it was to the idea of three forms, and the kind of delight I got. And then, I had already learnt by now, I had got a postcard of practically every 'Three Graces' that had ever been done, and I realised all the possibilities within it, and it's such a wonderful idea. It just became an idea, sort of concept, so that I could, it gave me freedom to do what I wanted, and I made those things, which I called 'The Three Graces'. Although of course I've often drawn 'The Three Graces' practically every year from some, copied somebody's 'Three Graces' with a reed pen.

In a figurative manner?

Yes, oh yes, yes yes.

Yes, yes. And this one here dated June 1960, is that collaged on or not? Was there bare canvas?

That is collage. I used a lot of collage. That relates back, the collage idea of course is back to sculpture, when I worked for Barbara, that almost finished me for painting for about nine months, because I couldn't get used to the idea of a physical shape, and a thought shape. I couldn't work the two out together. Because when you make a hole in a piece of stone, or when you carve a shape, you can't put it back on again, that is a fact, so you've got to make it adjustments all the way round. And with a painting you can scrape off. And I was a bit disillusioned about the illusionistic side of painting, and I think that's what helped me to be stronger on the abstract side, and certainly helped me with the collage, because if you use a collage you have to cut - well you don't have to, but I was cutting a positive shape, which gave me more satisfaction than having an expressionist brush-stroke just round the edge. I might put an expressionist chevron into it which was part of me to do that penetration with the black paint, which is an emotional, subjective emotional thing, most of the time, but it can be quite coolly thought about too. And then you start to worry about the angles you're doing, because a chevron can be very wide or very fast or very slow, and, it's full of complications, it's a wonderful mark to make. And if you put it into a static affair, like a collage which you've cut, lovely.

And, you had mentioned the chevron last time when you had done a drawing of your wife sitting on the river bank.

Yes, that was it.

And you put it to indicate the water splashing.

The edge of the stream.

Was that actually the first time you had used that?

The first time I knowingly used it, but don't forget I had been a Paul Klee fan in my days at Camberwell and he was using all those marks. But you see it's no good using marks unless you've got a reason for them, or at least I don't; other people would say no, you can use any mark you want, but I normally want a story, I normally want a reason, I normally want an idea, to put a chevron on. I want it to be slow or I want it to be fast, you know, I want to turn a corner or I don't want to turn a corner. And so I've always used them with a reason, I don't just make them as decorative marks I hope. Although I wouldn't mind doing a big canvas just with black and white decorative marks on, good idea, I might do that, about 16 foot long, I think that would look rather nice.

So that was that series. And then there was this one - sorry, do you mind me just asking about this one?

No, 'Drowning Blue'?

'Drowning Blue'. Had you used these sort of colours before, the sort of, it looks here, is it aquamarine would you call it?

Well, it looks like cobalt blue to me with a little bit of viridian chucked in just to liven it up a bit. But, it's oil paint, and certainly it's the old idea of the harbour, which I walked round for years, but this is an imaginative one, but I'm locking it the same as a harbour is locked by the quays that go out to make it a safe harbour; I'm locking that, and then I'm putting my rods of stability in, my verticals, which are locking it. I always like to lock the form to the area I'm painting on, and that was my way of locking it. And I did rely upon the lusciousness of the paint which was, I mean that ground underneath would be a very good white ground which I would have probably put six coats of gesso on, and burnished it and all kinds of things, because with blue you know it's a colour that goes down very quickly, and so that you need a good refraction underneath it. And Lanyon and I had practised that many times, making a good ground.

So that harbour, locked harbour scene you had done earlier on in the Fifties, hadn't you, but this is much more sort of painterly isn't it.

Well I had done that for pleasure, I'm away from the harbour now, I'm only thinking about...probably a bit of nostalgia in that for my evenings when the blue light is on over the harbour. I believe in memory conceptions like that, I think they're very important. It takes ages to use things. You see if you go blundering straight in as soon as you see it, well, you put a lot of nonsense in that really is not what it's about. Anybody can draw a lamppost on the end with a blue light on, that's not what it's about at all. It's a whole event, it's a whole feeling as you are walking past it; it's nothing to do with stopping in one spot and drawing it. That's OK, but not for me. It's a whole movement and a whole moment, and you've got to walk round it many many times, and then eat it and consume it and think about it, and it will come back. And that's what happened in that painting.

Mm, come back very effectively hasn't it, wonderful.

And now it's lost. Down somebody's cellar with a chicken run or something I should think, keeping the foxes from getting in.

And so, then, and so you...you were back in St. Ives but then, how did it evolve that you moved to Banbury, and why?

Well I felt, thinking about it, I think the steam for me had gone out of, I didn't...I didn't get so much excitement. I mean the arguments...Lanyon I think was dead by this time wasn't he?

He died in...[BREAK IN RECORDING] Yes, Lanyon died in '64, so he hadn't quite.

Oh yes, well Lanyon had died in '64, that's right. Well the point is that there was no...the arguments had gone. I just felt that, there were two things really. Have you switched on?

Mm.

I was thinking, perhaps a little bit big-headed, you remember I had been shown at Waddingtons, I had shown in New York, I was beginning to get recognised, which was something I hadn't really anticipated, and it is a problem, I mean it was a problem to Roger, that's why Roger drank when he started to get known, and I found it was, it is quite a problem, people expect so much of you. And on the other hand I thought, I thought St. Ives was changing, it was getting so many tourists down, and it was very difficult to walk along

without meeting somebody who was down on holiday, or wanting to come to your studio etcetera. And so, being a bit ambitious by this time, I thought I ought to get to London. You must remember I came up to see Adrian quite regularly, and I did like London, and I liked the spunk and the fighting, which had died in St. Ives, everybody was getting on a bit. So the younger people were fighting amongst themselves but our gang had all gone their different ways, and I felt, I'd better get up to London. I wanted to get to London. I mean, I had been to California, I had got all kinds of things going on, so...

Had you?

No I went to California from Banbury.

Yes, yes.

But I mean I knew that I had...well, as you know I had been to New York, and I wanted to go to London. So we went looking for somewhere, and I got a house in Fulham I think it was, £400 I had to put down, and the chap who surveyed it said, 'Absolute white elephant,' you know, 'it's falling to bits'. It was cracked all over the place, and the bomb situation, and also the electric lighting and the plumbing had all been done wrong, and it was an absolute disaster. 'Get your money back quick,' he said. And so I did. And, well I didn't my house in Fulham. But on the way back from looking in London we called in Banbury, and it was a nice day, the strawberries were in season and the cherries were in season, and we sat and ate the cherries and the strawberries near the church in Banbury, and there happened to be just up that little passageway a house agent, so we popped in while were there. And the young chap there took us up to see this house, and as soon as Kath saw it - she didn't want to move at all, but she knew I wanted to move - she said, 'That's it,' she would like that. And so we put in for this house in Banbury, which wasn't London, I mean I was changing my ideas now, but anyway, it was only an hour on the train, that was the important thing, so we took it. And we moved in the February of, was it '64 or '65? I don't know.

'63.

Mm?

'63?

No.

No?

'64 I think. We probably moved...yes, I think we moved, it was the coldest weather we had ever had, the snow was higher than my car as we drove up. It had been a terrible winter. And when we got to the house it was frozen, absolutely solid, and we had quite a few problems with that. But, apart from that I had two rooms at the front which, on the north side, very very cold indeed, and we all lived in the kitchen where the fire was. But I had the two rooms at the front, the studios, and then of course the question was, how was one going to survive? I don't think I was getting much from Waddington, a tiny little bit now and again but not very much, because he, I remember Victor said money wouldn't be any good for you as an artist, you know. How marvellous isn't it, all the dealers, 'Money's bad for you,' he said. So, I think I asked him for £100 or something. It would upset my style, my lifestyle. I wish I had kept the letters really, it's fantastic isn't it. Gimpels did the same you know. I asked them for £25 and we finished completely. That was 1951 of course. So I wrote to William Scott, who after all had actually got me to go to Corsham, with Bill Brooker, and Scott got me to go to Corsham. I said, could William do anything for me? Because I had to, you know, with the children, six children, all needing shoes and caps and school things, was there any possibility of getting... You see you could live on nothing down in St. Ives, I couldn't live on nothing there, because I wanted to go to London on the train, I wanted to make all these connections. And so William eventually managed to get me a day at Coventry, which was very useful, and I think I probably did that for twelve months or something. By that time of course I had got to know other places, other people began to know I was about, so I could do a day in Birmingham or I could do a day in London, at the Central or wherever I was asked you see. And so gradually we got a bit of an income. And Bertha came down to see me there, Bertha Schaefer came, said, 'Don't over-produce Terry,' which I've always remembered, because I couldn't...I remember saying something to Roger about that, I wish I could remember exactly what he said, but he said, 'No,' he said, 'you don't want to worry about that,' and he told me how many paintings Rembrandt had done. He said, 'You haven't done anywhere near that yet, so don't worry about that,' he said, which I thought was very nice of him. And, oh I must have had a show from Banbury with Bertha, I certainly did, I don't remember when it was, and I did the...I got the thing at Coventry, and then I was asked to go to California.

To San José.

By Fred Spratt who had been down on a sabbatical in Cornwall, and had knocked about with Lanyon, and, well he knew all the gang, Sydney Graham and everybody, and he asked me if I would go out to San José State for the summer course there, where, they run a summer course in the school, State University or something. So I went out there, and that was interesting

because I met a lot of people and I went and did the galleries in Los Angeles which I would never have done, and San Francisco.

Did the what?

The galleries.

Oh the galleries, yes.

And of course, San Francisco Museum, and, I mean I saw some wonderful paintings which I would never have seen, big abstract shows in San Francisco. And of course I had an exhibition at the Legion of Honour or whatever it's called in, I don't know whether that was San Francisco or San José, I can't remember. Legion of Honour anyway, it's on the top of a hill, everything's on top of a hill there. And also found people who had work of mine down there, and they invited me to their houses, so they had bought them from New York and places like that you see. So that was a very interesting trip, and I met a lot of people. And I learnt about Diebenkorn's work and people like that, which, there's a lot of painters in California who, I mean they don't think anything of showing in New York, it doesn't worry them in the slightest, but they've got their own bit of the market, and I found exactly the same when I was in Dallas, they've got their own market. They think New York's old rope, you know, nothing to do with that lot. So it was very interesting to see both sides of the penny.

And did the climate, that different kind of light and, did that affect the work you were doing or anything, or not?

Well it means that you've got to work early in the morning because it's too damned hot later on for me, unless you're in a good air-conditioned place. Also you have to work very hard in American schools in the summer; you get a lot of students, and they're very demanding, they're not like English students, they want you to show them how to paint, which of course you can't really; they don't like just encouragement, they want to be shown how to do it, which is pretty tough, and they like very tough criticisms.

End of F4320 Side B

F4321 Side A

I don't think the colour worried me like it did you. I never thought about it as a separate thing when I was in San José, I was just...eyes wide open at the scale of the place, of the orchards with the plums etcetera, and the way in which they put their kitchen into a house, is was brought on a lorry and the whole thing went in, you know, all the fittings were there. None of this putting it together on the spot, brought, dropped in. And the places were going up like that everywhere I looked. The prune orchards were all being cleared, and, I had read 'The Grapes of Wrath' so I mean I could see the situation. And, the spirit of the street where all the galleries were in Los Angeles was fantastic, I mean it was...they all opened on the same evening so you could walk along the boulevard, you could walk along all these different galleries. And, it was very exciting, and I liked that excitement, and I liked the way in which people didn't knock you down as an artist, they were delighted to talk to you about what you were trying to do. And if they liked something, they bought it. You didn't have to be famous, you know, not like it's got here, you know. And it's still the same in the States, if you try to do anything, you are encouraged; that is rather wonderful. Here, everybody's very suspicious about anything which isn't like that same bowl of fruit. So I had no regrets about California, I found it very useful. And of course the space was wonderful; when I was driven right up to Reading I think it was called, yes Reading, and I went to the...I'm trying to remember the name of the national park there.

Yosemite?

Yosemite, that's right. I went through that, and I went to various...I mean I can't remember the routes exactly, but I mean the snow-covered mountains of Nevada. And there was also cornfields just blowing and making all the movements. There was also sort of Spanish-type houses. And then there's a little village which is perhaps 150 people, and it tells you what their religion is, and they've still got the sidewalks, you know. And you think, well no wonder they could ride down out of the hills and take it over, no problem at all if you've got a gun on your belt, and, one could understand the stories and the myths that get around. So driving through all that, or being driven through all that area, which is much better to be driven, I found absolutely fascinating. And I wrote a lot of poetry and a lot of things about that, not at the time, I wrote about it, the facades; this is truth, because those are only facades that you see in cowboy films, and they are a fact when you're there, because round the back is a tin shack, but the facade is there and the walk is there; you open the doors and that's it, you're back in a tin shack, you know.

Blimey!

They're facades, but marvellous. So that was a sort of false situation.

So what were you painting at that time then, what was your work like?

Well, I think there was still an element of the big chevron going in on, I think there was some drawings about that period. That's Banbury.

Yes.

And Compton Wynyates.

Yes I was going to ask you about that in a minute. Oh here we are.

There you are, that's... That one's a good...there you've got the two shapes there.

And you've got that sort of wedge.

All these things growing up the side. Yes that's one. I think that was done there I think.

Which one, 'Black Chevron', 1964?

Yes, I think that was done there.

It's a drawing.

Yes.

Oil and charcoal on paper. Was that one?

Yes. That one, no, the watercolour wasn't done there, no. That was done there.

This one?

Yes, that's oil on paper.

Right. Untitled, 1964.

It's laced up too you see.

Yes, yes, yes.

The lacing up, there's all the forms that I like you see, and you look at that top left-hand corner, and the little bits of hair under the arm as it were, which are to do with, Nagushi used that in his sculpture in the garden in UNESCO, when he put the water coming through the rocks, male, and another one female, and then the bamboos were just... Well I mean that was my way of interpreting his poetical thing; I was probably very crude about it but you could make it pretty if you want to, but I was, my sensuality responded to that sexual side of the thing.

And then, so that lasted just the summer did it, that San José?

Yes. Lasted me a lifetime actually. I've been, I think I've been back there again, I can't remember. Perhaps I only get phone calls from San José now. (laughs)

And then, you also I think had another teaching job didn't you? Were you...did you get to Reading part-time?

Oh, I went to Reading, yes, I went to Reading.

From Banbury, did you?

Yes, I was asked to go to Reading, I don't know why. Tom Cross I think asked me to go to Reading, because he was working...oh Claude, Claude asked me.

Claude Rogers.

Claude used to be my, wasn't my tutor but he certainly had something to do with me at Camberwell, and he remembered me from Camberwell. And of course my star was rising you see; in those days if you were showing in London and you went to the States and showed too, then you were somebody who was needed in art school to make it look good as it were. And also, because you were doing well, your enthusiasm, which is very important, will go to the students you see. Whereas if you're down, not doing any good, well you're not very good for the students. But if your star's rising, as mine was, you feel pretty good and you are able to put ideas over very forcefully, and it does help a lot of students you see. So I was quite useful to people at that time, because I was confident and I suppose a bit cocky I suppose. And so I

went to Reading and had a look, and I didn't want the bloody job really, I mean I was in the position of Waddingtons being able to sell a certain amount of work, and I had got that bit of the visit to Coventry, which was enough to keep me going, and I was also selling the odd, I think Bertha Schaefer sold about 16 for me in a couple of years or something. Well it was all, it wasn't a lot of money because I was never high priced, but it was good, and it kept my confidence up. So going to Reading, which was so marvellous, it was the only time when I had been asked anywhere when I didn't really want the job, and I didn't mind doing a visit, but when they asked me to, would I take over and do a full-time job, I only need come in three days they said, and we'll give you a studio. Well I thought about it, and it was something like 3,000 a year; well as I had never been above about 600, this was big, big money to me, and I'd got the children there, and the mortgage, which I had never had before, and once you get a mortgage you see, it's a chain round your bloody neck, it can be total disaster. And all these people who bought them houses under Mrs Thatcher's tutelage. And I was handicapped with his bloody mortgage, and so I took the job. And, at that time I think Leslie Waddington increased his money to 1,000 or something, so I was then suddenly in the money, first time in my life. And I said to the vice-chancellor that I didn't mind if I could come and do what I wanted, but not to do any administration, I didn't want to come on that basis at all. What I wanted to do was to see the students and perhaps put some ideas up to them, and work in my studio, they could come and see me. That was all agreed to, and so I took the job. Then of course I saw the terrible state the place was in, you really see what...well as far as I was concerned it was a terrible state, it was so old-fashioned and everybody going to sleep on the end of a pencil, thinking they're do in life drawing, which they're not, they're only wasting their time, and so I had to get, I suddenly got involved, finished up taking the first years with Rita Donagh and, the whole thing took over so much, I soon gave my studio up to the first-year students, because I couldn't stand the way things were being done. And that did take about ten years of my life, and practically ruined my career, but I still kept painting as much as ever, at home at weekends and at night-time, but once you are involved in teaching so seriously as that, particularly if you don't agree with the way it's being done...

