

**IMPORTANT**

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NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION

**Artists' Lives**

**DAVID NASH**

interviewed by Denise Hooker

F4717 Side A

[Interview with David Nash at his home on the 7th of June 1995. Interviewer, Denise Hooker.]

David can I start by asking you where and when you were born.

I was born in Esher in Surrey on November the 14th 1945.

And did you have brothers and sisters?

I have an older brother who was born in September of 1939. He was born just before the war and I was born just after the war.

And I wondered if we could go right back now to your memories of your grandparents. Were you close to them?

We saw a lot of both. My mother's father was from New Zealand, I think he was a tailor, they lived in Walton-on-Thames, he and my grandmother, my mother's mother. Very middle-class family, very correct. And my father's parents had lived most of

their lives in Wales, my father was born in Newtown. My father's father I think I knew much better than my mother's father; my mother's father died when I was eight or nine. My father's father, Frederick Nash, was a, he went to Manchester University and was a pharmacist, a chemist, and he was a great entrepreneur, and he did things like buying all the army boots from the British Army after the First World War and selling them to the Turkish Army in one day and made a lot of money. So I think he was in his career, three times he was a millionaire, and he lost it all, so, quite a wild entrepreneur. He had a chemist shop in Montgomery, I remember my father taking me there to show it to me, and also to the chemist in Newtown, and he pointed out the room that he was born in, this was when I was about fifteen. My grandfather, the one in Newtown, bought a lot of, or bought a woollen mill, an abandoned woollen mill and converted it into a toothpaste factory, a powder toothpaste, which I think was sold by post, it was a...he got into this mail order, pharmaceutical mail order. And I believe he...he also had a ginger beer factory, we have a bottle with 'Nash's Ginger Beer' embossed on it. He also invented a cure-all tonic. Very successful businesses, successful enough for him to leave his brother, my great-uncle Oswald, in charge of these various little businesses, and he set up in partnership in Regent Street and started a department store which included a picture gallery which actually had at one time Turners and Constables in it, and he at one point in his life actually owned Turner and Constable paintings. So he had quite a good eye for art.

What sort of date are we talking about?

Oh well, 1918 for the army boots which he sold to the Turkish Army. He did another coup like that with boots I think, or something, other leather goods, but there was a ship strike somewhere en route and all these leather goods rotted, so that deal was an absolute disaster. I think the department store was 1920s, early 1920s. Uncle Oswald was a ne'er-do-well and totally ruined the businesses up in Wales, and my father suffered a serious nervous breakdown, and with that also consequently he...he was swindled by his partner, and he lost the department store.

Did your father take over the department store?

No, no my father was, in the Twenties I guess, he went to... He was in and out of local schools and private schools like a sort of yo-yo, depending on my grandfather's income, or wealth. There was one time when he had two Daimlers and two chauffeurs, and then they would be gone you see and my father was out of private school again and back into the local school. But then he went to Brighton College on the south coast.

Your grandfather?

My father. He was the eldest of five sons, so there was my father Charles, then there was Norman who never forgave my father for being older than him, and there was Ronnie and Geoff and John. I've got a little lost now.

Were you close to your grandfather, that grandfather?

He was an extraordinary character, and he was always very warm towards us but not in a really...I'm trying to think of, you know, this sort of grandfather image of the sort of embracing, and, he always gave us these bear hugs I remember when we arrived, but he was such an eccentric character it was...I suppose I didn't really fully relate to him. My elder brother, six years older, was always making fun of him, so...

What was he like?

He was round, he had white hair. This was in north Wales when I knew him. My grandfather bought a big old house here in the Ffestiniog Valley in 1948 for very little money, which included 44 acres of land, very beautiful land, it's got the Cynfal River running through it. There were some semi-detached cottages which were part of this estate and my father bought a pair of them as an evacuee house, this is 1948, because my mother, while my father was in the Army and in the war, moved 19 times during the Second World War and my father was very convinced apparently that we would have a war with the Soviet Union, and I think one of his strategies was to buy this house as an evacuee house for us. He also helped my grandfather financially, because they were very impoverished then. But they had always lived in big houses and they

had all this big furniture, and I remember it all being very threadbare, and these silk curtains were very thin and quite raggedy, and he no longer had Turners but he had sort of third rate sort of Turner-like paintings. It was a very, extraordinary, mysterious...it was an enormous house with staircases and passages and rooms, and it just seemed like one was in a dream there, so it was a great place to be fooling around and playing when one was a kid. And all our holidays were spent up in this little cottage, and then every day when it was wet we would go down, if it was wet we would go down to this big house and play there or...

Can you describe it?

Big black and white house, it's called Pen-y-Mount, big bay windows. I remember there was this hall-way with a grand staircase going up, and dividing to the left and to the right. It just seemed to be endless rooms, but very dilapidated. It had a sense of grandeur but the implied wealth was not really there.

Do you have any particular memories of it, any objects or...?

Well yes, there was a First World War revolver that my brother and I were always very keen on playing with. There were swords hanging up on the walls. As I said, these threadbare curtains. There was an amazing billiard room which didn't have any billiard tables in it, but it had a lot of old furniture stored in there and we used to make dens in there and tunnels. There were lots of old mattresses and trunks and books. I remember a lot of 'Giles' cartoon annuals from the Second World War there, we used to always enjoy them.

What kind of pictures did your grandfather have then?

They were sort of Dutch interiors, academy sort of landscapes, sort of late 19th century. Some quite nice pieces which have stayed in the family.

Do you remember any in particular?

My brother's got some of them now. I remember there was a ship. Oh yes of course, the great one was 'The Afterglow at Accra', which was a picture of the desert, and it was all sort of, an amazingly red painting with this camel in it with this great gilt frame. And when my grandfather died my Uncle Norman was determined that all these paintings were worth a great deal of money, and there was one dreadful painting of a woman, a melancholic, a very dramatic gesture, he was determined that it was a Goya, and my father would have them valued and then they were told that these were very insignificant paintings and Norman was always saying, 'These people are idiots, they don't know what they're doing,' and he would take them off to be valued somewhere else. And 'Afterglow at Accra' was taken to auction and the only bid was on the frame. (laughs)

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Your grandfather must have been very interested in art to have opened a gallery.

Yes, I think very much in the commercial sense, he was an entrepreneur. But he had great pretensions to be a very cultured man I think, and perhaps he was but it was difficult for me to tell at that age, he died when I was 13.

Did he talk to you about art and encourage you?

Yes he did, he sent me an easel for a birthday present when I was about 9 or 10, and he sent me a dead jay in the post, again when I was about ten.

A dead jay?

A dead jay, because of its colours.

How did you feel about receiving that?

Well I was absolutely fascinated. My mother was furious with him, because she never liked him, she thought he was a pompous old fart I think, and this was just a

typical example of his impulsiveness I think. He was very impulsive I think, as you will have understood from these various descriptions of his business activities.

Yes, I haven't really got a sense of what he was like I don't think, to you.

Oh well he was my...he was this funny old man who lived in this big house that we went to for our holidays, and...

What did you do with him?

Well we sort of moved around him really, I mean he never entered into... I remember him, he was very angry with my grandmother about something and he was weeding in the vegetable garden, he was swearing. That was a fascinating experience. (laughs)  
No I'm sorry, I'm not being...I would need to think more and prepare to give you a picture of it.

Do you know much about his background? Where for instance did he come from?

From the borders of, between, sort of Herefordshire area, Hereford, Shrewsbury. I think his father was a hotelier.

And did he have brothers and sisters?

Yes, something we will probably meet later on in this talk is that, I felt very rejected by the family, or, they would say I rejected myself from the family, and so I haven't had a very great interest, whereas my brother is fascinated with family history, and he knows a lot of the names and he has gone to trace our ancestry and where the name comes from.

Do you know anything about how he was brought up?

No. He went to university in Manchester, and, you know, and became a chemist, so, that gives some indications I guess.

Do you know how he met your grandmother?

No.

And what about her family, do you know where she came from?

I know absolutely nothing about her family at all.

Or what she was doing?

I mean I could find out, I could research it to find out, but it's not a...you know...no, what's interesting is that I don't, and I've never been, I've just never been drawn to be that interested I think. Because there's such a preoccupation with the family by other members of the family, I've always felt it rather unhealthy and I prefer to look away from the family.

Do you know what your grandmother did before she married?

No. Neither of them.

And what about her, what was she like?

Very small, diminutive. Nancy. My father has stories of her tying all five sons to a rope when they went swimming so they couldn't be swept away, because one of the houses that they lived in was on the Severn which ran past the bottom of the garden, and they used to go swimming there. I remember her, my grandfather was mending the roof of this big old house and the ladder slipped away so he couldn't get off the roof, and I can remember somebody calling, calling out, because, you know, this big house was about 500 yards from where this cottage was, and I said to my father, 'What's that, somebody's calling'. He said, 'Oh it's just a shepherd rounding up his sheep.' And this poor old chap was up there all afternoon, and my grandmother must

have heard him but she just left him up there, you know, it was a way of getting a little bit of revenge I think. (laughing)

Did she play much of a part in your childhood?

Very little. She was...I remember her filling up these old china water bottles to air the beds when we arrived, whenever we used to stay there instead of at the cottage sometimes, because the cottage used to be rented out so there were some times when we couldn't stay there so we used to stay in the big house. And she was always cooking, and I remember her peeling a raw carrot for me to eat. And then when my grandfather died I remember her being very lost, and my father and uncle sort of working out how they were going to look after her, and she went quite senile and bed-ridden, and she had a nurse looking after her for about the last five years of her life, and she died in that big old house. I remember coming up to the funeral, I remember seeing her dead, my father was...

How did you feel about that?