So how was it being done then before you got there, and what did you do to change it?

Well, it was very nice, it was very neat and tidy, but it was nothing to do with art. It was Victorian almost; they just had their cow-gowns on and they painted their still life and that, and they just, nobody was...oh! the tonal painting was so bad, the bloody drawing was so boring, and nobody dared make a mark that was exciting. And I felt so sorry for them all. And it got much better, because, well I pulled in visitors who I knew.

Who did you get?

Well I got Bridget Riley at once stage, I got John Hoyland down, I got Adrian Heath down: I got all the people I knew, Furnival on typography, I got somebody on music, and I got all the people who were exciting to me. And of course it does liven things up a bit, because young students are willing to take these things on, and the first year started making wonderful marks and colours and that. And of course I had been with Harry Thubron, who was one of the best teachers in the world, and I had helped him in Leeds, so I brought some of those ideas to the first year. And I must say I had great support in the end; I didn't from the regular staff, but they were all about leaving time, and so they all took their early retirement like, and then we built up a team, with the help of Claude Rogers who was brilliant.

And were you exclusively dealing with the first years to start with, or...?

Oh, mainly, to start with. Not really, I had total freedom when I went there to walk round any studios, that's what it was; I just allowed myself, because I was so upset with the way things were being done, to work with Rita who I liked very much, and she had a more surrealist approach than I did, which was quite useful to me, I learnt a lot from Rita, and I think it was equal, me with structure and her throwing a few matchsticks down and string, you know, which was totally opposite to my ideas. But we worked very well together and I enjoyed that. And then we had Roger Cook come in who was quite useful, because he had read most of the books.

Who was he?

Roger Cook.

Mm.

I think, you need all types of people on those...I mean, I could select from the people who were there some that were useful, and I would find out what they wanted to...what they were good at, and you use them for that, then they become happier. So Reading turned out to be very good for me, I learned a lot there.

Because you started...so then you became sort of virtually full...you had started off part-time then you became virtually full-time.

I took it over full-time for a bit. But I was then, I think by that time I was running the postgrads or something like that.

Yes, because you became Reader.

Oh they made me Reader, yes.

Reader in the Department of Fine Art, and eventually became Professor Emeritus.

Political appointments. Each department, if they see somebody else getting a Reader, they want one, and if they see two professors in the department, they want them. Oh it didn't make any difference to me, it gave me a bit more pay each time so I took it. But I was very keen on running the place, and we did have some marvellous students, who still write to me about it, they all loved it.

Can you remember any students who have now become...any of your students who have now made a name for themselves who you taught?

Well I don't think as...I mean in different situations. There's only certain names come to mind, and that's Mali Morris, and Clyde Hopkins, he's head of Chelsea now isn't he?

Yes I know who you mean but I don't...yes.

And then, oh, Steve Buckley was one of the postgrads you see.

And he's there now isn't he, hasn't he gone back to teach?

He's gone back there, yes, as Professor, yes. But he was at Newcastle, I met him first at Newcastle when I was teaching in Newcastle University.

When did that happen then, the Newcastle?

Going up from Banbury, early on in Banbury, yes. I had a fellowship in six months up there. And, that's when I met Mali and when I met Buckley, and so I took them on as postgrads because I liked their work you see. And, Angela Thwaite or Weight, Angela Thwaite, she's at the Imperial War...

Oh, Angela Weight.

Yes, Angela Weight, yes, she was...

Oh was she?

She was the one who threw the red paint over Ted Heath wasn't she. Had terrible problems with her.

Oh it was her, was it?

Yes. Smashing girl though. And, oh they're just...but I met so many who have stopped me when I was down in Penzance and say, 'We're running the museum up in Carlisle' or something; I mean they've all done very well. And, there's Will Scott who, I think, he's the big firework expert now; that's not the word they use, they've got a proper word for people who do all these fireworks, which I can't remember. Well he was an amazing character, even at Reading, he had a wonderful set of uniforms for everybody, and he also, when I took the vice-chancellor round to see the postgraduates he gave them a 21-gun salute with all these guns he had built out of stuff that he had pinched in farm fields and things. Oh, fantastic. And he was in full uniform of the Confederates, you know, do his sword... And so...and the girl who does the lighting nowadays, I've forgotten her name, does marvellous...did the whole building of Centrepoint and these new buildings, made them into a light display, as a work of art. Only done last year wasn't it somewhere. She was there, and she was a fantastic girl, the girl who tore all art history things up and put them in a mailbag and mailed them to the art history door, you know. And, very interesting people I had there. But they've all done something, they're all in the business.

And did you have...so you were painting yourself in the evenings and whenever you could, and at weekends and things?

I never did more than three days a week.

So you were able to keep all that up.

Sometimes I would only do a couple of mornings, you know, I would have to work it according to, and another time I would do quite a lot there; I worked it quite well.

And then, some time during, early on, while you had just...I don't know when it was quite, but '64 was it, or a bit earlier than that, when you went to Compton Wynyates, whatever it's called.

'64, '64 was, from Banbury I went to Compton Wynyates, yes, because it's in the area, and of course it's a wonderful historical park at the back of Edge Hill, and so therefore it was a case of the, those that were for the Royal Family and those that were for Cromwell. So, Compton Wynyates was the Marquis of Northampton, that's right, and he was on the wrong side in some battle or another, so all his windows were bricked in, and the moat was filled in. But I mean I just read those bits, but I was more interested in what I actually saw when I went there, and going to that chapel, which was after I had been round the building, which was beautiful, Tudor chimneys, I mean absolutely marvellous, and the gardens are wonderful there. The carving is, in the chapel, is superb, it's carved on either side; you can see through it almost, it's carved, the wood is so thin where they've been carving on either side. One side is totally abstract, the other side has got a sort of battle on. And you only notice things like that, because you haven't got time to go into everything. And then I was in the sarcophagi area where, I think the Marquis of Northampton lost four or five sons in that battle, I'm not sure, but the bodies are lying there in the tombs with the swords on top, and of course the swords are so big, how the hell they ever lifted them with all their armour on I don't know. And that particular flag was one of the flags that was above the bodies in this little bit. And of course the whole thing, I'm not describing it well because it's a whole event; you know, you are almost back in those times, and the flag has such a meaning, because you can see it's very tender, it's been there that long, and if I had have blown hard it would have disintegrated. And so it really takes you back in history, and for a moment your heart stops while you feel that. And of course it was just my cup of tea those circles round the flag, and the big chevron in the centre.

What, this is the coat, some sort of coat of arms or something like that?

Well it was carried in the battle, yes. And then, turning to come away from that, when one has been put in a kind of trance almost by the magic of it, there was, someone had been restoring, and they had knocked plaster off the wall, and there was a moon, a blue moon, and it was fantastic, they had just cleared so much plaster off and there was this lovely moon with a face in and that, and the semi-circle underneath it. And that stopped me, I was just walking out, and I used that in several, I've used that in lots of paintings since, trying to give the same surprise that I got. It's the moment.

So then there were several works that were inspired by that visit.

Oh there was quite a lot for me.

Yes, yes.

From, I mean there was a Cromwellian chair in there, which was a wonderful piece of sculpture with a blue, lovely blue velvet on the seat in there, and black legs which were beautiful space.

And this, is this...oh no, that's a different one.

'Harvest Moons'.

'Harvest Moons'.

Oh well there are always harvest festivals in that part of the world, and I just put it together. I know that came out of all the...that, I did that down in Cornwall that one.

Did you?

Mm. That's a Banbury one.

These are these traffic signs.

Yes, well...

And lorries and things you did.

I was just, Banbury being a market town, is really a very busy place with the cattle, one of the biggest cattle markets I believe, probably the biggest cattle market in the country. I don't know if it's the biggest...biggest in Europe I think. It's a very very busy cattle market, and as one is, it's a bit of a tourist place, with Banbury cakes and the Banbury Cross, all the stories you hear about it, and the market every week takes the whole of the centre over. So you've got the cattle market and the ordinary market where all the veg and things are brought. And it has such a wonderful history. The buildings are so good around there, or they were then, a lot have been changed now into Safeways and all that kind of stuff, but at that time they were genuine, lovely, the White Horse was marvellous, the entrance to that pub with a big courtyard and everything, and the wine merchants with 1642 over the top, you know. So

Banbury had a wonderful history. But the thing that irritated me was, to see all the modern signs up, the 'no waiting', 'no parking'. It was absolutely fantastic; if there was a space to put a sign up to stop you doing anything, they had done it, which I thought, having by this time travelled abroad a little bit in the car with the children trying to camp, I was amazed that any small place you went to, there was always a parking place for tourists. Now, I'm in an area which is supposed to be a tourist place, and there isn't a parking place for anybody, you can only get fined. And I had to give a talk to the Rotary Club and I just had to tell them, I saw the chief of police was there and all that, and I said, it's just bloody ridiculous. Here you are talking about it being a tourist place, you haven't even got a parking place for anybody in the area, it's absolutely ridiculous. I mean how can you work it out, ask people to come and then not have anywhere for them to put their bloody cars? Anyway, so I did all these things, they just, it made me do some drawings you see about it. And of course all the lorries come through there, there's no by-pass, so all day long you've got these wacking great lorries coming with loads of stuff on, and to me they all had different faces, and different rears, and I got very interested in photographing them. I didn't know anything about using a camera but I did go out, and the cameraman said put it at 125 and that will be all right, and do it f5 and f8 and f11 and you won't miss. And in fact they did work out very well, and I did hundreds of slides. But of course some of the drivers put their fists up at you, because I didn't realise when they stopped at a belisha crossing as it were, and I could have a good shot then, because what I was doing was photographing all the radiators, because I loved the decoration on them, and the way in which they had put a daffodil in a radiator they had painted green or red. And the natural decoration, which I thought came from the canal boats, from the hay cart canal boat, is a tradition, this decoration on the buckets on the barges and everything, and here it was being carried on on the roads, and if you look inside their cabs it's the same. And so I was very interested in the design you see. But of course the drivers thought, wondering what...they had got false loads on very often I found out, you know; having delivered one, which they were paid, they were now doing a bit on the side, and they didn't want to me photographing them. Of course I never knew anything about that, I was just looking at the shapes. You see if you're in a place where there are good gables on these old buildings which had the light on which, a wonderful structure about the quality of the shape and the windows are beautiful, and then you get a lorry come up which has got sacks of corn or something on, which are sloppy angles, I mean soft angles, I mean, that's what sculpture turned into with a lot of people, like Barry Flanagan and Morris, was this kind of thing, which was there all the time. And so therefore I've got shots of these lorries with these loads on, which are soft, or if they're full of potatoes again they're different, and then you've got the structure of the architecture which is similar shaped but with firmness. So I was using that in those days. I was only looking through the little hole like that, because it particularises you see.

And you had first become interested, you were saying, when I was interviewing you in Cornwall, when you were working at the factory, you used to walk past the part of the factory where they made the cabs and you were talking about...

Oh yes, that was the Eagle Checkerphone[??] firm, that was in Emscote - not Emscote, Warwick, Salford, yes. Oh yes I used to...and I would see the chaps doing the design there, yes, that was...that of course, I didn't then know about, so much about, I didn't notice the lorries as much; I only noticed them being made then. And, I had that interest in them, but that was before I ever started painting, and I just was fascinated by the way in which it was done.

So were you...how long...you stayed...how long did you stay in Banbury for?

About eleven years I think, till 1974, so it was probably ten.

And what made you decide to go back to Cornwall?

Well I think I had come to the conclusion that, I had gone half-time, I had put myself down to half-time, because most of the staff complained about not being able to do enough work, and I had said, well - in the end I was, I had had enough of it really, so I said, well, I managed to get shows, I managed to do shows, you know, you've got to work twice as hard, that's all there is about it, and I cut my own time down to half-time, which was half salary of course immediately. And I thought that I would set an example and the rest of them would follow suit, but they're still there now. And then they wonder why they haven't done it with their painting; you can't do it, it's impossible, because each student is a unique individual, and takes all your time, and it's not like giving a lecture about mushrooms which you can do for forty years without making any improvement. But not if you're teaching individuals in an art department; each person is so valuable and has such wonderful ideas and that, and you've got to try and help them. So I went half-time, and I decided that I had got to get out of it, it was corrupting me completely, the salary was corrupting me. I loved it, but...

So you think the advice was right about, the salary that...was it...did you say it was Victor Waddington who told you that...?

Oh yes, yes, the salary was corrupting me, in this case, yes, it was. Because by this time I was getting 3,000 from Waddington, and I thought, this is bloody ridiculous, and so...and also the children had done very well at school and I thought, we can get back, and we went looking, for a couple of years we were looking for somewhere to go back to, and eventually it

came up, a place. And I hadn't got the money to do it, so Adrian Heath lent me money, and John Hoskin lent me money, to put the deposit down, and then I sold my house and I paid them back straight away you see. But they were great friends like that. And I've never regretted it, and I got my freedom to paint exactly as I wanted to again without any salary coming in, and it's much better, you can do what you want. I mean it's such a handicap when you're teaching. Not that I didn't enjoy teaching, but you've got to give so much to it.

End of F4321 Side A

F4321 Side B

Where were we?

I'm just going to say where we.....

[Terry Frost talking to Tamsyn Woollcombe at Camberwell, London, 18th of December 1994.
Tape Ten, side B.]

Well that was quite a task, looking for houses. And old Bryan Wynter was a great help on that. And of course as soon as I had got back, well I hadn't been back very long, and it was Bryan's funeral wasn't it, Barbara Hepworth, Roger: we lost a lot in a very short time. I did see Roger for a bit of course, but... So that, all my gang had disappeared you see. Denis Mitchell was still going, I kept in well touch with Denis till a couple of years ago, but the painters, it was only Pat Heron, and he hasn't been the same since his wife died, I mean he's a loner now compared with what he used to be. So that all the sort of things that one had before were not in existence. But I'm sure it's all happening amongst the younger painters, but I don't see anything much of them.

One person who was there quietly all the time I suppose was John Wells. Did you...?

Oh yes, but Johnnie's...

Another loner.

A law unto himself, you know, he'll never be any different.

Did you know him actually, did you get to know him?

Yes, I met him in '46, '46/47, mainly, and then, when he had just come back over from the Scilleys, and he had Stanhope Forbes' old studio. Oh yes, I knew Johnnie quite well. I still know him quite well, I take him over to St. Ives when he wants to go anywhere even nowadays, but, he's not over-communicative, that it might cost him something. Being a natural miser he ain't going to get involved in anything like that, because he can't help it, that's his life, that's his style. So, Johnnie is, I suppose he's only helpful in the sense that he knows more about it than anybody, because he's always an observer; doesn't give you much back actually, an observer of what's going on. Probably very good to talk to.

Yes he is. No, because I have seen him for the...and he does actually, he's got a very good memory.

Very, oh absolutely wonderful. He's got a good filing system for all his paintings as well, he's got a date on every one, I mean it's fantastic.

Extraordinary numbering system there, mm. And all his photographs are numbered and everything.

Oh, I can't...that's wonderful isn't it.

But he can't find any paperwork or anything like that I don't think, it's all sort of in heaps. But, and so he was there, but you...you didn't really...

He never mixed with anybody, no, I mean, it isn't just with me or anybody else, he's always very nice when I see him, but he doesn't go...he prefers his own company. You don't buy a drink for anybody if you have your own company, I mean it makes all the bloody difference in the world doesn't it? (laughs) I mean, he knows what it's all about, but he's a natural miser, I mean he's got a kind heart but, has a kind heart but he don't use it.

I don't know about that. And what about Sven Berlin, I mean you knew him...

Yes, Sven still drops me a line occasionally, yes, but I haven't seen him in a few years; I mean I've seen him at the Belgrave Gallery with the odd thing there, and I saw him in St. Ives when he had a show with Gilly [SHORT FOR HENRY GILBERT, DEALER-OWNER OF WILLS LANE GALLERY, ST IVES] in St. Ives, but I don't...he dropped me a line the other day. But you see there's nobody, you can't expect it, it happens, you have a spell when everybody's fighting and doing things, and it changes. I don't expect anything any different. I still enjoy being back down there, because you can concentrate on your work, totally and absolutely.

And that amazing light, it must have been nice to be that...

Well I don't worry much about that really. Everybody talks about it, I suppose it's true.

But didn't you miss it when you weren't there? No.

I don't have any problem painting wherever I am, there's such a lot of problems you see. There's such a lot of problems in doing a decent painting, you don't have to be anywhere in

particular. I mean, if you think of painting that's been done in every country in this world, in every different town in this world, half the French painters didn't paint in Paris, they only went there for their fun and games; a lot of them were out in the country doing their painting or down at Collioure or somewhere finding out what they wanted to do. The same in Spain, it doesn't matter where you go. But the only thing about being back in Newlyn is that you have got the peace and quiet to be able to get on with the job. I have to come up to London to let my hair down.

And, you had some other opportunities to teach, didn't you, after you had got back? Were you invited abroad again?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Oh yes I did, yes.

Canada?

Now, well Canada, I had exhibitions in Canada, yes.

Was that, the exhibitions, were they anything to do with the British Council?

Yes. Well no, not in particular. I got the exhibitions; I did get help from the British Council when I had a big retrospective, they I think lent me, they put forward some money to help transport to London, Ontario that was, yes. But previous to that, I had been out to London, Ontario where I had, Eric Atkinson was head of the Fanshaw School, and I had been invited over there. And then I went out to Vancouver, because Alan Wood and people like that were out in...Tom Hudson who had been with me in Leeds, were out in Vancouver, so I went and visited their colleges.

Where was Banff?

Banff was, that was a British Council job, in the Rockies.

Ah.

But that is a big summer school, that covers ballet, opera, music, sculpture, poetry, knitting, everything, it's a wonderful school for summer courses.

So that was a summer teaching job was it?

That's right, I did that, yes.

And the teaching job at the University of Western Ontario, that was...

Oh yes, oh yes, I forgot Western Ontario, yes. That I met through going to Fanshawe actually, but then I was invited to Western Ontario at the time when Bill Tucker was there, he had just gone out there then too. And I also went down to Florida, and Mike Tyzak, he was in charge of the school down there, to Tallahassee, with Trevor Bell, do a visit to his place. And to Dallas, and I ran a thing there for two or three weeks. And, that was quite an adventure, because, Dallas was good because I went to Santa Fé, and I saw Navajo Indian work, which was...

Is that Navajo, that thing you've got round your...?

No, that's Suni. Which one have I got on? Oh no, that's...is that a round one?

Yes.

Oh that's Mexican.

Oh right.

The Navajo blankets and things which I saw were fabulous, I mean very constructive articles. And so Santa Fé gets you in touch with the, I mean you're nearer to Mexico, so you've got a different set of ceramics and works around you, which was of great interest to me.

And what work were you...we're in the sort of mid...

I don't think, I don't know whether I'd done anything as a result of...that was after Banff.

'Circle of Love', 1975-79. Oh yes, because, I was going to ask you, when you were at...when did you first use acrylics?

Oh they were given to me in '64 in San José, I was given a studio and paint and canvas, which was one of the perks, because you had to work damned hard for it I can tell you. But I did learn to use acrylics there, and 'Liquitex' acrylics are beautiful.

And you took to them immediately, acrylics, did you?

I took to them because I liked the brightness of the colour, I liked also the quick drying process, which I found quite useful. It did flatten me out a lot on painting, which I wanted to flatten out anyway. But it has dangers of course, it's a different way of building up. I've never been able to marry it quite as well I don't think as my son, Anthony, who actually started off with acrylic, so he has mastered the, he can extend and get much more out of it than I can. I use it in a very limited way.

And do you have to prepare the canvas with a ground, like when you use oil, or not?

It's not necessary with acrylic. You certainly do with oil, but it's not necessary with acrylic, although of course it's quite easy to put a coat of acrylic over the canvas, because that seals it. But I like painting on the raw canvas, thinly with acrylic, and then sometimes I would use oil to finish off with; not always, but when I want the blacks particularly to move a bit I use oil.

Can you use it on paper, acrylic? Do you use it on paper? Yes.

Oh yes you use it just like watercolour.

Oh that's José, San José, 'White Figure', 1964.

Yes well that was done at San José, but then I was doing what I did at home there, that wasn't affected by San José, I was merely showing the students how to do a few things, trying to make them be braver in making their marks.

And were you using your camera, were you photographing...when you went to Canada on these teaching visits in the mid-Seventies, were you photographing still? Because I saw an exhibition you had at the Tate, in the archive, and...

The best photographs in there were San José area, because I was, I went to some, I've forgotten the name of the Indian tribe there, damn, but I went to an Indian reservation which was there when the Spaniards made a conquest of that area, and it is still there, which is quite exceptional, where they still have the ladders up, and then once you go they disappear down those ladders, everybody disappears. And there you have the blanket round and the old trilby hat on kind of thing. And it was actual fact, and, I was very impressed with that, the fact that it was still there. I wish I could remember dates, I don't know when the Spaniards went there, is it 16-odd or is it 14-odd? I don't know. But certainly I was very impressed with that, and I got...and of course we were along by the Rio Grande and, I really enjoyed that, visually it was

very exciting. That's where I saw the Hotel Fonda in Taos is it or something like that? That's another place. Wish I could remember the names of the places. I saw the actual, this is where I did do some photography, I saw the actual paintings of D.H. Lawrence.

Really?

The ones that were banned in London in 1926. Because I was looking for the Hotel Fonda, because that girl who, I think she now runs the Whitechapel...

Lampert, Catherine Lampert?

Yes. I had met her with Barry Flanagan one night, and we were having a bit of a booze-up and she said, 'Well if you're going you must stay at the Hotel Fonda for this place.' Well I finished up in this little place with the sidewalks, and there was the Hotel Fonda. Bloody hell, I was having a good piss-up when I heard the name. So there I go in - well I'm going to go in and there's a poster outside which says, '1926 paintings found at such-and-such a gallery,' this was the... So I thought, well I'll have to go in, and of course with was the big swing doors, and the aspidistra inside, really old-fashioned, beautiful actually, all the furniture and everything. And then it said it was a dollar or something to go into this office where the, which was the boss's office, and that's where the Lawrence paintings were. And I had my camera with me, and there was no objection to it, I was there, well Kath and I were the only ones in there, and I photographed all the paintings, and read the letters and all the photographs of Frieda and all the friends that they were with at this time. And I read the letters that were on the table which was a letter from Nottingham when it was their centenary, asking for the use of the paintings. And the chap who had a Greek name like Theodopoulos or something had left this letter on the desk, obviously for people like me to read, and it said that certainly he would be delighted to lend them the Lawrence paintings providing they return the Elgin Marbles to Greece you see, which I thought was fantastic. I had come all this way, walking on the sidewalk, Hotel Fonda, and I got all this. And so I got photographs of all those paintings, which were nothing to object to at all really, not nowadays, but you know, at that time they were...

What were they like, what, were they of Frieda then?

No, they were a couple of chaps together, hand on a bottom or something like that, nothing in it at all really, very ochrery colours, and quite well done, I quite enjoyed seeing them. I've got the set at home. But it interested me that I didn't know about this, I just hit upon [INAUDIBLE].

Mm, mm.

And so, I did see a lot of Indian ponies, Indian territory, and wonderful churches that had been there since the Spaniards' time, and they were, in one of them they were actually scraping down to find the original painting that had been done there, because this chap was a retired sort of art historian who was working with the girl there, and they were scraping off back because they knew that somebody beginning with A who was a painter who had, a reputation had been built up, had done a religious painting on the wall there in the very early times you see, and they were getting back to that. Well what upset me was that they were...I saw the other things in this church, they were scraping off good works to suit their art historical business, because... Well, I was disgusted actually. And they showed me the bits they had got to, they just wet it and it comes off the...and I thought, it's not good enough what they're doing, because, just because they had researched that there was a painting by somebody originally, they are now taking off other people's which are done over that, who might even be better, but are not so historically known you see, and I just found the whole thing much discomfoting, I was very worried about it. But there you are, wonderful building, wonderful things in it, wonderful paintings round the altar.

And that was when you were...from...you went there from when you were at San José?

I went there from where I was in Dallas.

Oh Dallas, right, right, right.

Oh yes, we're right over the other side. Santa Fé I went from, yes, Santa Fé.

Santa Fé, sorry.

I went to Santa Fé a couple of times. Before I went down to Mexico, I went down to Mexico later after Tucson, Arizona. You see painting has taken me all over the world actually, and you do see, by going to - well I do see things when I go to new places. It's very easy to get familiar and then you don't look. You walk along a street for the first time, you see things; you walk along it the hundredth time you don't even bother to see things, unless you're very careful.

And you went...what happened when you went to Cyprus? Because you taught there too.

When did I go to Cyprus? The British Council sent me there.

'77.

Was it '77?

According to this it was.

Oh, I always thought I went much earlier.

Nicosia summer school.

Nicosia summer school?

That's what it says here.

Oh, does it?

Is that wrong?

Well I don't think there was any Nicosia summer school ever.

Oh well that's wrong then.

I went to Nicosia to do, the British Council sent me to award...I went on a committee to award some prizes, and I can't remember what their name, Golden something prize. The British Council sent me, and there was also someone else from Greece, Professor...oh God, I've forgotten his name now. Gramadopoulos from Greece was there, and we were the judges on some painting prize, and we met in Nicosia and then we went up into the mountains in Paphos. That I think was my first trip, but I'm not sure.

Mm. And did you find that, how did you find Cyprus as a...?

Total and complete surprise. I had no idea, because I had only been to Greece as a prisoner of war, which didn't give me any opportunity to see anything. So that Cyprus was a real eye-opener to a way of life which I didn't know existed. I didn't know that people really loved poetry and painting as a thing which belonged to them, rather than as it's become here, a bloody greed, auction house property, whereas there it still belongs to the people. Poetry,

everybody writes it, and Aphrodite does exist, and the Moon and Sun are gods to be worshipped, not evilly but to be loved, and I gained a lot from the attitude of people, which I'm sure is getting destroyed by now they've become popular tourist places. But it was an eye-opener to me the kindness and the friendship and the generosity of people, and the love of poetry and painting. I don't know so much about music because I'm not a music man, but I did go to one of the concerts as well, they're marvellous singers you see, but I'm not into that as much. So the visit to Cyprus was very very important to me, apart from seeing the paintings in the various caves and the monasteries. The only thing that appalled me again was the restoration that was being done by a lot of the monks, and worried me the way in which they were doing it on lovely old icons, you know. But that's their way of life, and, just paint the damp out! (laughs) I mean, it's very frightening when you know how valuable things... So I thought Cyprus was very important to me. It was so different, that was totally different to anywhere I had been, and the journey to Paphos from...the journey from Paphos to Troodos, which is precipitous, so the sun is never in the same place for two seconds, that's marvellous to see that circus of balancing tricks of the circle. And then the moon comes out as well, and the lights begin to fade, so you get all these wonderful happenings, which you only see the first time you go, you have to look for them after that. So I've always loved Cyprus, and the black olives become a necklace round the sun, but only because I like it; it doesn't really happen, you make it happen.

And that, did that affect your work, that...?

Oh tremendously, tremendously. The whole...it lifted up my heart, I felt much happier about things. The only reason I can't go so much now is because Kath won't go because she says I drink too much out there; the Ouzo is a fascinating drink, I mean I love the colour. I always love red and black and white check table-cloths with a good restaurant, and the tables have to be movable, the chairs have to be movable. You can nearly always rely upon the food; when the tables are fixed and the chairs are fixed, you don't want to go there. And in Cyprus I noticed it was blue and white check, because it suits the white of the Ouzo in the bottle you see, it's more together, and with the black olives you've got complete harmony, so you're already sent before you start, just by the colour scheme. And that happens to me, my spirit is a different spirit in that situation than it is in England.

And so, did it actually make the colours that you used, did it change the colours that you used in your paintings?

You don't think about it, but it did, deliberately, if you look at the Ouzo painting you will see the whole thing is lifted a mile, and they belong very very much, that's...

This is later on.

Later on, yes.

These are all Eighties actually.

It did, because it's a wonderful light, and also the sun is so strong and as it sets whole areas can go totally pink; all the stone is so soft you see, that it sort of pulls in the pink colours, and they become rose, and you walk in a rose glow, which we don't do in this country really.

'Ouzo', this is an Ouzo one.

Yes, but you've got a coloured 'Ouzo' somewhere.

I know.

There you are, there's a necklace.

Yes. 'Sun Necklace', that's a later, that's 1987. Did it actually take some time for it to percolate through?

It usually takes me a couple of years to get the...to get clean as it were, and not to copy... There, that's the original, 'Between the two gods' you see.

Oh yes, 1986, acrylic on paper.

That's when I did it, but I mean I had been...I had experienced it many many... It takes me a long while to get clean enough not to be... You see what are you copying? It's only a moment in one's life, a moment when your heart stops for a second when you realise how lucky you are to be...well you don't realise, it's a moment, and so, eventually you can do something about it when you're free, and you have to find it again. You see that was San José. Wonderful colours that was, but I only did it in black and white, which was a disaster really.

And then these other shapes that you were doing.

Oh that's 'The Game of Chess'.

S's and...

Well that's just a game of chess, I mean there are 32 pieces in that. Funny, the driver who brought me over plays a chess champion.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....impressions, which we see as colours which are very similar, but which the colours are different. And of course the colours are different running through the olives, because the olives contain the colours of the sun, so they've got red black and white, they've got all the...they're made from the colours, they're not made from black, they're made from the colours. No that was very important to me, and I tried to write Ouzo and I spelt it wrong, and I had a hell of a job to change it. I put O-Z-U for some reason, had terrible problems, scraped that lot out, changing it.

And you know that black, you were talking about, there are different colours in black?

Mm.

There was that large painting the Tate have got of blacks.

That was done in Banbury.

Mm. That was what, was that in the mid...?

'69.

In '69, right. Have they got that up at the Tate in St. Ives? No.

No, they've had it up, they've changed it for the triptych at the moment.

Oh yes, yes. How did that one come about?

What, the triptych?

No, I think we've talked about the triptych last time. The black one.

Well that came out simply through teaching at Reading, and I found it was very...it was quite tricky getting people to keep the paint clean for a start up as well; what I was really interested in, getting the grammar right, because everybody will paint how they want to paint in the end, and everybody will have their own colour range, if they're any good. And I was just trying to help them to get the paint clean, that was the big idea, and I knew it was tricky to mix colour, so what you do is, you mix different reds, you mix different blues, you mix different yellows, so you run people through on the cool side, you run them through on the warm side, with the yellow, red and blue, and then you get them to mix yellow red and blue together to make a black. The problem you give them is to make it until the red, the black breaks to red, and black breaks to blue, black breaks to green and yellow etcetera. And then you give them the problem of sorting out the black which is the mid black, the one which is neutral which doesn't go too far to the cool side or too far to the warm side. The black is black. Which they did, and they cut that out from all these sheets of paper they'd done all the colours on. And what interested me was that, when we put them up, when they chose their mid black they then painted a nine-inch square, and when we put them up it was the best mural I had ever seen. But the fascinating thing was, they were all intelligent students, but, some were green-blacks and some were blue-blacks and some were very red-blacks, but for them that was their mid-black, which taught me that colour is totally subjective, that we all have a different idea about black and red. And the difference is a mile wide, it's not close, it's a mile wide. So, I was just knocked out, and I thought, well, they look marvellous, I've got to do that. So when I went back I did six six-foot square canvases with the different blacks on each one, and then I cut them up, which was terrible, I should have kept them, they were so clean and absolutely abstract, and I hadn't got the nerve to leave them. I cut them up because I had already got the plan of doing this collage with the semi-circles, so I destroyed six beautiful canvases, which I had done not trying to do paintings but, which is always the best way, I was mixing my colours. And then I cut the shapes out and made the big collage and that's it.

End of F4321 Side B

F4322 Side A

[Terry Frost interview at Camberwell, London, 18th of December 1994. Tape Eleven.]

And then I actually...can you see?

Mm.

Oh well that's all right then.

Yes. So, you were connected with Reading. We were talking just now about summer school, when you were teaching in Cyprus and how that affected your work. You also, I think you did some teaching in Sweden didn't you as well at some point?

Oh yes. That was very...I went from, now, John Hoyland booked me onto that, came down with the chap from Sweden, brought him down to see me. And I also did it in Norway took, Victor Pasmore put me on to that. And then I put Adrian Heath on to Norway. And, Sweden I enjoyed very much; I found it very hard to go in at, what, 15 degrees from the North Pole or something, in, what was it...

Ulmea?

Ulmea, Ulmea. I found that very different, such an enthusiastic crowd of people they were. And, I had to run the whole summer course myself as it were, and, it was very good, I enjoyed it, but also, I got a lot of ideas being taken up in the mountains, which is a different scene to Cyprus, I mean it's blinking cold, and there's glaciers, and to go up in one of those car things which take you right up and then you're left to wander around just totally alone in a spot like that. I found that the...of course I then found out that, I saw all the shapes that I wanted, sort of three shapes.

What kind of shapes?

Well three mountains together.

What, like three triangles?

With a white bench with three shapes on the back of the white bench. And I'm up there for the first time. Well I've gone all that way to find the shapes that I know, it's amazing isn't it.

You mean they were the familiar shapes that you had...?

No, the familiar shapes that I liked. And also, the only thing that was different was the, the way in which they used coloured clothes pegs on a line, which also fascinated me, because they seemed to be dancing in the space. So, my trip to Sweden was quite...again a new visual experience. The only thing I didn't like was when you had a meal in the evening the mozzes were vicious. The locals seemed to be immuned, whereas I simply got eaten up; I didn't like that at all. Also they all strip off in the nude down at the beach; I was the only sort of, I had got my vest on and my beret on and, I felt right out of place, you know, sitting there trying not to look at all these beautiful things being massaged with oil and everything. Very intriguing. All new to me, walking through the pine forests. And of course no, sort of no night time, it's... I had to put...I had to put a blanket up to the window, because it was still light at night.

Mm. So anything come up in your work after you had visited there, particularly?