Oh this was the first time I had ever encountered a dead body. I remember how the eyes seemed to have sunk; they were shut but they were closed[??] away. And I remember this great nose, extraordinary. She was tiny, she had shrunk. I remember my father, who was the eldest son, and he was in his fifties then, I came home from college one time and he told me that they had just had news that his mother had died, and I remember feeling him very alone, he felt very alone. I think suddenly he was at the front of the family, where, although my grandmother had been in bed for five years, incapable of any conversation, nonetheless she was the generation, she was still representative of the protective generation, and then that wasn't there, and I experienced that, I was about 18 then.

Were you close to her?

No. No, I mean as I say, they lived in Wales and I guess...I can't remember them ever reading to us or playing with us. Because we were always so occupied with our own games.

Would you say that she or both of them were affectionate, took an interest?

They were English middle class so they were as affectionate as the average English middle class can be.

But, so Wales had always played a big part in your life right from your early childhood.

Yes, yes, yes. I can remember, my first memories are in that big house, and discovering one of the back stairways. There's probably only one back stairway but there always seemed to be lots of them, and it was very narrow and incredibly steep, and as I was very short, being about three years old, I was toddling up towards this space, and it just seemed to be like, like it just dropped away into nothing, because my eye level was so low down I couldn't see the stairs until I was right on the top step.

How much time did you spend in Wales?

Well, it could be six weeks in the summer holidays, three or four weeks in the Easter holidays, a week to two weeks in the Christmas. I mean we just loved it there, it was such incredible contrast from Weybridge, this very conservative, English middle class, English... It was the eye of the middle class, Weybridge, it was a hundred per cent Conservative there. My parents always talked about Labour people as if they couldn't possibly ever have met one, these socialists. So that was Weybridge, and it was also owned there, and I sort of knew a small area, and I had my friends, I was at school there, and so most of my time was spent in Weybridge. But the wish was always, the longing was always on this great adventure, because to actually go up by car then, for the last 25 miles coming in towards Blaenau Ffestiniog we were on roads that had grass growing in the middle, it was just two strips of tarmac coming over the

Moelwyns, and the journeys would take nine hours, and we would start really early in the morning, 4 o'clock in the morning. They were tremendous adventures. And we would always break down, there was always the mending the car, and there were various scrapes that we had. It was like a military manoeuvre. My father was an army man so everything he did had this sort of military preparation and organisation about it.

So how would you spend those holidays?

When it wasn't raining, which was about three-quarters of the time, we either went to Black Rock Sands or the Harlech beach, or, because my grandfather's land was 44 acres of wild, you know, he had his vegetable patch and they had a lawn, it was like a quarter of an acre which they looked after, the rest was wild, and there was a chestnut wood on the Allt Goch with the Cynfal river, which apparently, some of the stories of the Mabinogion take place in the Cynfal valley. And down in the Cynfal there's an incredible rock that's perched right by the stream and I can remember experiencing that when I was probably four years old and it was a very special place, it was...it was powerful stuff. So all my nature experience happened in Wales, and particularly in that Cynfal valley. My brother was incredible at playing and inventing games, and always very ambitious building projects of huts and dams, he was always trying to dam the Cynfal. And as there was a six-year gap he felt very, not threatened by me, so he was very protective towards me, and I owe him a lot I think, he taught me how to play, he was fantastic.

Can you remember some of those games?

Yes, well we were...my father was in the Army in the war and my brother had experienced this from age one to age five, six, with his father away and then would come back, and dressed in his uniform and everything. So army games were a big thing, and we had a lot of my father's holsters and water bottles and hats, berets and stuff, so, you know, it was just pure imitation, we would play these games with this imaginary enemy. So this word 'imaginary' was...I never knew what it meant for years, what this special word meant. We were digging trenches a lot. You know,

there were some vacant plots of land near where we lived in Weybridge, we lived down this cul-de-sac. My father had bought a little plot of land and he was the first one to build a house down this cul-de-sac, we were at the very end, where there was like a sort of turn-around there. But it was a rough road, it wasn't made up until after we left there. So we did a lot of what we would do in Wales in those plots of land, you know, digging trenches. There was fantastic gang warfare against the neighbouring street, they had a gang of kids, so there was a lot of missiles toing and froing.

I was interested that you mentioned about the rocks in the streams in Wales. Would it be too much to think that there was any connection between that and your 'Wooden Boulder'?

Oh yes I think so, and in catalogues I have drawn the connection by actually having a picture of that rock, and I let people make...you know, have the two experiences together. Though I still go and see that rock now, I think it's like a sort of, it's a touchstone, and it's quite hard to actually get to, and so this sort of scramble along the edge of the Cynfal has always been a very special sort of journey for me.

Why do you think Wales has become so important for you?

Well simply because we came here, and my father had a very strong connection and always regarded himself as being a Welshman, although he is not a Celt, he was English, he had an English folk song, he wasn't a Welsh, he didn't have a Welsh folk song.