I don't think there's anything...I don't think I got anything out of Sweden except the company of the people which I enjoyed; I learned a lot about eating their specialist fish which they think is marvellous which I think is rotten and stinks like hell.

Sort of soused herrings and things?

I had to move it around and pretend I was eating, because they were doing it specially for me, this party. And, I thought they were marvellous people but, I don't think I got a lot out of it visually, but I enjoyed the company of the people, and I probably got something out of it but I don't, I didn't work directly from anything, not yet.

Mm, mm. And now, I'm just looking at this catalogue from the exhibition you had called 'Painting in the Eighties' that was...was that just after you had left Reading? Oh it was, quite a bit after you left Reading, because you left Reading in...you were made Professor Emeritus but you retired in 1981 from Reading, that's it, and this exhibition was I think 1986.

Yes, well it was arranged by the boys and girls who I knew.

Mm, mm.

And I had done a lot of work on paper in those days too, which helped to put the show on. I mean there were some good things. That's been worrying me recently, I don't seem to do anything on paper these days, not in the same way that I did then.

Mm. Because in a way you would think it was easier to do something on paper than on...

Probably less expensive too. No, but it was a question of trying out ideas, mainly with collage. I used to do a tremendous amount of it.

This white paint, 'Through Whites', 1981, that's...when did you first start using whites? It's equivalent of...

Well that of course, well I was in to blacks.

Mm, exactly.

And I did the reds, I did the greens...no I never did the greens, I did the blues and I did the yellows, and I did the reds, and I attempted to do the whites. I made several attempts at the whites, but the whites were the result of visits to Canada, and being in white-outs, when I saw all the different colours of white. But it's much more difficult to do than blacks, I find it much more difficult to do anyway. I've turned the same shape inside out there, done everything with it, and I've tried very hard but I think I'll, I will do it again one day, I'll do it in oil, it may be better then.

What was this in then, acrylic?

Acrylic, yes.

Oh I see. And was this...that one's called 'Through Whites', 1981; there's this one, 'Snow Light', 1981.

Oh yes. Well that again is after Canada where you'll see the whole thing is lifted up, all the colours were lifted up, they're not deep and heavy, they're to do with that kind of spacious light which happens in very fine snow, very, pin-heads of frozen ice, frozen rain, pin-heads of it, and you're sort of, almost bewildered by the speed of it, and the wind of it. So colours look totally different under those circumstances. So those paints were affected by being in white-outs. But that is a straightforward job of the greys is using, just like I use the red, yellow and blues to make black, in that one we're using the red, yellow and blues, plus white, to make the

various greys. So that is a problem I'm giving myself there. Plus the rhythms you make by cutting your shapes, and assembling them together.

This is collage is it then? Is it collage done?

I should think it is, yes, they usually are. So that each shape, when you put them together they make the shape that goes in between if it's to be as strong as the colours either side.

Mm, so it's...yes, it's sort of even.

So the whole thing works.

And that's called 'Thames Greys II'.

Oh that was done because I went to the Lever, Leverhulme House is it?

Yes, up in...

The City somewhere.

Yes, yes.

And they have a collection...

Unilever House?

Unilever, that's right, Unilever, that's right. And they have a collection of things there, quite a pretty wide open selection of work, but they're not very keen on abstract work I don't think, but I didn't know that at the time, and Prunella Clough and myself were asked by, a chap who has died recently, architect bloke.

Who used to work for Pentagram, Pentagram was his thing, Theo Crosby.

Yes, Theo Crosby, who I met when he first came over from South Africa, down in Cornwall, when he first came over. Well he asked Prunella and myself to go along and have a look, because in the reception area they wanted, there was about an 8 foot by 4 area above the seats, and you look over the Thames from there, and the day I was there it happened to be grey, and it looked marvellous. I thought, oh I know what would go there, I was already on it before I

had seen anybody, I thought, that would be lovely, I could do that for there, and it wouldn't interfere but it would be so beautiful, it would relate [INAUDIBLE]. Well, as we walked out, I said to Prunella, let's have a cup of tea. And we sat and had a cup, and she said, 'Well that was a waste of time, wasn't it?' I said, 'Oh, I don't think it was a waste of time.' She said, 'Ah yes, that's a waste of time.' I was so excited with just the opportunity, the chance I suppose. She was quite right. I did the maquette and sent, I did a couple of them and sent it up, and I forget what the letter was like but, you can lead the horses to water but you can't make them drink, that was how he spoke, about his other directors. The point was, they didn't want any abstract work at all, so they just bought the maquette and turned the job down. Now Prunella with more experience than me and obviously very...she realised we were wasting our bloody time. I didn't, I was so, just saw that view from the window and I wanted to do it, so I suppose I shut out any opposition, but she knew straight away. I ought to have know better anyway, I mean that bloody decoration that Theo Crosby had done, taking Mondrian and making it in plastic on the top of columns was about the end, that's what put me off. Ugh! I shudder when I think about it. But I would have liked to have put that grey thing up there, by the Thames. Anyway, it didn't matter, an architect bought them.

Oh good. But did you...is that quite unusual for you to know exactly what you want to do, so soon, when you have...? I mean because...

Well if you're in a space, a situation where you had never been before, and I had obviously worked with the blacks, I had worked through the yellows, I had worked through all the colours, the whites, there was no reason why I shouldn't go through the greys, and that, you just link it up to what you want, you see. I wanted to do that obviously, and that was the site.

Mm, perfect, right.

Now those kind of things are done back from being down in Cornwall again, I mean you were right back, that's what I get every morning.

This is 'PZ', 1985 we're looking at, and 'Black and White Moorings', 1985. Are these on paper? I can't see from here.

No, they're canvases.

Oh right.

That's a big one, it's in London somewhere. Yes those were done because I was right back looking over that, Mounts Bay is my view to The Lizard, so I just see a big moon or a big sun, and you get all the elements really pushing hard, the wind, the rain, the gales; the whole thing is there, the stillness, the wildness, the fact that that is the power which we can't control, it's there hitting me every day at some time or another, whether it's in twilight or dawn. And so I, because I like poetry, I probably, I probably do poetry spiritually to myself about these various events, and then I do lots of doodles and then I look at the doodles and I'll do a painting from one of them. But it starts off in total silence with yourself when you're in touch with things. But then, as I've done another abstract division of an area, I use that kind of structure underneath them, I hope.

And talking about poetry, what particular poets, who do you admire?

Well I'm not a fan in the sense of knowing a lot about poetry. I just happened to pick up a book of poetry about Lorca at one time, which fascinated me.

Yes, when was that, when you...?

'75 I should think. And, well it took me 15 years of work to get that out, to use that. So, things aren't instinct, it's only, that everything in one reacts to a particular line which builds up an image, but you don't think about it like that at the time, it's just a delight almost. And then, time comes when you can think more about it, and read the poem again, and get more out of it, and I think then I use it; particularly found it very rewarding to do the Lorca series.

That was the prints that you did?

Yes. Yes, but I had been reading it for, I had read it for a long time before I did that, but I had always wanted to do it, and to be able to do it was wonderful. It's quite a strain to do it, because things don't come easily because you're moving into another medium for a start off, so you've then got to make all your adjustments to the aquatints and things like that.

Were they...what, were they etching and aquatint or...?

Mm, yes. So it's quite a different medium, and you have to shove it back in and make things happen. It can be a calamitous disaster.

And were you very involved in that yourself, I mean the actual print-making?

Oh yes, oh yes.

Where did you do that?

With Hugh Stoneman at his place in London.

Is it Islington?

Islington, that's right, Islington, that's right.

I can't remember what it's called.

So, you know, that just went on for a long time, that went on for, but I mean I had had odd, I had always done some etching and that, but I'm not a skilled person at it, and so I have to get advice from people like Hugh Stoneman who are brilliant at suggesting what you should do to get what you want, and put another ground on and we'll put it in the acid and we'll wash the sugar aquatint off and see what happens, and then work on it again, things like that. And then of course we did a lot of hand-painting too on them as well.

So you don't find it too frustrating then, working with someone else? You're not in total control?

No I don't find it too frustrating if they're good people who are willing to help me get what I want. The trouble is, if you're at art school it's very often somebody who wanted to be a painter who's now doing that just to survive; well they don't like helping painters so much, it's only natural that they don't. But Hugh Stoneman, his business is to help you get what you want, which is marvellous. So the poetry in that sense has always been useful, like I tried to do something with Manley Hopkins, but I've never been able to do, although I love some of the poems, like, 'Nothing is so beautiful as Spring', etcetera, which should give you every opportunity. Then you start cheating, and if you don't really get it from a poem then you're making it up, and I don't like that; I like the poem to give me an unexpected image you see, and I don't get it enough. And I also, having read a bit of Rimbaud I tried, because some of his poems were sent to me, translations of course because I don't speak French, and they didn't give me an image at all, so that, I've never done that, although I've been asked to do it.

So it's probably easier if you discover it.

I have to discover it by chance you see. I mean I did Eliot, 'Black Sun'.

What was that?

I did one on Eliot. I did one for 'Madrigal' for Auden.

Oh yes.

I did an Eliot one, 'The black cloud carries the sun away' or something like that, I can't remember the lines now but...

Was that a painting you did?

Yes, it was...I did a series for Manchester Education Committee. I did Blake, I had the nerve to do William Blake, 'Yellow Day' I think it was. I did...I did about ten poems for that. But I found they brought images up for me you see, otherwise I couldn't do them, I chose the ones I wanted.

And this was spread out over a period, or was it concentrated?

Oh they were concentrated.

Oh right, I see.

I did 'The Game of Chess' then.

Oh yes. Why, was that taken from a poem, 'The Game of Chess'?

Yes.

Oh sorry.

Yes, oh yes.

What poem was that?

Ezra Pound.

Oh right.

So, I...I mean I liked that, I could make the moves with the collage you see, make all the moves, it was wonderful. And, so that if I get poems like that, they're very often sent to me by people, like I've spent a lot of time now on the 'Sonnet to Black', I spent, yes I mean I was doing that at Reading with, Tom Barrett put me on to 'Sonnet to Black' by Lord Cherbury. And I really worked on that for years and years before I actually did it; I've only done it in the last couple of years, but I fiddled about with it for donkeys' years. So it takes about fifteen years to get the things out as a rule, and 'Sonnet to Black' was so marvellous. I thought it was in here but it's not. And, I mean I did that, you know, I just showed it in New York, the triptych.

Oh right, oh.

He was Edward Herbert, Lord Cherbury, 1582-1648. And he was a diplomat for ten years, there you are, I didn't know that until Tom told me recently. And he took to Montgomery Castle, was Cromwellian. That's very interesting, I didn't know that about him. Now I've just had a marvellous poem sent to me last week by Thomas Campion, just written out for me about the black sun which, I haven't read it properly yet, but I knew immediately I read it, it's wonderful. I put it away quick, because it's secret, I haven't read it properly yet, but I shall do something with that. Thomas Campion anyway, it's a lovely name isn't it, Campion the pink flower you know, there we are. And, of course John Donne was another poet who drove me mad, I did the one, 'Forbidden Morning' when the two spheres you see, which suited me, and there's a painting in there which is very much related to that, 'Forbidden Morning' when Willie Desmond committed suicide. I had to do a painting as a result of that; but I couldn't paint until I had done something that sorted that problem out with Willie Desmond, and it's in that book, 'Red, Black and White'. And it has the spheres floating in space. And I couldn't do that again, it was done as a result of tremendous emotional feeling.

Mm. Because, can we just go back, because your relationship, what happened to your relationship with Waddington?

Well there's the...there it is.

Oh right. 'Forbidden Morning', 1991.

And if you read the John Donne poem you'll see what that comes from.

Oh I must read that.

And, with Waddington?

Yes.

Ah well, he just went through it with the shareholders, which is the bank who we owed all the money to, and said I wasn't making enough profit, simple as that. Very few abstract boys make a great deal of profit, I mean you've got to be more figurative than I am. I mean Howard Hodgkin's very clever, he puts a bloody figurative name on, Mr and Mrs Smith or something; well you can't see them but at least it makes them, it gives him a way in you see, people feel happy because they've got a figurative name, and they're, I mean the ones of mine that sold the easiest were 'Harvest Moon' or something. You've got to think of a bloody good title, it's nothing to do with painting. And, Howard Hodgkin does what the hell he likes and calls it something else you see, it's all right. But I found it very difficult, and I wasn't making enough money for Leslie, it's as simple as that. And he had already moved from, you see his father started us off, and when he took over from his father, the real truth was, he didn't want us; he was already, when I was there, buying tons of Légers, well works on paper, I saw a whole stack of them, and he was buying, moving into Picasso: he was moving into a different market. Instead of the hundreds of pounds, he was starting to move into the half million pounds, and then it got into the millions, and so once you're involved in that, you're no longer dealing with people like me, at 200 to 2,000, you're just a bloody nuisance.

So when was that then?

Well I don't know. I had shown in New York but he never followed it up. His dad was going to follow it up, but Leslie wasn't interested in those people, and Bertha Schaefer died, and he wanted to get into the big scene. I mean he said, put it quite easily to me, said well, you know, you don't make enough money to pay for the postage stamps and the openings. Well when someone says that to you, you realise that you haven't got much chance.

So did you get rather depressed by that?

No, I got...he said, 'I can show you every two years if you like.' But you must remember, I helped to start him off, and I brought him Ben Nicholson and I brought him Roger Hilton, but, big dealers soon forget things like that. They have to...I mean they're a business, that's what they are, they're nothing to do with art really, it's business and it's got to pay, and if you don't sell, well you don't bloody order it again do you? You're their stock. So, I don't know that it depressed me; it irritated me very much to think I had been so loyal to him and done so

much to him, and let him have half of everything I had sold, even if I had done the sales, because he never got off his arse to help me, you know. I mean, I had sold a big one to the Tate, and he never even saw the bloody painting. They came down to Banbury, saw it, and he still had half the money. You know, well, you get a bit fed up with that. And so, when he said that I said well no, I don't want to be showing every two years if you're not really interested, let's forget it. And he suggested I should try somewhere else, I said, yes, that's all right, and so I did.

And where did you try?

Well, as it happened I had a letter the next day when I got back from London from the New Art Centre, which you never know how much these dealers are gossiping to each other. So I said yes. Well that was a total disaster too. I think it's the only show I've ever had there and never sold a thing.

Really?

Not a single thing. And I knew why that was, because she fell out with me very quickly.

Did she?

Because she had priced my drawings at a ridiculous low price, and I said, 'Look, I'm not having that.' I said, 'I wouldn't have let you have these things if you were going to price them like that. I've kept them for something like thirty or forty years, and I'm not selling them like that.' And she got really shirty about it, and ripped the prices off like that, and I knew that I had upset her. But I wasn't having it. I mean what's the point in selling something for 1200 which you've kept since 1952, and you've let them have this lovely little painting, and they go and sell it for 1200 to Lord Croft I think it was, and then by the time they'd charged me for the bloody framing and taken 50 per cent... I said no, I wouldn't...I wouldn't have given it to my best friend at that price. And we really fell out over it.

Mm. So she...

So when I put my show on they made sure they didn't sell anything, it's as simple as that. Because it's nothing to them, they're busy selling other things, they're only using you. You're only window dressing; unless you're really making a pile of money for your work, you are simply window dressing, like every shop has to dress its window, always, whether it's Selfridge's or Debenhams or whoever it is, Debenhams, they have to dress the window, and

you are cheap window dressing in this country, that's all you are, until your prices get up a bit and then it's different. There's always millions of young artists waiting to dress windows. It's the only business you can start without having any capital at all; all you need is the rent for a shop, and you will have 500 artists round you in the first week trying to get a show. You don't have to buy stuff, wonderful.

It's all on consignment, you don't part with any money.

And it happens all the time, and it's still happening just as much today.

So, I think that might have been, might it have been 19...well you had a show there in 1980, and 1981.

That's right.

New Art Centre. And the Waddington, the last Waddington show, according to this, is '78.

Was it?

Well according to this, in the one-man's, this is your 'Painting in the Eighties' chronology.

Well, I mean, Leslie and I still get on all right, I mean I accepted the fact. When I had my Serpentine show in '75 he had given up me, I knew that, because he walked into the Serpentine show in '75 and he said, 'I've been wrong about your painting for about twelve years,' he said. He didn't like me leaving Cornwall, that's what it was. 'I've been wrong about your painting for about twelve years.' And I didn't want to hear him say it.

Wrong about what?

My painting, he hadn't liked them. Until he saw the whole lot together and then he realised.

He realised, yes.

He hadn't been doing anything for me.

But then, he...yes, very odd. And then he told you he couldn't, a bit later.

Well, I think then, by that time he had really moved into the different stuff. I mean, he got Matisse on the wall. I mean you're in a different bracket altogether, so that a £500 painting you can't afford to have it taking up the space, simple as that, and I understood that. And in fact it's very depressing at the time, but it's the best thing that ever happened to me, but since I've kept my freedom, I've lived off my painting, which ain't bad.

Mm, mm.

My prices are still reasonable. The only things that cost a bit of money are the ones that I did thirty years ago, but then they all belong to dealers anyway, who keep buying them and selling them from auction, according to whether my prices are going up and down. Nothing to do with art, this is all business.