And the huts? I was thinking of your huts.

Yes, well it's all this...these echoes and how it metamorphoses. And when I had children of my own and seeing them play and how there was nothing between them and the play, there was no anxiety about the history of play and how did what they were playing fit in with the history of playing (I'm making the analogy with an artist, how does my work fit in with the history of art), that you go for it directly, and I've

been trying to work intelligently but with that freedom of playing. So there's a...I mean I've been talking about, or you have drawn me to be talking about what it was like for me when I was a child. And this outdoor activity was right there from the beginning again because of my father being a very practical man, because after the war, rationing, we had a lot of chickens, this was in Weybridge, my father was quite an entrepreneur too, and I can remember him cutting a tree down in our garden in Weybridge and splitting it into lengths to build a chicken house, and I can remember the gleam of light as it seems to be when you split wood open, fresh wood, there's a brightness in the wood there.

How old would you have been then?

About four I should think, three, maybe three, four.

Just to go back to those grandparents, your paternal grandparents, were they...what influence if any do you think they had on you?

Well this eccentricity of my grandfather I think, and hearing the stories of his business activities, and this impulsiveness, rising again out of disasters. He was I think quite a hero to me. For my father it was dreadful, and I don't think they had a very good, they didn't have a very good relationship, a very difficult relationship. But because of my father's experience he set about very solid, building solid foundations. So although I have a great difficulty with this middle-class upbringing, but he built, he protected us and it was secure. I had an incredibly secure childhood.

But you were attracted to what your grandfather represented?

Yes because you can if you are secure. And I guess I have...somebody observed when I was at school, I had an autograph book which I had when I was about 14, and I got my friends to write, sign the book, and some made comments. I didn't know you did this in autograph books but this guy, Chris Stracey, said, 'Tends to be too hasty about me'. (laughing) I often remember that, because I still am to this day, I'm still too hasty.

Well what about your mother, your maternal grandparents?

Well my mother's father, as I said, died when I was about 8 or 9. I just remember him being very tall and he had a moustache and was quite tall and thin, and I can only remember him sort of whirling me round and round and round. It was always fun to go there - no it wasn't fun to go there, it was not something I didn't like doing but we would go there, but it was all very formal.

And where was this, David?

When?

Where.

Walton-on-Thames, which is next to Weybridge. And then when he died my grandmother continued to live in this house, which had an amazing orchard, and I remember every autumn all the grandchildren, of which there were...well, seven of us I think, we would go and pick the apples for her.

How old would you have been then?

Oh this would have been from the age of 6 to 15, 16 I guess.

And, what did he do, that grandfather?

I think he was a tailor, I think I mentioned this earlier on, a merchant tailor.

And where did he come from?

He was from New Zealand, he was a New Zealander.

Do you know when he came to England, or what brought him?

The Vickery family, and apparently there was a relation to one of the Prime Ministers of New Zealand.

Did you say the Vickery family?

Yes.

That sounds like somebody I ought to know about, which I don't.

Well no, they were...my mother's maiden name was Vickery, so his name was Vickery, so there was some connection with.....

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F4717 Side B

And what was he like?

I've no idea what he was like. I only remember him as being tall, thin, and with a moustache, that's all I can think about him, from memory.

Did you ever hear any stories about how he was brought up, his background?

No, no. I might have done, but they haven't stuck.

And your grandmother?

Well she was this round...very independent, quite fiercely independent. Most of her family lived immediately around, in the area, so, it was our turn every fourth Sunday I think to have my grandmother. But I was very fond of her, and I felt she was very supportive to me in my ambitions to be an artist, because she was very artistic, she did needlework, and did, you know, extremely high quality needlework, embroidery.

Do you know what she did before she married?

No, probably nothing.

So what was her family like?

There is Auntie Nell, now yes, she was amazing. Auntie Nell lived in Harlech, up here, and then occasionally she would come and stay with us, and I can remember getting into bed with Auntie Nell in the morning and she would read to me. She was this really cuddly spinster, and she was a lot of fun, I really liked her.

Did the whole family come up from Wales?

No she went there in the Second World War as one of these nineteen evacuee places that my mother was at. My grandfather had a place in Harlech, that was my father's father and mother, and my mother's mother and father also were in Harlech at the same time, but not for the whole of the war. It was a way of getting out of London.

So what do you remember about those maternal grandparents' house?

Oh, a painting of a lion. Very feminine, thinking back on it now, I wouldn't have thought that when I was a child. Everything in its place. A lot of china ornaments. Very Victorian - well I guess Edwardian is really the time, I think both my parents were really brought up in that Edwardian time, and their values and their mannerisms were very much connected with that era.

And so, did you spend much time with that grandmother?

Never stayed there, but she was part of my life then, and I...yes, I possibly would have visited her on my own, you know, when I was an adolescent, I think.

And how would she have spent her time?

Well she did this needlework. She was...she enjoyed playing the family off against each other, there were always these little intrigues, and she had managed to upset one family in relationship to another family.

I don't think I've quite got it clear in my mind, these sort of aunts and uncles.

Well my mother was the second of four in the family. There was Joan, who my father was first interested in but then through Joan met my mother, Dora. Then there was Brenda, who, she was exciting, she went to Africa, she did things like going to Africa, and exotic places. And then there was Peter, who was the youngest of the family. And they all lived in the area, except Brenda who was always off somewhere.

So that was your mother's family.

Yes, my mother's family.

You said your father was one of five.

Five, yes, he was the eldest of five, and they lived all over the country, and they all went through the war, they were all in the Army and they all survived.

Well I suppose I was thinking more then of your great-aunts and uncles, I was thinking more of the brothers and sisters of your grandparents.

Yes, I don't know anything about my father's father's, except Oswald. My father always used to use him as an example of a ne'er-do-well and I would end up like that, like Uncle Ossy.

And that paternal grandmother?

No she was such a shadow behind my grandfather that, I can't remember her ever being mentioned. But again it might have been but it hasn't stuck. And then my mother's father, I know nothing about his brothers and sisters, and of my mother's mother, I don't know anything about them.

But you think that your maternal grandmother did have an influence on you?

Yes, she was supportive, interested, so she would, like, give me paintbrushes for my birthday, paints. And my Aunt Brenda used to do portraiture, so she was...but only, you know, evening class, amateur.

Perhaps we should move on to your parents.

Yes I think we've exhausted grandparents.

So where did they come from, your mother and your father?

My mother was brought up in Weybridge I guess. She went to a school there, she was head girl there, she was very sportive, sporting. She played in Junior Wimbledon, she was passionate about tennis. A very practical person. And my father was, as I said, was born in Newtown, and spent most of his young years in elementary education in Newtown, Montgomery and Aberdovey, and then there was a move to London, but they lived near where my mother lived, they had a big house down there.

What were they doing when they met?

Well he was...probably a tennis club or something like that, I would imagine.

No, I meant their occupations.

Occupations, oh my father, he came out of school, this private boarding school, Brighton College, and it was the Depression, his first job was walking greyhounds, so he never went to college or university, you know, because there just wasn't the money to pay for him to go through college. Then he got a job with Sun Life Insurance, and he was also in the Territorial Army and he became a...he got a commission as an officer in the Territorial Army, so when the war started he was called up, you know, full-time, he was in Dunkirk. But we could get to the war years a bit later I guess.

How do you think he was brought up? You suggested that it was very erratic.

Yes, well, yes, he was, as I said he was in and out of these private schools and then back to the local school, but then he had a very stable time at Brighton College, which, he really loved it there, he just had a great time there, and his ambition was for my brother to go there, so we were sent there, and he just could never understand how we hated it, because it just wasn't the same, the regime was quite different by the time we were there. It was ghastly, but we can get to that later on.

What was it like when he was there?

Well he had had a...well, I can only...he had a great time, I can't tell you anything more than that, only that there was a lot of sports, they were always getting out and they were going drinking, and, it was a hell of a lot of fun, it was great. I don't think the academic pressures were so intense then.

Do you know what he was interested in particularly?

He was a hunting and shooting; fishing was always so important to him. My grandfather after these various disasters in London became a farmer, and he apparently bred quite a famous herd of cattle, but they all, you know, they got foot and mouth and had to be destroyed, and so he built up another herd and they got foot and mouth and they were destroyed. Very unlucky.

Well he was certainly versatile.

(laughs) Yes. So, my father had quite a lot of farm experience too. So his background was...he had to survive out of his own resources I think, that was really what my grandfather gave him. There wasn't any wealth for him to build on, he had to...he started from scratch, and built up a very successful career as an insurance executive, he was manager of Eagle Star Life Insurance, and after the war, with his gratuity from the Army, he was kept in the Army for two years after the war in military government in Germany so he got quite a good gratuity when he left and was able to buy some big old houses in Weybridge, in St. George's Hill, and converted them into flats, so he always had a property business. So again, for my brother and I there was always work, he was always very keen on us learning the value of money and work and you get a reward, and there were always Saturday jobs and weekend jobs and the holiday jobs.

What kind of things would you do?

Oh, a lot of decorating, digging holes for fence-posts, creosoting fences.

Was this for him?

It was for...yes, for this business. Because he was going to have to pay someone so he was paying us an hourly rate.

And you think he met your mother at a tennis club?

It would have been in that sort of social connection, yes.

Well now, what about your mother's upbringing?

Well I mean, I've already mentioned what I know. She was the head girl of this elementary school, and, I guess it was the secondary school too, and then she went to secretarial college, and I've already mentioned about the sports. I think, I can't think of anything...

Was she a secretary when they met?

Yes, yes I think so.

And was it her maiden name that was Vickery?

Yes.

How do you think your parents got on?