Mm, mm. And then, you were saying about, you mentioned William Desmond just then, he was then...he was quite soon after New Art Centre was he? Well Gillian Jason I think showed your work.

Oh well Gillian Jason showed me; she was a partner of William...well they were working together, they weren't partners, but William Desmond and Jason came to see me about some early work, and they bought nineteen between them, and they shared them. Nineteen, what's that, 9½ inch, because I remember them having quite a problem as to which should have this and that. That was my first meeting with both of them.

I see.

End of F4322 Side A

F4322 Side B

OK, so that was the first time you met Desmond and Gillian Jason?

Yes, they came down to see me, Willie courted me a bit by asking me out to...they hired a cottage down in Cornwall - obviously the family, and we went over there, Kath and I, and he seemed a nice enough bloke. And he bought things which was the first time I had ever had anybody come in and buy a few things like that. And then of course he had that gallery in Pied Bull Yard; first of all he had a gallery in Ascot, a farm.

Yes, at Sunninghill.

And I went down there to his home, which was a farm place, building, with Nissen huts where he kept the work. And he had a terrific collection of stuff from Leach pottery to all kinds of paintings, minor and everybody, I forget the names of people now, but they were all the old-established people that you get.

Buhler, people like that he had didn't he?

Yes, he had Buhler but he also, it was a Royal College of Art, paints the... Jacobson's taken him up. All RA. Still alive. No, never mind. Anyway there was total...Keith Vaughan, and a tremendous selection of stuff that he picked up. And I went down and I saw that he had got a good collection and I thought, well I don't know whether we can survive in amongst all this kind of thing. But he said that he would put on a show and he did, and it was a very good show; I mean from the point of view he sold work, which...

Was this your works on paper show, or was this another one you had there? There was a print show you had too wasn't there?

Oh I couldn't remember what it was, what it was, but I mean we had it in that Pied Bull Yard place. And he said that...well the long and the short of it, I was interested in the Lorca very much, I had been since 1975, so, he wanted a lot of my early work and a lot of my early drawings he wanted, and I said, well, I mean I was very scared about dealers by this time, I really had had some nasty lessons, and I said, 'Well, I'll do something with you if you would do the Lorca poems for me'. And he sat down in the bar opposite his gallery and he worked out... 'If you let me have those drawings, I'll make it 45,000,' that's, he had it at what, that would be, 90,000. He said, 'And then we can do the book.' So we got a quote on the book which was about 60,000 I think, which surprised me, I didn't know it cost that much to do a

simple job like that you know, and it was about 60,000. So I let him have the, he came and selected all the drawings he wanted, and he went right through and cut out the best bits of some of the things and had them framed up and...and he did get rid of a hell of a lot of stuff, and some were very nice drawings, early drawings of Kath and things like that. And he got rid of that, and he actually got the money, but he took all the money off me because he had put his insurance hat on, and he gave me the cheque. He said, 'Now you haven't got a pension, have you?' I said, 'No, not really.' He said, 'Well,' he said, 'at the age of 74, if you give me so much, I can save you £8,000 in tax,' you see, with his insurance hat on then. So he gave me a cheque for 12,000 and took 11,000 to put in the...for this pension. 'Got to do it this year,' he said. So, I never ever saw the 45,000; the most I saw was about 20,000 because it had all got... I mean it's like, the girl's water broke, who was doing the catalogue or something, so they had to get another designer in, which put the price up to 8,000 you see, and so I got charged all these extra charges you see, so by the time I got my money there was very little left. And then, and when I got it I always had to give him a cheque for this insurance you see, which thank God I did, because I get 5,000 a year, which I wouldn't have got...

Well that's something then, oh thank God for that.

If it hadn't have been for him, you see. So he was quite right, I did save on the...

Oh that was all right then.

Yes. On the tax. Because he was buying the pictures and selling the pictures. But that was just a mad spell, that was in that 'mad money' spell which I didn't realise, I thought I was really getting better, or people were liking my work; but what happened was, people weren't liking my work any better, it was just the fact that there were a lot of people who earning a lot of money under Mrs Thatcher's dictatorship, and they were actually spending the bugger like that; they didn't even look at the paintings I don't think, they were just being advised.

And sort of talking and not looking with their eyes.

No, just buying anything. That's why they're all coming up in auctions again now, because they've all lost their bloody flats and their Porsches, because they've all got the sack or had to take lesser-paid jobs, and of course the market is flooded with stuff that was bought at that time. So, and then of course dear old Willie committed suicide because he read that recession very early on, he told me it was coming, but at least he did the Lorca for me, and every one went you see.

Did it just?

They all went, they were all collected, which is marvellous. And if he was alive today he would do the next book I wanted too, you know, he was a really marvellous person like that. But he just ran out of steam, he ran into big debt, because the banks would lend you anything at that time, and then they suddenly decided to pull the carpet in, and that was the end of a lot of people, and he was one of them. So, he did me a lot of good, a lot of good. In fact I'm living on what he earned for me now, because I mean I had six shows in London this year, I've got, what did I sell? One, I think. I didn't sell anything at the Mayor at all, because the Mayor are not interested in live artists really, they just use you again for window dressing.

And what, you said that some of those shows the dealers had bought stock.

Yes, they, well in the Mayor Gallery they were only interested in selling their stock; they didn't let me know until ten days before the show that my new work that I had worked on for three years was not going to be shown except down in the squash court. And it was too late for me to pull out because the book launch had been arranged there; if it hadn't have been, I would have zipped the lot out, I wouldn't have done it. If I had have known three weeks earlier I would have stopped it, because it was a bloody insult, but they weren't interested. I mean they never even bothered to come up the stairs while I was, while the book launch was on, with all those people there. Impossible people. And, so...

And the Coram Gallery you had, and Andrew Usiskin.

Well they sold about, they sold, as far as I know they sold half a dozen small things, but, one or two nice things actually, but of course I've never had any money from them yet, I mean I have to keep on to them. And they just sent the word back - and there's twelve missing, so maybe they sold twelve, I don't know, but they certainly haven't had the decency to let me know. Again that's the publisher again, he owns that gallery.

And then the one of drawings, which I never saw actually.

Oh, well they...

How did that go?

They did very well. I think he sold nine I think. But most of them he had bought you see.

And they had early...was it drawings...?

Oh, 1952 and '48, very early drawings, yes, single line drawings they were, which I was very proud of so I was very glad that he sorted them out, and he has framed them up beautifully, and he's done very well with them really.

And then you had one, that was Andrew Usiskin, that was one, two, three; you had something in the Royal...oh yes because we haven't actually said on this, I don't know how you felt, how did you feel about being...?

The Royal Academy?

Yes.

Well, I was, at my age it doesn't matter, that's what I thought. I saw my old tutor, Victor Pasmore, who was a great supporter of mine, wandering around there, so I thought, well if Victor can do it I can do it, because in all those years against it, you know. And also I liked Roger de Grey very much, and he asked me if I would join them, so I thought, well, what's it matter now? I haven't really got a dealer, and so I might as well do it. And I must say it's quite enjoyable, got very good lavatories to go to and things like that, and a good place to put your coat. Very useful to have a sort of club in town, and I've met lots of nice chaps and girls there. And they have very good corporate sort of dos, if you can get up to them. I don't get up enough really for that now.

And you had a how, didn't you, in the Friends Room there?

Oh yes, that was just, well it was, well some papers and all things. That was quite a nice, that was a lovely evening, a beautiful evening they gave me, but again only one thing sold you see. I'm certainly not in fashion at the moment. I don't have to worry, I don't worry about it too much, because somehow or another I seem to manage to get rid of enough each year. Somebody from Hong Kong has just bought a big one, through the Redfern. You see I can be with any gallery I want now. The Flowers Gallery just bought a big one for themselves, Matthew.

Yes? Oh that's good.

So things like that keep me going. But if I was tied to one gallery I couldn't do that, they wouldn't do it.

Yes. And the New York exhibition you had.

Oh yes, they did quite well, they've done quite well. Well I don't know, something like five or six things went.

And which, what gallery was that?

The Addison Gallery, which is on the third floor of the Maak Hotel, 74th Street I think, East 74th Street. Well that was very good, because I'm not that well known in New York, I haven't shown since the Sixties, which is quite a long time, but it went exceptionally well. So, keeping my freedom and not being tied to any one gallery is what keeps me going. Well I think that's it with.....

End of F4322 Side B

End of Interview

Born Leamington Spa 13 October 1915. Lived with maternal grandparents. Describes the house in Rugby Road - two down and three up including the attic.

He was an only child but brought up with three uncles who were like brothers to him so he did not feel an 'only'.

Mother divorced his father after the war and then remarried when she met again her original sweetheart. Terry says he has a half-brother and a stepbrother - his stepfather's first wife had died giving birth to the child.

His uncles were sporting types. Grandmother worked as a night nurse. Grandfather had been a steeplechase jockey, a groom and an athlete. He was also the last but one Bath chair proprietor in Leamington Spa (Charles Lines). He describes the chairs and how he used to take people shopping down the parade and to the Home & Colonial grocers when his grandpa wasn't able to.

When the bath chair business ended they converted the chair into a truck and collected people's luggage from the railway station and delivered it to them. Grandfather had had a stroke aged 27 and Terry heard rumours that he had been a bit of a lad when he was 'in service' and a gambler. Thinks his grandparents met then. He recalls visiting his great-grandmother (his grandmother's mother) of whom he was in awe, in Moss Street in Leamington Spa - she lived to be about 100 and was very strict.

He did not know his grandparents' parents but remembers meeting his grandfather's sister who lived in a former shop.

Describes his great-grandmother's terrace house and, also, in some detail, the house he was brought up in. Remembers two reproductions of farm scenes and a fluted silver teapot, and lots of brass objects which he remembers cleaning. Also recalls seeing his grandmother mull a glass of beer every night by putting the poker in it in the living-room/kitchen. There were cobbled areas at the back of the houses - these later became parking places. He describes the objects in the front room particularly some fine pieces of furniture and ceramics. His father had been in the artillery. The front room was used on Sundays and after lunch they played cards, put the gramophone on. Tea was a great event. Stayed a bit later in bed Sunday morning, went to Sunday school in the afternoon and in the evening family and friends of his grandmother visited.

They usually had beef for lunch - sometimes pork because the neighbours kept pigs. Most people had an allotment and on Sundays they brought their produce. Terry worked on his grandfather's allotment. Describes the fruit and vegetables they grew.

They lived in Milverton (now absorbed into Leamington) and knew every neighbour. He describes them as well as the pub (the Mason's Arms) its skittle alley, and the shop which sold a great variety of things.

The Rymans ran the shop and had two sons and a daughter. He used to have tea there on Sundays. Says Coffee Ryman was a great sportsman and played the piano and the saxophone. Also he had a steam engine which Terry used to play with. They went swimming and birds-nesting together. Aged about 8 Terry had a collection of eggs and butterflies. He and Coffee remained friends up until the war. Aged 11 Coffee went to the college and although Terry passed the same exam he couldn't go because his grandparents couldn't afford to pay for the books or the uniform. So he went to the Central School.

In his formative years - probably until he was at least 5 - Frost's mother lived in the same household. She never talked about where she met his stepfather nor about his father. Before she died Terry tried to talk to her about his father and she said she just fell for the uniform but

she did not want to talk about it. Recalls particularly when he was about 3 years old and before they split up, his father sitting in a chair and crying. He still has his father's whip (from his days in the Artillery) hanging in the house and his spurs. He lost touch with his father who never made any contact but his Uncle Fred mentioned he had seen him once at a Coventry football match and that he was an Inspector of Police in Birmingham. Terry recounts how, when he was out on his bike picking bluebells at Chesswood Woods, he thinks he saw his father.

END SIDE A; TAPE F4312

F4312: SIDE B

Continues with the bluebell episode - says he was about 10 or 11 and remembers a man in a red sports car asking him if he was Terry Frost and if he lived in Rugby Road. Neither of them said who they were. Thinks it was his father and doesn't know why he didn't have the nerve to ask him. Also remembers that his mother made the best jam tarts. He and his mother got on very well together. His stepfather was works' manager at Alfred Herbert's. Recalls that in the early days he slept in the same room as his mother. His uncles Don and Fred slept in the attic. Describes their various apprenticeships and says he did an early morning paper round when he was about nine or ten and was able to ride a bike. His mother worked at Woodward's, a big department store on The Parade. She was a milliner and specialised in repairing and altering fur. Tells a story his mother had told him of how he rode a borrowed bike down the Parade unaware that the then Duke of York was visiting the town.

Sometimes he used to meet his mother from work. She did dressmaking at home - very good at cutting - never needed a pattern. Says she didn't stay in much at home - went out a lot - went to dances - she was very good looking. Doesn't remember her tucking him up in bed. Remembers postcards from his father sent to her during the war which were framed and placed above his bed. Recounts a story his uncle told him of why his third name is Manito. His father was a sergeant in the artillery and had been to Gallipoli. He would like to trace more details of his father's background for the Frost family.

His mother wore wonderful hats and dresses. His uncle Fred was always drawing, copying from photographs, he never drew from the original. Terry Frost would copy his copies and also the Billy Bunter magazines. Says he was quite good at maths until he was twelve but was unable to cope with more advanced problems. Thinks he hasn't the willpower to make himself understand. If he asked questions he was made out to be a fool so he got behind. He was good at composition. He cannot remember anyone reading to him at home - says he always played in the street and describes the games he played with the local children. Describes the neighbours and how they lived - particularly a family of six children who all slept in one room.

Says he used to collect washing from some of the 'rich' houses using his grandfather's truck says he used to flirt with the servants. The washing was done by neighbours at the back of his house. Alice, from the family of six, tried to teach him how to make love at the age of 8.

Cannot remember much about books at home - nobody told him any stories but he does remember listening to his uncles talking to their friends about sport. Terry used to go and watch all the matches until he was old enough to play.

Remembers very little about the infant school across the road except that he had a teacher named Miss Dentry whom he thought very beautiful. Also that the boy who sat next to him had been labelled a 'dunce'. This boy was very badly treated and nowadays would be diagnosed as 'dyslexic'. Terry met him after the war and he had a job in the post office. In the next form his teacher was a Miss Huggins. Describes daily life in this form. He passed

an examination to go to the Central School - a good school for sport and also theatre. He cannot remember any art at all - doesn't think it was on the curriculum.

Talks about Arsenal and Aston Villa football clubs and Warwickshire cricket matches. Remembers seeing Bradman and Hammond as well as famous footballers of the time.

END OF SIDE B

F4313: SIDE A

Talks about his next school - loved cricket - good at it. When he left he ran the Old Boys' cricket team, played regularly, played against Warwickshire Gentlemen and in the Coventry North Warwickshire League. Played all his life. Was no good at soccer but went to all the local villages to watch matches. Talks about the team and what happened on Saturdays.

Talks about Central School and one particular teacher named Danny Morgan who used to read aloud from newspapers to the class. Talks about the French master with no sense of discipline and also about the French exam. He remembers hearing stories about the war from Captain Billingham.

Says he was quite good at composition but wrote in minute detail - rather like Proust! - and was never able to finish anything.

Describes New Year in his grandmother's house. Was not aware of his mother's second marriage - too busy doing the morning, evening and Sunday morning paper rounds, collecting the laundry etc.

He also joined the cycling club, bought a bike for nine pence (a kit which he put together), swam in the river in the grounds of a house called Chesswood Grange which was owned by someone called Pratt of Pratt's Oil. He was never bored - always had something to do. He became interested in radios, built some from instructions in the 'Boys' Own'. He had a crystal set and made a one-valve set which he rigged up for his grandmother and uncles to listen to.

Describes art classes - watercolour painting - lettering and so on at school. He designed the cover for the form magazine and vetted everybody's contributions. He also made Christmas Cards - usually holly. He thought of art as just another class.

Talks here about his uncles, their marriages, where they lived. He saw them regularly. His grandfather died when Terry was about 12. He was alone with him in the house at the time and remembers giving him lemonade. He went to fetch his grandmother and to collect the doctor who pronounced the old man dead. He cannot remember any details of the funeral - says he has always had the knack of not remembering things which he did not want to remember.

Refers again to his grandfather's stroke and to his grandmother's night-nursing. Says she earned 30 shillings a week. He earned 4 shillings and 6 pence from his newspaper round and gave his grandma two shillings and sixpence.

END SIDE A

F4313: SIDE B

Talks about various people who impressed him when he was a child:- his Uncle Fred, for example, who was a good cricketer and footballer, a waif-and-stray called Nobble Davies who

lived with a neighbouring family, with whom he used to go to the cinema and who played goal in football. Also remembers a certain Tiger Tim who was a centre forward and was never fit as he didn't get enough to eat. Also Pisa Green who was a runner people used to place bets on that he would win on the track.

Says Anthony Eden used their front room as an office during elections and paid them 10 shillings - also gave Terry 10 shillings for the Allotment Society.

One man who stood out from all the others and of whom Terry was very fond was the man who took the Bible Classes on Sunday afternoons.

Describes the period of Cubs and Scouts, the World Jamboree in 1926, meeting Lord Baden-Powell, Polish Scouts and a girl called Annie Pearce and wearing his Uncle Fred's Boy Scout shirt. He got interested in girls, cigarettes, snooker and joined the cycling club so became less interested in the Scouts and eventually left but still went camping with them. No choice about staying on or leaving school. One had to go out to work. First job was at Curry's after failing to get a job with Harris the grocers. Describes the different jobs he did at Curry's - especially enjoyed doing the window displays. Started going out with shop girls in the department store called Francis which was opposite Curry's.

Went with his mother to tea dances from age 11. Went to the Blue Cafe which had a leather floor and to the Pump Room. Learned all the dances and says he was interested in the visual excitement rather than the tunes. Remembers going to Bobby's and once on a coach trip to Oxford with his mother and her friend. Age 14 went regularly to dances in the evening and on Saturday nights. Still recalls the courage he needed to ask a girl to dance - terrible if she said no. Coffee Ryman played sax in the band.

Cannot remember why he left Curry's. He was there in 1933 - saw the hunger marchers from Jarrow. Became unemployed though he says he never got the sack. Remembers when he got the dole and went to evening classes at his old school and did drawings there of casts of sheep. Finally got a job in the radio factory at Warwick. If 'short time' came in workers were laid off - factories were run like that - only used you when they wanted you. Worked there (the Eagle factory) for a couple of years. They made cabs for lorries - painted in different colours with lettering. He found the book of designs most interesting. Talks about what he did there - quite busy - worked too fast because he wanted to buy a racing bike. The firm advertised the radio sets in the News of the World. He fell in love with a girl who worked there.

The cycle club took up a lot of his spare time - he used to train every Wednesday. He took about two and a half hours to do the fifty miles. When girls were allowed to join he went on hundred mile rides on Sundays because the girls did.

END TAPE F4313: SIDE B

F4314: SIDE A

Remembers working at the Cadena Bakery for sometime - describes what he did there. Dressed in white he carried the cakes on a tray to the Pump Room Restaurant Gardens where he used to go with his mother. Started work at 4am and worked until 2 or 3pm. Kept in touch with his mother (she had had a baby) and stayed with her on Sundays. Can't remember much about the arrival of the baby - too busy with girls, cricket, dances, table-tennis and snooker.

Thinks his last job before the war was in the Armstrong Whitworth factory - in the paint shop. His sergeant (Hadland) in the Territorial Army helped him get this. There they painted the targets on the wings but his job was to make the tea. The paint was mixed with dope first - very dangerous - had to drink lots of milk. Very hot in the workshop he recalls. Eventually he painted all the colours for the wiring in the secret part of the factory where they were making the Wellington bomber. This was in 1938 when all the newspapers were saying that there was not going to be a war. He remembers the prototype being built in wood and being allowed on the runway to see it go off on its first flight - very exciting. He also painted all the lead for the metal tubes for the body of aircraft and worked in a very high temperature. Also building the Hurricane fighter there. Pieces were assembled then taken apart and hidden underground.

Remembers an official doing a time and motion study at the factory who wanted to stop the workers making tea at 11 o'clock. The men had been used to having their morning break for years so they all went on strike including himself.

He joined the Territorial Army aged 17 and here he explains what that entailed. They were sent to Cumberland. There he met young people who had never had work (they were 21/22). He learned square dancing. Also noticed that the fathers always came to meet the girls as they were frightened about pregnancies.

The time there affected his political leanings. He remembers doing a lot of horse-riding and that a lot of the officers including Lord Bearsted, Gilbey and one of the Vestey's went training and all had very good horses. He loved riding - thinks he had a natural bent - his father had and his grandfather had been a jockey. He didn't think much about war - too busy enjoying himself - quite shocked when he was called up.

Talks here about the period when he was on the dole (aged about 24) and says he was obliged to attend the local art school.

Describes reporting when he was called up and then going to Thorsby Park, Nottinghamshire. All the horses were there - he slept in the stables. Thorsby Park was a stately home which had been requisitioned. He took the horses to France by boat - landed in Marseille - around Christmas 1939. Trained in Aubagne, Provence - very cold - slept in tents. Found Marseille very interesting - especially the brothels. His first experience of that kind of life.

From there had to transport the horses to Palestine. Describes the voyage across the Bay of Biscay. Conditions very poor in the hold - horses got sick - some died. Terrible difficulty getting them up and on to dry land. Their first camp was in Afula where they did more training, riding, map-reading. Visited the Druze, Arab and Jewish settlement - went into various villages - met the Mukta - drank their thick black coffee. Patrolled the Lebanese border on horseback - saw a lot of drug-smuggling. Explains the training they did as cavalry. He became 'rough-riding' corporal. Was sent on a gas-training course in Alexandria - volunteered for the Commandos. He wanted to get away from his sergeant major with whom he had been in trouble ever since he first joined the Territorials.

END SIDE A; F4314

F4314: SIDE B

He was sent to the desert in Egypt. Describes the infantry training compared with the cavalry - bayonet drill and unarmed combat. Found that total discipline is absolutely necessary. Found it very difficult to begin with.

First saw action in Gonder on the banks of the Nile. Italians being pushed back to Eritrea - Commandos did some of the probing behind the enemy lines. Says how difficult it was finding your way in the jungle. His attendance at lectures in Cairo on navigating by the stars became very useful. They were pulled out once the Italians were on the run and sent back to Alexandria.

Describes how they were sent to Crete in January 1941, the taking of Melambes aerodrome by the Germans, and the defensive job of helping people to get off Crete. He was finally taken prisoner and marched back to work on the aerodrome.

He got on well with the German troops. Spent about 6 weeks there before being moved to Salonika to a prisoner of war camp. He had to resort to scheming his way round things in order to survive. Remained there about two or three months until they were moved to Germany in cattle trucks. Journey lasted several days - no facilities - awful.

Worked on building a light railway somewhere near Berlin. Went from there to Poland - very tough on the German/Polish border. From there moved to Stalag 383 where they were given cards via the Red Cross to write home. Describes the food, the camp and the way of life of the prisoners; i.e. starting their own school, their own theatre, taking French lessons and so on. Started drawing, especially portraits of people in the camp. Joined a painting class - describes his first oil painting (this was about 1943). Mentions that Frankie Whetton from Nottingham and a chap named Rowlandson were also in the class. Began to draw all the time, describes meeting Adrian Heath and how the latter became his unofficial tutor and encouraged him to paint. It was the start of their friendship.

A man called Challis used to read to them - got books via the Red Cross. Some people took exams in a variety of subjects. He himself told stories in French to a Spaniard who had been a taxi driver in Paris. They were all constantly searching for ways to beat the German regulations. They copied passports, made clothes, brewed booze and so on. Describes how he painted Mick Moore's portrait (Moore ran the camp 'market') and how they formed themselves into a group with a sergeant in charge and received orders by radio.

Remembers also lying awake at night talking about sexual delights or the meal they would have when they got out - some people told marvellous stories and some people sang very well. He might have had a bible but says they probably smoked it as the pages made good smoking papers which they distributed amongst themselves.

END TAPE F4314 SIDE B

Talks about the time in Salonika when he was ready to escape through the sewers. Describes the attempts at escape and the reactions of the Germans. Particularly mentions Adrian Heath who was in the tunnel at the time and who jumped out howling like a dog.

Describes a mock fox hunt through the camp and other tricks - says the Germans thought they had all gone mad. The camp medical officer suggested that the prisoners be allowed out on parole for a walk. They brought back wood to use for fuel. Terry picked wild flowers to paint. But says he felt uncomfortable for this was freedom without freedom and he never went out again. Rules were broken, Adrian Heather tried again to escape so the walks were cancelled.

Frost drew interiors of huts which he says set him a perspective problem. Red Cross provided some materials. Also mentions a friendly German under-officer who brought him some paints in return for a portrait.

Explains why they were handcuffed. Describes how a Scottish prisoner made brushes out of the fetlocks of cart-horses and how he used pillows and mattresses (hessian) for canvasses and barley soup for size. Says he kept the oil from tinned sardines to mix with the paint. Mentions a friendship with a Spaniard called Marin who had been at Madrid University and who talked to him and Adrian Heath about Velasquez. Also a sergeant-major who took Terry's work home with him and how the Coventry Evening Telegraph mounted an exhibition at Leamington. Admits that he had not seen any real paintings but that Adrian Heath had introduced him to a lot of relevant things. He had had good lessons in art history and also read a lot. Made up his mind to be a painter when he got out of the army. Adrian Heath suggested that he go to Cornwall to get away from his family who would expect him to go back to his job immediately.

Describes the end of the war when the Americans were getting nearer and the behaviour of the Germans at that time - a nerve-wracking experience he says. Describes the home-coming and going back to his grandmother's house. Soon had to report back to the regiment and to go to Catterick.

Describes the two-week stay in Catterick then the issue of demob outfit and the return to grandma's house. Sold the demob boots via Fred Mulley and took up the job he had had before the war (employers were obliged to hold open jobs for returning service people). He was working in the radio wholesale business at Snowhill and went to Birmingham Art School in the evenings. He was then offered a better job in Coventry.

END F4315; SIDE A

F4315: SIDE B

Recalls that he drew 'still-lives' of wax fruit at Birmingham Art School - had no car so got back late to Leamington. Change of job based in Coventry - nearer home - covered an area which included Leicester which he liked. Met several people connected with the art world who encouraged him to paint. He had to go into hospital and knew the reason for his illness was disappointment in himself. Told his boss about his decision to resign as doctor had advised him to go and live in the south-west of England. He also had stones in his gall-bladder.

Describes how he met his wife (Kathleen) very soon after the war ended. Met her in May and married in August. Reception in the barn and garden of a local pub. Fred Mulley was his best man. He and Kathleen went to Banbury for their honeymoon. He painted a picture of her lying on the bed. Has since let the Belgrave Gallery have the painting. Could not continue living with his grandmother in Leamington and decided to go to St Ives. His family could not understand his wanting to be an artist - didn't think it was a proper job.

END OF SIDE B; F4315

F4316: SIDE A

Describes the journey, by night, from Warwick to St Ives. Disappearance of their trunk with all their worldly goods. Very quiet, very empty, all the shops there closed - it was May. Trying to find somewhere to stay - looked at papers in the local library. Found a tiny caravan in Carbis Bay on a nice piece of ground and near a wood. Rented this for 30 shillings a week.

His wife got a job with people called Hoskins who ran a bed-and-breakfast and the local post office. She delivered the telegrams. She found the Cornish accent difficult on the telephone.

Found that Ben Nicholson and Barbara Hepworth lived in the same road though he had never heard of them and never met them when they lived there. Moved from the caravan when the high season started. Stayed for a short while in Rottaruer near the village hall. Worked for a Mrs Finlay doing odd jobs (he) chambermaid (she) in the guest house she ran. He remembers a Mrs Trevithick (granddaughter of the Trevithick who had invented the steam-engine) was staying there. In the evening he served the food - lots of commando officers staying there - food strictly rationed. Stayed there until his wife became pregnant. Mrs Finlay admired his painting and helped him to get into the St Ives School of Painting run by Leonard Fuller. He spent half a day there while he was working for her.

Explains how he came to live at 12 Quay Street - owned by Pippa Renwick - where he painted 'Walk Along the Quay'. Talks about what he painted and his style of painting. Lanyon showed him around Cornwall - he learned a lot and met a lot of people and his work was becoming noticed.

Describes how he hitch-hiked to London to visit the National Gallery. His first visit. Also how he met, by accident, a crowd of Stalag 383 ex-POWs - some of them in education - and he discovered that he probably could get an ex-serviceman's grant to get into art school. Fred Mulley told him how to write the necessary letter. He wrote off to the Bristol and after 8 months was told he could apply. Advised by Adrian Heath to go to Camberwell School of Art and he got in in 1947/8.

Describes his reactions to the paintings in the National Gallery. Went to Camberwell and used to visit one room at the gallery each week. Describes the difference between the work of the artists in St Ives and the work of the students in Camberwell. Says the academic atmosphere at Camberwell had killed the art in them.

His first child born July 1947. Started in Camberwell in the autumn of that year. Found somewhere to live in London. He had a grant of £7.00 a week - rents in Chelsea where he remembers knocking on doors - were at least £3 00. Adrian Heath lived in Walpole Street - found him a place nearby. They had a room with gas fire where they could dry the nappies and they felt themselves very lucky to be there. Later was offered a room in a house in Albert Bridge Road with use of bathroom and kitchen for £2 7 6d per week. He did a lot of paintings and drawings from here of Battersea Park. They stayed there until the course at Camberwell ended. In the summer they went back to Quay Street. Can't remember when he met Nicholson. Talks a little more about what sort of painting was going on in Cornwall and compares it with Camberwell. Sold about eight paintings from his exhibition 'Paintings with Knife and Brush' - got about £10 00 each and he got noticed by other artists.

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F4317; SIDE A

Talks about Ben Nicholson and playing table tennis with him. And about him and Barbara Hepworth who bought Trewyn Studio. Says he saw Nicholson quite often but that he never went into a pub for a drink with him - he was not that sort of person. Nicholson was very good at any ball game but he hated to lose.

Describes what his paintings were like before Camberwell. He used a palette knife and painted portraits, street scenes and so on. Says he painted like Van Gogh. Mentions a 1949 drawing influenced by Nicholson. Describes a Miss Humphries who was his favourite model and of whom he made lots of line drawings. Tries to explain what he was trying to do when drawing but how difficult it was to translate into paint. No-one ever taught him how to draw. Even at art school only the students who had cigarettes (heavily rationed in those days) got any attention from the tutors. Refers to Coldstream who was at Camberwell during his time there and whose painting style he tried to copy. Says Coldstream told him to scrape it off and start again. Describes other occasions and other problems and the advice Coldstream gave him. Terry preferred to work in the manner of Pasmore who had encouraged him to go to the galleries. More about Camberwell and the Vice-Principal - about Willesden Art School where he later taught anatomy. Recalls the first time he met Pasmore who told him not to go to his Saturday morning classes - better to go round the galleries. He took his advice. Invited to Pasmore's house in Blackheath. Very much influenced by Nicholson's constructions. Also refers to Tom Monnington at Camberwell from whom he got good instruction. Another member of staff there was Carter who later went to the Slade. Remembers that Howard Hodgkin was also at Camberwell and how they both struggled against drawing in the academic sense. Talks about a self-portrait hanging in his studio which he did 1948/9 - using the grid system - says Lawrence Gowing gave him the idea and he copied Pasmore's approach. Frost recalls he used the grid system.

Here he describes the work he saw at Victor Pasmore's house. Talks particularly of the work before it became abstract including one of a flower barrow. Frost says he did a painting of a flower seller which was inspired by Pasmore's.

He also recalls Kenneth Martin's work - Martin was interested in Frost painting abstract work. In fact, he showed an abstract work in his final exhibition which was entitled 'Madrigal'. He explains how it came about and how he worked out the composition based on the golden section.

Says there were two subjects set for the students to work on during the summer vacation. One was Joseph's coat of many colours. He discovered from reading in the public library in Leamington Spa, that it was not a real coat but a philosophical statement!

END SIDE A

F4317: SIDE B

Continues talking about Auden's poem 'Madrigal'. Refers to Adrian Heath saying that Frost always made up stories to himself from which he could paint his pictures. Recalls what Daniels (the Principal then) said about it when it was put up at the final show. Says he wanted to stay on another year at Camberwell and was sent for by the Principal because he had tried to do an abstract in the lithography studio under La Dell. The Principal said he had not been following the course during his extra year. He had been doing pottery and trying to do printing. He had been quite good at pottery. Daniels asked Frost about abstract art and Frost explained abstract shapes and structural organisation and used Rembrandt reproductions to illustrate his points. Daniels was impressed and rang Dickey at the Ministry of Education and Frost was finally able to have his extra twelve months on his own terms.

He also remembers that he and his friend Jock Purdy used to get in to the pottery about 6am in order to have a couple of hours on the wheel before the rest of the students came in. Says he spent about twelve months just trying to centre the clay. Mentions Dick Kendall (who married one of the Leach family) who was in charge and another potter (a professional from Staffordshire) who taught Frost to make a palette of glazes and put them in the kiln in different places in order to study the results. He remembers that the famous Japanese potter, Hamada, came in and how they noticed that he never bothered to centre the clay but produced

perfect asymmetrical pots. Thinks this was quite a good example for them. He also started doing sculpture with others including Monty Sunshine. Says Humphrey Lyttleton had just left and remembers how the students used to start playing their instruments as soon as the model had left. Says they were marvellous when they played at the school dance. Thinks art schools are the best places for people such as film makers, writers, etc. Talks about his sculpture using clay and then stone - says he was not a natural carver and did not learn how to until he went to work for Barbara Hepworth.

At Camberwell he was taught by a Czech. Says he found him depressing as he hated abstract art and was only interested in the baroque. He tried to reason with him without success and confessed his disappointment to Kenneth Martin who told him not to waste his time with people whose minds were made up. Better to talk with people who are searching for the same sort of truth as oneself. Frost soon gave up going to the classes.