It was a rock solid marriage, it was...they got on extremely well, it was, you know, I would have thought a very successful marriage. Very supportive to each other, but it was in an old style, it was in an old...it was an Edwardian style marriage. My mother was a housewife. I remember my sister-in-law taking her up with some feminist issues, and why doesn't my father wash up and everything, and she always used to say, 'Well why should he? He does all those other things. It's not a problem'.

What sort of part would your father have played in the family?

Again it was an Edwardian structure. He was like the demi-god, and I remember being...I was always very frightened of him, I was afraid of him. I think my first two years when I was born I didn't see very much of him, and my mother, so I understand, was in quite a nervous state when I was born, I think the war had absolutely exhausted her. And by then my, when the war ended my mother, or probably before the war ended, had moved back to this house in Woodland Way, which is this cul-de-sac which I have mentioned before, which, my father had bought the land and he had got a mortgage and he built this house, and a lot of the other houses were built in the same, on the same plan, the same architectural plan. And the people who lived next-door were very close friends to my parents, and the mother there, Mary, was my godmother, and I think for the first two years she pretty much brought me up. I think my mother was just completely exhausted. And so, we were living down the end of this cul-de-sac, this rough road with lots of big puddles whenever it rained, and we were in and out of all the various little houses around us. It was a real little community.

What was the house like?

It was detached, it had a lot of, my father had designed it so he had sort of brought a lot of aspects of architecture which he liked, which were like...it was mock-Tudor in one way, because, you know, it had painted wood on the outside of it to make it look like a Tudor house. It had diamond-leaded windows. It was a classic little middle-class suburban house.

And what about inside?

I can remember every detail of it. I can remember the brick fireplace in the living-room, the ornaments in a bay window, the French windows which went out into the garden. The garden was great, we had a quite high yellow brick wall, very old, running down one side, which was very high, about ten feet high, so that over that side I never went, I never knew what over there, it was a mystery over there. But on the other side was my godmother's garden.

How old are we talking about now?

From age, when I was born up to the age of 10, then we moved to another house, which was a very important experience, moving.

Perhaps you could describe the house to me more inside. I mean what about those ornaments?

My mother died recently and I've got some of them now. There was a very curious glass object which had a sort of, an insertion of glass which, it looked like...it's something to do with heating wine, mulling wine, but I've never figured out how it could possibly work. There were a lot of little china animals, Staffordshire dogs. It was very small actually; it wasn't small to me because I was small.

A small house?

Yes. But it was very sort of compact, and there were...the kitchen, there was a stove in the kitchen, there was a garage, lots of tools. I remember my father straightening nails, he always, whenever he pulled anything apart he would save all the nails, all these bent nails and straighten them out. You know, it was rationing, so... Rats, because of the chickens, he was always down there with a - well not always down there but he often was down there with a shotgun shooting rats. Very exciting.

Yes. What would have been the centre of the house, which room?

The dining-room, it was a dining-room cum living-room. The kitchen, which I have always felt is the centre, if you were an Edwardian is not the centre, you know, your living-room, which is for the weekend, and then your dining-living-room is really the centre, that was where the fire always was, it was a coal fire, there was always an open fire there.

When you say you didn't see much of your father for the first two years, was that because he was in Germany?

Yes, yes he was in military government.

And so your mother was on her own?

Yes. But we were in this community, so, I virtually lived next-door, I seemed to be as much there as I was in my own home.

And what...it was Mary, wasn't it?

Yes.

What was Mary like?

Oh she was wonderful. She was from New Zealand, and her husband, Geoff. They were very important to me, that family. He was a graphic designer in Babcox & Wilcox, which is an engineering company, and he made movies, he made films about their sort of holidays, and that he would, every couple of times each winter he would...he had all this projection equipment for 16mm film and he would hire in films and we would have a film session. My father always went to sleep and snored, and Geoffrey always said, because he used to wake up when the lights go on, 'Did you enjoy that Charles?' 'Oh yes, yes yes, jolly good, jolly good.'

And what their name? Mary what?

Mary and Geoff.

And their surname?

Peacock.

Peacock?

Yes, Peacock. And they had two children, David and Elizabeth, both older than me, but because he was a graphic designer there was always art going on in there, there was painting and drawing, was part of their life, so it became part of my life, and that was really where I was introduced to art.

So from about what age?

Well from whenever I could...I can't remember, but, I can only remember that that was an activity that was always going on there. Geoff was very creative with his Christmas decorations, and the parties which they had there. Quite an intense, anxious man, but, he was always into the latest technology, he was the first one to get a...they were the first ones to have a television in the street, so I can remember watching the Coronation in '52 on their TV.

Was that a big event in the community?

Yes, I was kind of bored by it, but... You mean them having a TV or the Coronation?

Well both actually.

Well the Coronation, you know, this is Tory-land here, and you know, these are Empire people.

Were you rejecting this even under 10?

(laughing) The seeds were getting there. I found the Coronation an immense bore. But you could say that it was a quasi-military family I was in, although it was not my...my grandfather was not involved in the First World War, other than being an entrepreneur, and possibly...yes, yes, I think we'll leave it at that, as an entrepreneur. But my father was obviously very very attracted to the services, and that was very important to him.

And did you paint next-door with this man?

Yes.

And he taught you, would you say, or...?

Well he didn't but his kids did, who were older than me, David and Elizabeth, so, David would have been the same age as Chris, six years older than me, and Elizabeth was probably four years older than me. I would just copy what they were doing, imitation, that's what children do, and I was picking it up. And so I got good at it, so, compared to my peers at school, so I appeared to be the artist, and if you get praise for doing something when you are at school, especially when you are very young, you tend to focus on that. So that's where that... But there's a whole combination of influences which I think is what you are trying to...is what you're aiming at, you know, what were these very early formative influences, and it was the practicality of my parents and their sort of very straightforward entrepreneurial ventures with these properties, and if you want to build a chicken run, though you can't buy the wood, because it just isn't there, then you get it out of a tree. And then this artistic quality going on next door. Music didn't play a big part in my family, but next door Elizabeth was learning the piano. We were always woken up by Elizabeth playing the piano and my godmother scraping the toast. She had this ability to burn the toast every morning. [DN MAKES SCRAPING NOISE]

Tell me about Mary.

Well I loved her, I absolutely adored her. I can't ever remember a cross word from her towards me. I seemed to be getting into trouble at home, but there was never any trouble with Mary. And I can remember going in there a lot in the morning and I would help her make the beds, and...

From a very young age?

Very very young, yes. So it was a...there was a work sense there. In fact what we do in the Steiner kindergarten is actually, one tries to instil that feeling of rhythm, and this is what you do, this is how you make a bed, this is how you fold up a shirt, and this is...you know, all these sort of rhythms, practical, very practical, basic home things. So, I think that was important, I felt really safe there, very very safe. There was a painting by a Pole of my father in his Army uniform which used to hang on the landing, the upstairs landing, and that, what we call the landing, it's where the...at the top of the stairs there was a space and there was a corridor and I used to play there a lot, and there was always my father's...it was one of those paintings where the eyes follow you everywhere, and it was always...I was always being watched over. You know, I was always afraid of him, and there was this very strong authoritarian approach towards children. And my father sort of felt that my mother dealt with us; he dealt with the moral principles of what should be done and what was right and what was wrong. But he was also great at playing, I remember, these fights with him would go on, because of my brother's gang, I would be about 6, and in the time in the autumn when there are acorns around, there was this...we were always trying to hit my dad with these acorns, or, they were water bombs and things, and he used to love all this. He was trying to garden, but the gardening was always distracted with him creeping up behind us.

I wonder if we could get more of a sense of Mary, her personality.

Well, in retrospect looking back on it now, it was probably very bland. I remember her handwriting, she used to write me these long letters when I was at school, and postcards; when they moved back to New Zealand she sort of kept in touch, and it was always, as I got older I found it all rather boring, but when I was very very young there was just this love coming from her.

It sounds as if she was very reassuring and...

Yes.

Comforting.

Yes. And, I was part of her family. Christmas-time was always very, was great there.

There, rather than your own house?

Oh no, because we would share. If we weren't in Wales then our Christmases were...and the two houses would take it in turns to do the Christmas meal and then the Boxing Day meal, so the two families were very very closely connected.

And what was Christmas like?

It was with all these relatives, and I remember my father was always very funny, and he would always tell us his very funny stories from the Second World War. That was his great moment I think, the Second World War, it was when he was completely himself, and his human qualities, he was a very humorous man, and as an officer it seemed that, you know, he was a very successful officer, he had the respect of his men but they also knew he had a warmth, he wasn't just authoritarian. Control, it was from personal vanity[??]

What rank did he rise to?

Lieutenant Colonel. So he was in Dunkirk, and he was blown up on a bridge, because he was getting his men across the bridge and he was the last one over and the Royal Engineers were blowing all the bridges up to stop the Germans crossing, and he was still on the bridge when it was blown up, and he got hit on the back of the head with a brick. And he was dumped in a field hospital and told to surrender, but, and they were left there. So he found someone who, one of the other people who were left there and knew how to drive a tank, and he found a tank which was still working, so he got them all onto this tank, all the people in this field hospital, and they drove to Dunkirk in this tank, on this tank. And then he got back, and then he was in Africa, so he saw a lot of action there, and got dysentery. And then he was in the landings in Italy and he played a very important part in the Battle of Monte Cassino, and he was in charge of a crossing of the River Rapido, which was successful. And then actually

in the middle of that battle, orders came for him to go to staff college because they wanted him for military government in France and in Germany, so then he went back to England then he learned German, learned to speak German. And then, he was following the progress of the landings, and as villages and towns were occupied it was his job to organise the people, the civilians, to sort the water supplies out, the food, the sanitation, you know, to sort of get the towns working again. And then there was the crossing of the Rhine, and then he was doing the same work in Germany. Apparently he drove into one town where the German Army hadn't left, so he quickly drove out again.