He used to visit galleries mostly by himself but liked particularly going with Adrian Heath as they had great discussions as Heath knew all the art history. Terry Frost says he wanted to learn by seeing the paintings not by looking at reproductions in books. He remembers that the history of art question at Camberwell was to compare Rubens' technique with that of Ingres. Says he reacted strongly against the artists that Coldstream and his gang were interested in - Poussin, Ingres, Fra Angelico. Cezanne was about as far as they could get. He says he thought they were trapped in a suit of armour in a time warp. He also visited the Victoria & Albert Museum to look at the sculpture - particularly the French sculpture. Used to get lost in the Egyptian rooms at the British Museum. Enjoyed the Wallace Collection, loved Fragonard and Velasquez. He continues to enjoy visiting the galleries just as much now but has never been an expert on dates and names. Thinks he is too lazy to make himself learn such details - he would rather concentrate on whether or not he likes a painting and why. Talks about Richard Wilson's painting "Cadre Idris" and how he found out how it was done. He remembers miniatures and Constable studies in the V&A.

In commercial galleries he remembers seeing Prunella Clough's work at Roland Browse and Delbanco. Thinks she is one of our best painters as well as being a wonderfully honest person. Mentions the Redfern as one of his favourite galleries. Rex Nankerville had a wonderful collection of Utrillos and Vuillards which Frost particularly admired. He remembers also the Leicester Galleries where he was able to see Ginner, Bevan, Sickert and says he thus had a very good grounding. His first London show was in 'Artists of Fame and Promise' at the Leicester Galleries.

Says he was absolutely broke when he left Camberwell and tried to get an overdraft. Explains how he went to Penzance College of Art on the advice of his friend Fred Mulley who said he should give himself a breathing space. He studied for his Intermediate (he had three children at this stage) and a small grant of about £7 00 a week which helped him to survive. Says here why he was not very popular at Penzance. He had been written about and was already part of the Nicholson group. Tunnard who was teaching at Penzance and was also Parliamentary Secretary to Chuter Ede, Minister of Education at the time, had fallen out with Nicholson some years before.

Reverts to talking about his time at Camberwell. Minton was only there for his first two terms - he remembers him at one life class before he went on to the Royal College of Art. Remembers also that William Townsend set them a task of copying an Old Master. Terry chose Rubens rather than Poussin or Ingres - says he liked the juicy paint and the pentementé. Describes the difficulty of copying in the National Gallery in those days when it was only allowed at certain times.

Talks about the composition of the 'Three Graces' and the structure which underlies the whole painting. Says he learned a lot from this.

Remembers a particular friend at Camberwell called Paddy Gault who still paints and who lives in Blackheath - both were very hard up. His friends were limited - he was a little older than most of the Camberwell students - but says he saw Adrian Heath regularly and Corinne and Anthony Hill. When he went home he would paint the view from the windows in the evening and in the early morning he went into Battersea Park and drew the trees and railing around the lake and this posed a perspective problem which was a rewarding one for him to tackle.

END OF SIDE B; F4317

F4318; SIDE A

Continues talking about Battersea Park. Says he mainly went there to take his first baby out of the house as he was always crying. Talks about making drawings in the park and various 'tricks' which he discovered for himself. Did a painting from the window of his flat in Albert Bridge Road of two cyclists wearing yellow mackintoshes and the reflections on the road. He thinks it was one of his best paintings. He also did a lot of drawings of his wife Kath - eg looking in the mirror, knitting, in the analytical cubist manner. He drew the flower-seller with his horse and cart in the cubist manner. Battersea Park was heaven to him.

Says he was too busy to feel any sense of missing the Cornish landscape. It was a very exciting time. Adrian Heath and he liked to go to the docks to draw. The V & A has two of the single-line drawings he did of the dock gates which he talks about here. Because he was 'into' abstraction and constructivism he was always looking at things and discovered that one could see wonderfully clearly when one had done pure abstract art and pure geometrical division. He could then make his own selection from the visual experience. Talks some more about the shapes and balance required for making a drawing.

Jacques Villon was their god and his drawings, a book of which he and Adrian had, and which they studied and talked about, were very analytical. Juan Gris became a favourite.

He and his wife survived quite well. They walked everywhere and enjoyed London. Walked to the V & A and the Tate. Food was rationed so didn't go out much to eat. Perhaps went to Lyons Corner House to have a cup of tea. Went to the one at the top of Cork Street (Clifford Street) and another near Whitehall where they went on their way to the Tate after having visited the National Gallery. Both interested in Seurat at that time and had been to a talk on him by Kenneth Clark. This confirmed all their ideas about the division of an area. Says Adrian was copying Seurat. Says he cannot recall anything which 'stopped him in his tracks' at the Tate. Remembers Joseph Wright of Derby. They were told, he says, to look at Turner's work and thinks it makes a big difference if you are told to look at work. Says he was impressed by a portrait of Robin by Augustus John and a portrait by Degas of a girl's head.

He left Camberwell and got a grant to attend Penzance School of Art based in 12 Quay Street - he had the 'Porthmeor' (thinks the Arts Council were trying to purchase the Porthmeor Studios) - but Frost applied and Ben Nicholson backed him.

Explains how he started the 'Walk along the Quay series'. He used to buy bundles of stretchers at Lanhams auctioneers and by sheer chance he picked up a long, thin, rectangular canvas for this particular painting. Continues talking about 'Walk Along the Quay'. Later he did works that encompass the square of the quay - a locking process one of which is called

'Walking along the Quay, Blue Movement 1952', which he talks about in detail. Also talks about in great detail 'Green Black and White Movement' owned by the Tate. He used Rowney's Naples Yellow and terre verte, he prepared the canvas himself having been taught the technique by Lucas at Camberwell. The latter worked at the National Gallery as a restorer. Max Derner's book was their bible.

Here talks about how he became one of Barbara Hepworth's assistants at 18/- a day and working on 'Contrapuntal Forms' for the Festival of Britain.

Explains that Denis Mitchell who became a lifelong friend, helped him get the job.

Sweeping up and cleaning at first - just one day a week - eventually was given tools and taught how to carve. He learned a lot by watching Denis and Barbara working and picked it up very quickly. Describes how the high points were marked out in ultra marine. Thinks Barbara was very difficult to work for. Also that it is very difficult to work with the same intensity (as it is not your work) as the artist you are working for. Says she could tell if you were not working properly - ie following the form - by the sound you made when carving. Recalls that ten tons of Connemara blue limestone was delivered for 'Contrapuntal Forms'. He would work on the rough piece bringing it up to the shape she wanted and then she took over and made any alterations she wanted. She might let him polish it up sometimes. He worked at the same time as Mitchell and sometimes Owen Braughton. John Wells usually went on a different day. Mitchell taught Frost how to mix plaster properly and how to sharpen tools.

Here he begins to explain how working for Hepworth had an effect on his work. He felt all he was doing was illustration and illusionism on a flat board or canvas to try and make shapes in space rather than making it in a physical fact as in sculpture.

END SIDE A; F4318

F4318: SIDE B

He says here that he tried to do some sculpture by carving wood and that also he made some small mobiles by cutting semi-circular shapes in metal and copper and used bamboo and cotton to fix them. He enjoyed doing this as well as making linocuts. Says he did not paint for about nine months. Eventually from cutting the shapes he got back to collage. Pasmore was doing collage which he had shown at the Redfern Gallery and that was also an influence he thinks. The collage made him deal with positive shapes and freed him to put any colour he wanted in the shapes. Talks about 'Blue and Yellow Collage' 1951 and about colour and the subjective response it elicits from everyone.

Explains how he never wasted paint and always used it to paint lots of pieces of paper which he would later be able to use for his collages. Used Ingres paper for one of the colours.

Talks briefly of 'Collage' 1950 at the Pier Gallery, Stromness.

Says that when working in the cafe he would sometimes cut out the coloured bits from tea packets.

Talks about the artist who came to St Ives for quick visits. Reg Butler, for example, Kenneth Armitage and later Alan Lowndes and Americans like Jack Bush and Frankenthaler and Bill Brooker. Frost remembers feeding them in his cafe.

Talks about exhibition of work in 1951 at Heal's and about abstract art. Explains how his first one-man show at the Leicester Galleries came about and about the works which R D May bought from him.

Pasmore also came to St Ives and stayed in the cafe where he and Kath worked. Talks about the drawings Pasmore did at the time - says he thinks the spiral drawings may have been influenced by da Vinci.

Finished working with Barbara Hepworth in 1952.

Bill Brooker and William Scott visited and saw the life-drawings he was doing and invited him to teach life-drawing at the Bath Academy of Art (Corsham). Talks about how Clifford and Rosemary Ellis were trying to run an art school free from the constrictions of the Ministry of Education - here he hits out at the Department of Education's bureaucracy which insisted that the students must pass the drawing examination.

Says Lanyon was already there, Scott was interested in people from St Ives and Brooker liked Frost's drawing. Frost says he was making a bit of a stir at that time. Ivon Hichens had written to him and John Berger had slated him - the latter liked his drawings but disliked abstract art. Says that Ellis liked having members of staff whose work was in the news. If they were up-and-coming they would pass on their enthusiasm to the students. Frost thinks this worked well - all his students passed after twelve months' tuition. He talks about his method of teaching and says he was known as 'plumb-line Frost'. Says he was very strict about drawing - he loved it and still does.

END SIDE B; F4318

F4319: SIDE A

Talks about Alastair Grieves having made a mistake about Frost and the Fitzroy Street exhibitions and for which Grieves apologised.

Talks about 'Construction' 1952/2 (a la Gabo) possibly one of the first he made and about three exhibitions arranged by Adrian Heath in the front studio in Fitzroy Street. People exhibiting there included Paolozzi, Terence Conran (a young art student), Trevor Dannatt and Kenneth Martin who was trying to hang up his first mobile. Frost describes the Fitzroy Street house and the front room where the exhibition was held where Frost had worked and Bryan Wynter before him. Frost says that photographs of the exhibitions held there still exist. Talks about the group who exhibited together and says galleries at that time would not exhibit their work.

He recalls the AIA exhibition in 1951 in which Martin and Hilton also exhibited. Frost sold his 'Walk Along the Quay' to Peter Gregory. Ben Nicholson came in and suggested that Frost should increase the price of one of his paintings. He also advised Frost to put the price of each work on the back of the paintings so that there would be no embarrassment. Says Nicholson was most helpful in that sort of way. Frost talks about Sam Francis's paintings which were exhibited at the ICA which he found very exciting.

Frost was associated with Nicholson, Lanyon and company and talks about his first one-man show at the Leicester Galleries when Myfanwy Piper wrote a scathing review for 'The Guardian'. He was told that Myfanwy and John Piper had fallen out with Nicholson at the time of the 7&5 Exhibition earlier - he was innocently caught in the cross-fire. Frost thinks arguments are important and make the artist even more determined to do what he wants to do. He remembers that Ivon Hichens had written to congratulate him.

Talks again about how he got the job at Corsham and how he loved drawing and always has done. He taught in blocks for half the term. When Bill Brooker moved to Willesden Art School, Frost taught anatomy there for about twelve months. He had a room with Heath's brother-in-law, Mickey Lloyd. Remembers travelling to Corsham by train with the poet

James Kirkup and describes his eccentric dress and behaviour. Frost also got involved with the painting at Corsham - he had a room in the village in Corsham but worked at the school itself where he did quite a lot of painting. Talks about what made him paint 'Corsham Silver and White', 1953 and his feelings about it. Says he never thinks about an experience too much at the time for fear of killing it and thus not being able to do what had really moved him. He never made sketches - or, rather, - only in his head. Here he explains how he has to work at these things.

Talks about making the lithograph 'Blue Moon' with Harry Cliffe in the studio. He needed the advice of a technician. Cliffe told him to treat it like watercolour. Talks about having been in love with the moon and shapes that go with it. Mentions the square lino-cut of 1952 and the painting which followed (now in Vancouver - presented by by the CAS). Frost thinks it is one of the best paintings he ever did at Corsham. He painted it after having done the lino-cut which he turned round. Ben had told him that changing the format was always a good idea. Frost says a lot of his paintings were untitled at the time - also that he did not like signing his work especially on the front.

His colleagues at Corsham included very lively people: Kenneth Armitage, Peter Potworowski and James Tower. They used to go to the pub in the evenings. Says that Clifford and Rosemary Ellis were hard task-masters and made the students work very hard. They received reports every term and these were treated very seriously.

He recalls doing a keep-fit movement class with Bryan Winter- the class was taken by Litz Pisk, the famous theatre movement expert - and he attended it before giving his life-drawing classes. Talks about her drawings and says he also always enjoyed William Scott's paintings - still-lives mostly. Says Armitage was doing flattened figures and Scott also used the figure and was also doing some sculpture at the time. Frost was very busy teaching and did not look a great deal at what other people were doing there.

He never overlapped with Lanyon at Corsham - both had large families. He stayed at Corsham until 1954 - he was drawing objectively as well as doing abstract work. When he was teaching he always drew the model too. He never drew on other people's paper - he did not like it when teachers did it to him - people should find out for themselves. If you do 200 drawings you find that you improve. He enjoyed the teaching, talks about how he taught. Looking back he thinks that working for Hepworth probably influenced him and he learned that if you did not think you could make a piece of sculpture from your drawing, then the drawing did not work. He also thinks that one can do much better by drawing a single line than by using tone.

END SIDE A; F4319

F4319: SIDE B:

Talks about how his Gregory Fellowship in Painting in Leeds in 1954 came about. He recalls going to meet Peter Gregory in London in his flat for lunch. Says he was given a pin-striped suit to go to the interview - getting drunk - knocking the wine over. Gregory was Director of Lund Humphried (publishers of art books) and gave all his money to support the Gregory Fellows. Talks about the other Gregory Fellows.

Frost took over from Martin Froy. Heath-Stubbs was Gregory Fellow in poetry - Reg Butler and Kenneth Armitage and then Dalwood were Gregory Fellows in sculpture. Alan Davie succeeded Frost. Frost found Davie very interesting and recommended him. Talks about the Gregory Fellowship and the benefits to the Fellows apart from the £300 per annum living expenses. He and his family lived in an old-fashioned house. They had four children at the

time. One room was used as a studio. They had no furniture and the university was not very helpful. They were helped by people called Gillinson in Leeds who sent round some beds in exchange for two paintings. The Mansons also were very kind.

He talks about the Yorkshire landscape compared with that of West Cornwall - how he felt in it and how it affected his work. Refers to the yellow tryptich on view in the Tate in St Ives - this was painted in his house in Leeds in Kelso Road. He explains here how he often adds to his paintings much later on. He refers to one of the first drawings he did in Yorkshire of Kath in her swimming costume on the banks of the River Nidd where they had a picnic. He did a drawing on the spot. He used chevrons to indicate running water and these later became his symbols. He did another drawing using oil paint on paper in which he used the shapes such as the laces he used in the later 'bikini' paintings.

Talks about the hexagonal shapes he used and about 'Abstract with Red Verticals'. Remembers driving through the snow to have lunch with Herbert Read and going for a walk through the snow in borrowed wellies, seeing a blinding circle amongst the verticals. He thought about it and then tried to paint it.

While looking at reproductions he talks about a drawing he did after a walk with a gallery-owner friend when he saw sheep with their heads down in the snow with their tails blowing in the wind making spirals. Says he swapped his 'Red Black and White Leeds, 1955' for the deposit on his first car - a Ford Cortina.

There was a working atmosphere amongst the people of Leeds and the fact that Frost worked made a lot of people who would not normally have been interested in art, make the effort. Frost sold quite a number of small paintings to people who had never bought a painting before.

Harry Thubron asked Frost to go and teach at Leeds College of Art where he taught the first year students. Teaching with Thubron was a marvellous experience. Here he talks a little about his teaching method (inspired by the Bauhaus). He was able to find the best in people, including people on the staff. Frost taught colour theory at Leeds. Pasmore asked him to write something on colour for an exhibition at the ICA - The Developing Process - based on what he had been doing with the students - colour analysis from nature.

Frost talks about having done quite a lot of painting on board - canvasses were difficult to come by - and how he prepared the surface (rough side then six coats of gloss). Lanyon had also worked on board. Frost's stepbrother was a timber merchant and sent him a crate of hardboard. Francis Bacon, who worked in St Ives next door to Frost (a bit later on) gave Frost the hardboard in which his (Bacon's) canvasses were packed. He used the rough side to paint on and put on six coats of gesso. He thinks that it was in Leeds that he met Roger Mayne who took photographs of his family there and later on in Cornwall.

Frost stayed on an extra year (1957) after the Gregory Fellowship as he had the house and had three days a week teaching in the art school - best pay he had ever had - then gave it up to go back to Cornwall.

He talks here about having met Hilton in 1951 and of trying to sell Hilton's taxi to Ben Nicholson. He went back to live in 12 Quay Street and had many visitors particularly from America and dealers who bought the occasional painting. These latter included Dr Roland, the Gimpels and Victor Waddington. He felt rather desperate as children were growing up and he hadn't enough money. Decided he had to move.

END SIDE B; TAPE F4319

SIDE A; TAPE F4320

Frost remembers seeing the Sam Francis show of the Tachiste period with Roger Hilton. Also having lunch with Hilton and Bacon in Paris when the latter had an exhibition there. They also met Soulages who advised them never to sign a contract with a dealer for more than two years. Soulages and Frost used similar techniques and Soulages gave him some paper and asked him to paint something for him. He did so but does not think he would have the nerve to do that now. At that time he was using verticals in order to paint very quickly with tubes also he was full of innocent enthusiasm and had not been corrupted by greed. He and Roger Hilton (who was bi-lingual) went round the Salon de Mai and saw work by Veira Da Silva, Mortensen, Tapiés and saw Nagushi sculpture in the gardens of the Unesco building - he describes them. They also went to the Deux Magots, saw the Monets at the Orangerie and had lunch at Les Assassins. Met lots of people they had known years before.

He goes on to talk about being called one of 'the middle generation' at Waddington Galleries where he had an exhibition in 1959. Describes the work he was doing on his return to St Ives - quite a lot of linear and vertical works in black and white. Also talks about the element of the figure lying down and recalls having discussions and correspondence with Hilton who was determined to bring back the figure whilst Frost did not think you could bring it back unless you imitated Picasso. Frost enjoyed the clarity and freedom he got from abstract art. Talks about 'The Three Graces' which was based on the Rubens' painting which he had copied while at Camberwell.

Also about his exhibition at Bertha Schaefer in New York arranged through Waddington. Says a lot of people like Rothko, Motherwell, Jack Bush, Frankenthaler who knew of Nicholson, Lanyon and Hepworth, came to St Ives and he was just a part of it. They all visited his studio because he was one of 'the gang'.

Describes his visit to New York. A critic who had bought one of his works from the Leicester Galleries arranged for him to meet Motherwell, Frankenthaler, Newman and others. He was impressed by the work of Tomlin and Motherwell and says that Jackson Pollock's paintings fascinated him. He had heard a lot about him from Armitage and Scott who had been to New York and had told him about them. He visited Barnett Newman who showed him his paintings. Motherwell also showed him his work. He worked on the floor and unrolled all his paintings to show to Frost. He also met de Kooning but never went to his studio.

He saw Rothko on the day he decided not to sell the paintings which are now in the Tate. He talks about how his exhibition was received. Says he was supported by the artists and that de Kooning was the most excited about his painting especially one which he thinks was due to de Kooning's influence and which was bought by the Imperial Tobacco Company. He describes it. He went to Helen Frankenthaler's studio and to Clem Greenberg's. The latter showed him his collection as well as the first of Nolan's paintings that Frost had ever seen. Looking back he realises that he was treated extremely well. He also met Alan Ginsberg, saw a play with Larry Rivers in it. Talks about the excitement which existed in the art world at that time, says discussions among the artists were very tough and militant.

He saw Lanyon on return from Leeds. He had corresponded with Hilton while in Leeds then Hilton moved to Trevor Bell's old house in Cornwall in 1957/8 and Bell used it as a holiday cottage.

END SIDE A; TAPE F4320

SIDE B; TAPE F4320

Frost used to go to Little Park Owles where Lanyon worked in a former garage. He was working on paintings he had done as a result of the gliding. Frost did not like them at all and explains why. Says he and Lanyon discussed them and that Lanyon was disappointed at his lack of enthusiasm.

Does not remember much about Hilton's work except that he was working on board. Says that at that time he was drinking a lot - much more than when they first met in 1951. His work was too delicately based on landscape and not abstract enough.

Frost saw William Scott when he stayed in Sennen. Frost continued to work in his Porthmeor studio - Francis Bacon worked for six months next door. Frost's studio was always open - he was never worried about fellow painters seeing his work. He always knew when he had done a good painting because people did not know what to say - out of envy, he thinks.

Talks about Ben Nicholson falling for Felicitas Vogler after being away from Barbara about 5 years. Frost went to Switzerland to see Ben who was always spare with his words. Used to send a postcard with three words on it - later he'd draw a picture on the front. Frost occasionally went to see Barbara or she visited him. She was always busy. He would go in the evenings or sometimes at lunchtime. Says she had started to drink a bit then and he tells an amusing story of how he tried to get her to drink milk with her whisky and that one evening they drank a pint of milk and a whole bottle of whisky. Hepworth smoked 100 Churchman cigarettes a day. Says she was always worth going to see - the work was all around and the forms so powerful you read them while you were talking. Denis Mitchell was her main assistant then and possibly Brian Wall.

Talks again about how he painted 'The Three Graces' and about the Rubens painting which he copied while at Camberwell. Now is able to look back and knows about construction between shapes and forms. Loves putting three things together. Explains he has drawn three Graces practically every year with a reed pen. Talks about having worked for Barbara and having been put off painting for a while. He became rather disillusioned about the illusionistic side of painting. Thinks this helped him to be stronger on the abstract side and certainly helped with collage. If one uses collage one cuts a positive shape. This gave him more satisfaction than having an expressionistic brush-stroke round the edge. Talks about how he used the chevron shape. Thinks it is no good using marks unless you have a reason - they should not be just decorative marks. He has an idea for a 16 foot long canvas consisting entirely of black and white decorative marks.

Talks about his painting 'Drowning Blue', using the old idea of the harbour. He likes to 'lock the form' and relies upon the lushness of the paint. Says he takes ages to use an idea, a whole event, a whole movement, etc.

Talks about why he moved to Banbury. Says St Ives was changing - so many tourists - very difficult to walk along without meeting someone who wanted to come to the studio. He was becoming rather ambitious, his own gang had gone their different ways and he wanted to go to London.

He found a house in Fulham and put down a deposit of £400. The house turned out to be no good and he got his money back. He went to see an estate agent in Banbury (the village was only an hour away from London) and he and Kath found a house they thought would do. They arrived in freezing weather in February 1964. He used two rooms at the front (North

side) as studios. How to survive? Did not get much money from Waddington (he had told him money was bad for artists!)

Frost wrote to William Scott and asked if he could find him some work. His six children were growing up and Banbury was far more expensive than St Ives. Scott found him a job teaching one day a week in Coventry. This was very useful and he did this for about twelve months. As he got known he was able to find other teaching jobs and gradually he got a bit of an income.

Bertha Schaefer went to see him and warned him about over-producing. When he told Hilton this the latter pointed out to him how many paintings Rembrandt had done. While in Banbury he had a show with Bertha.

When he was at Coventry Fred Spratt asked him to go to San Jose University in California to run a summer course. Spratt had been on a sabbatical to Cornwall and knew everyone. While in Los Angeles and San Francisco he saw wonderful paintings he would never otherwise have seen. He also had a show of his own work at the Legion of Honour and met people who already owned some of his paintings. He also learned about Richard Diebenkorn's work. His students in America were very demanding and liked tough criticisms more so than the British students.

TAPE F4321: SIDE A

Here he talks about his time in San Jose and the spirit of the street in Los Angeles where the galleries were. Says people were delighted to talk about his work and if they liked something they bought it. One did not have to be famous. He was taken to see Yosemite National Park and also a place called Reading. Describes the villages. Says he wrote poetry later, about the facades in the villages. Refers to Nagushi's sculptures and their influence on his own work. The San Jose experience has lasted him a lifetime.

When he returned to UK he was asked by Claude Rogers to go and teach in Reading. He need work only three days a week and would be given a studio and £3,000 a year. Previously he had never earned more than £600. The job helped him pay the mortgage. Leslie Waddington increased his money to £1,000 and he felt his star was rising at last.

Says the set-up at Reading was terribly old-fashioned and he became very involved and ended by taking the first year students with Rita Donagh. He gave his studio up to them and continued painting at home at weekends and at night. Talks about the Victorian method of teaching and explains why it was, in his opinion, so bad - says it had nothing to do with art. He brought in visiting teachers - artists he knew like Bridget Riley, John Hoyland, Adrian Heath, Furnival on topography, someone on music. The students work began to be exciting as a result. Says he learned a lot there and finally had total freedom to walk round any studio. Worked full-time there ultimately and ran the post-graduate course. He became Reader and Professor Emeritus. Says he had some marvellous students including Mali Morris, Clyde Hopkins and Steve Buckley (later Professor of Art there). Angela Weight was also at Reading. Says she once threw red paint over Ted Heath when he was Conservative Prime Minister. Also talks about a student called Will Scott - an amazing character.

Describes a visit to Compton Wynyates (seat of the Marquis of Northampton) which he visited in 1964. Very struck by flags in the chapel with chevrons and black circles and also by a blue moon and semi circle exposed where plaster had been removed. Says he used both

in lots of his paintings since. He also talks about a Cromwellian chair in the chapel while looking at a reproduction.

He describes Banbury with one of the busiest cattle markets in the country and the vegetable market and ancient buildings. Says it has been ruined by modern 'no waiting' and 'no parking' signs. Says he did drawings and photographed the different lorries which came through - loved the way the drivers decorated the radiators and thought this came from the tradition of barge-painting and painting hay carts. Refers to the structure of the buildings and angles of the gables contrasted with the lorries and their loads of sacks of corn giving soft angles. Refers to Barry Flanagan's sculptures.

He stayed in Banbury until 1974 (about 11 years). Explains how he cut down his teaching at Reading to half-time. Says he felt the salary was corrupting him. He was now getting £3,000 a year from Waddington and it had become impossible to devote sufficient time to his students and, at the same time, do good work himself. He wanted to move back to Cornwall and spent a couple of years trying to find a suitable place. When something did turn up Adrian Heath and John Hoskin lent him the money for the deposit and he paid them back when he sold the Banbury house. He never regretted the move. Says he enjoyed teaching but it was a handicap as far as his own painting work was concerned.

END OF TAPE F4321; SIDE A

TAPE F4321: SIDE B

Talks about Bryan Wynter who had also helped him buy the house in Cornwall and then about the members of 'the gang' who had died. E.G. Barbara Hepworth, Bryan Wynter, Roger Hilton. He was still in touch with Patrick Heron and Denis Mitchell. Also mentions that he had met John Wells in 1946/7 but found him unsociable though an excellent observer and a kind-hearted man.

Says he still keeps in touch with Sven Berlin -mainly by letter. Says he enjoys the peace and quiet in Newlyn but likes to go up to London to 'let his hair down'.

Talks about exhibitions arranged for him by the British Council in Canada. Invited to teach in London, Ontario by Eric Atkinson, Head of the Fanshaw School. Visited Alan Wood and Tom Hudson (both with him in Leeds) who were teaching in Vancouver. He also taught at Banff on a summer school. Invited to teach at the University of Western Ontario when Bill Tucker was there. Went to Florida to Talahassee and to Dallas, Texas. From Dallas he went to Sante Fe and saw the Navajo work (blankets, ceramics and so on) all of great interest to him.

Discusses his introduction to acrylics which he first used when at San Jose - says he liked the brightness of the colour and the quick drying property. Discusses how it alters one's technique.

Mentions a visit to an old-established Indian Reservation and also about using his camera. Visually the trip was very exciting. Talks about the Hotel Fonda which Catherine Lampert had told him about and where the paintings by D.H.Lawrence (banned in London in 1926) were on show and which Frost photographed. Describes some of the letters exhibited there and says why they were banned in England.

Says how upset he was while in Dallas seeing churches where paintings were being scraped away from the wall to find the original painting underneath sometimes inferior to the later works. Later visited Mexico - says new places helped him see new things.

In 1977 was sent to Nicosia by the British Council to award some prizes. Cyprus was an eye-opener to a way of life he knew nothing about. Says the people really loved poetry and painting as something that belonged to them. He gained a great deal from their attitude. Saw paintings in caves and monasteries but was appalled by some of the so-called restoration work done by the monks. Talks about the precipitous journey from Paphos to Troodos. Loved Cyprus - it affected his work tremendously - lifted up his heart and made him feel happier about things. He loves colour and remarked on the blue and white check tablecloths, the Ouzo in the bottle and the dish of black olives - perfect harmony he says. Talks about the work he did afterwards, the effect of the light, and the rosy glow when the sun sets. Talks about his various paintings of that period.

Talks here about the black painting (Through Blacks, 1969) owned by the Tate and how it came about when he was teaching at Reading. Gives detailed description of an exercise he had set the students using black and how this inspired him to paint six six foot square canvases in different blacks. Describes how the different blacks are achieved and the conclusion he came to that colour is totally subjective.

END OF TAPE F4321: SIDE B

TAPE F4322: SIDE A

Talks about teaching in Sweden and Norway. John Hoyland introduced him to someone who invited him to teach at a summer school in Ulmea, Sweden. Through Victor Pasmore he taught in Norway and later Adrian Heath taught there too. Talks briefly about his time in Sweden. Says he got a lot of ideas in the mountains and he enjoyed meeting the people. Liked the way they used coloured clothes pegs on the washing lines. Did not like the mosquitoes which plagued him in the evenings. It was the time of the aurora borealis and he found that trying. He did not like the food.

Talks about his exhibition called 'Painting in the Eighties' held in Reading in 1986. Talks about his work then compared with his work now (1994). Talks about his collages and the rhythms one makes from cutting shapes and assembling them and making shapes in between.

Talks about his painting 'Thames Grey' and how he and Prunella Clough were invited by the architect Theo Crosby to go to Unilever House to be shown a space by a window overlooking the Thames. The Directors wanted to have a new painting installed there to add to their collection. Frost was enthusiastic and made a maquette - the Unilever Directors did not like abstract work though they later bought his maquette.

At this stage in the interview he looks at reproductions of 'PZ 1985' and 'Black and White Mooring, 1985' and talks about his view in Cornwall, looking out over Mounts Bay to the Lizard. How he is dominated by the elements, composes poetry to himself, begins a painting by doing a lot of doodles and so on. Refers to Lorca's poetry and how he came to produce the Lorca series of prints. He was not skilled at etching and aquatint so worked with Hugh Stoneman in Islington. Says he was brilliant at making suggestions, did a lot of hand painting on them.

Frost says he has always found poetry a useful adjunct to painting and tried to 'do something' with Manley Hopkins' poems. Has ready translations of Rimbaud poems which have been sent to him but he did not get any images from them. Did a series for Manchester Education

Committee including 'Madrigal' by Auden, 'Black Sun' by Eliot and something based on Blake's 'Yellow Day' and the 'Game of Chess' by Ezra Pound for which he used collage. Says people often send poems to him. Mentions Thomas Campion and John Donne in this connection and a painting he did when Willie Desmond committed suicide.

Talks now about the end of his time with Waddington and how abstract painters never made much money for the dealers. Says Howard Hodgkin gave figurative titles to his abstract paintings which made people happy. Leslie Waddington started to deal in Picasso, Leger, etc. He offered to show Frost's work every two years. Frost had introduced Hilton and Nicholson to Waddington and he now felt irritated by Waddington's lack of loyalty. When he left Waddington he went to the New Art Centre but that was a disaster - it was the only time in his life when he did not sell one picture during an exhibition. Gives his views on galleries and their owners.

Recalls that at the time of his Serpentine exhibition Leslie Waddington said that he had been wrong about Frost's work for the past 15 years; found this depressing at the time but since thinks it the best thing that has ever happened to him. Since then he has had freedom and has been able to live off his paintings. His prices are still reasonable but the paintings he did 30 years ago are more expensive - dealers buy and sell them to each other at auction - this has nothing to do with art he says.

Talks about when Gillian Jason and William Desmond went to see him and bought nineteen paintings which they shared!

END OF SIDE A; TAPE F4322

TAPE F4322: SIDE B

William Desmond bought Frost's work and invited him to lunch when he rented a cottage in Cornwall. Frost talks about Desmond's gallery in Sunninghill where he had a good collection. Says Desmond put on a show of Frost's work which sold well at his gallery in Pied Bull Yard in London. Desmond was interested in a lot of Frost's early work including his drawings. Frost here explains how Desmond published the Lorca suite of prints and how he also arranged a pension for him.

Frost talks about the 'mad money' period when people were buying a lot rather than looking. A lot of that work is now being sold at auction. Says Desmond did him a lot of good.

Frost had six shows in London in 1994 and only sold one painting. Says the Mayor Gallery is only interested in dead artists and only use living artists for 'window-dressing'. They told him, for example, only ten days before the opening that his recent work would be exhibited in the squash court. By this time it was too late for him to pull out. Says it was an insult and had he known three weeks before he would have stopped it.

The Coram Gallery and the Uzitzkin Gallery held exhibitions and the latter exhibited his drawings which sold well. Says he is proud of his early line drawings. Andrew Uzitskin bought a lot of his work.

At the end of the interview Frost is asked about his reaction to having been elected an R.A. Says at his age it doesn't matter. He was against it for years but was invited by Victor Pasmore and Roger de Grey (both R.A.s and both of whom he liked) so he accepted. Says it is useful to have a club in town.

Feels he is not in fashion at the moment but doesn't worry about it too much. Sold recently through the Redfern Gallery and Flowers East and recently had an exhibition in New York at the Addison Gallery on the third floor of the Maak Hotel. He is not well known in New York. Keeping his freedom keeps him going he says.

END OF INTERVIEW

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