Do you think he found it difficult to adjust to civilian life?

Well he continued in the Territorial Army and in the Home Guard, he continued...he was a very good shot, and won quite a lot of competitions with a 303.

Did he teach you to shoot?

Yes, he was...my brother had a '410' shotgun when he was 14, but I was never very interested in killing birds.

And how did he feel about that?

Well there wasn't anything he could really...a sense of disapproval I suppose, I wasn't living up to... I think that was about when I began to... Coming up to Wales there was, one of the activities was going shooting grouse here, so my brother had his '410' and I had my air-gun which was totally useless of course, so, I went along with it in imitation, but it got to a point where I didn't like shooting these birds, so I didn't go along any more.

Was he affectionate to you?

In his way, but again as I said before, this Edwardian middle class English family.

End of F4717 Side B

F4718 Side A

I asked if your father was affectionate to you.

Yes, well...the word affectionate isn't what comes to mind in my relationship with my father. He was deeply caring, and I know he really loved us, my brother and I, but it was...he had this certain intensity which created anxiety, so he wasn't relaxed, he was very worried about the world and how it was going, and he was always very concerned that we wouldn't go off the rails, and this whole idea of us going to public school, and we would be professionals, we would have the right attitudes, right Conservative attitudes, he was very anxious about us going astray. So there was always an underlying tension there, you know, we had to do well at school. There was a lot of expectation and a lot of assumptions made, or assumptions maintained, which inevitably caused great friction, particularly when I was sent off to boarding school, which I loathed. I think it's important to talk about this stammering, which is a curious trait in the family and it's probably imitation, and whether my father stammered or not I don't know when he was younger, I am led to believe that he probably did, but my brother picked it up either from him or from somewhere, and so I imitated him. Because I remember around 6 years old is probably when I started, and it got pretty bad, very bad, but by the time I got to 13 I had actually managed to develop a sense of my self through it. Because what stammering does, it tends to make you shut up, it makes you listen more, and where one would have stepped in or would have affected a conversation or a flow of activity, one didn't. And I guess it made me more observant. It's interesting how handicaps are strengths, or they are there for a purpose, and I think this was very important for me. But by the time I got to 13 and I was at the, in the sixth form of the preparatory school that I was at, which was a day school which I was very happy at in fact, at the end, I wasn't earlier, I found it pretty difficult, but...however at the end I had sort of sorted it out and I wasn't stammering. And then I was sent off to this boarding school where my brother had gone, and he had had a terrible time there, but my father was very determined that I should go there as well, and this school systematically set about demoralising me, and worked at destroying this confidence which I had managed to develop, and because I was...I got aware of myself probably a bit more than my peers were because of this

stammering handicap, I could see what they were doing, and I was absolutely appalled. And I remember, I was probably in my second term there, being so angry, and I can remember the spot that I was standing on, and I actually determining that I was not going to be moulded by these people, and I really declared war on them, and in a way I then declared war on my parents, because they were doing this to me, they were aiding and abetting what these people were doing, which were the staff, the whole ethos of the school, of what Brighton College was, what it represented, and this moulding one into these certain sort of attitudes. And I had friends there who were also dissidents, and they were very important influences on me. And unfortunately there was a brilliant art master, quite extraordinary that he should be in this situation, but, we'll possibly go into that in a bit more detail later on.

Well I think we certainly will come back to Brighton College. Presumably it was your father that disciplined you, rather than your mother?

No, I think as I've said before, my father set the rules, but it was for my mother to carry them out. So he was like in the...he was this mystic force in the background, whereas, 'I'll tell your father about this,' you know, that was absolutely terrible, because there was this... You know he had a lot of authority, natural authority.

At that young age, did you, I mean before Brighton College, did you have conflict with him, open conflict? What I'm really asking I suppose is, how did you get on with him?

(laughs) Well there is a history of difficulty with the father-son relationship, seems to be in the family, and he had a very difficult time with his father I think, and my brother, six years older than me, I watched that relationship deteriorate and be very very difficult, and I learned some strategies from that of how to minimise that, keeping my head down, not coming out with how I felt, because that just seemed to create arguments and strife and tension. But it was, the real damage was being sent...because actually, as I've said, he, though I was very afraid of him, it was a secure family situation, and this preparatory school, which was called Wallop, because it had been in Nether Wallop in the war so it was just called Wallop, and it

moved back to Weybridge and it retained this ridiculous name, Wallop, I mean it's absurd. And the headmaster was a Colonel Biss. But there was a robustness about this school.

Colonel...?

Biss. Not Piss, Biss, B-I-S-S. He was a very tall man, and he had another diminutive little wife. And there were some real characters teaching there. There was a Major Hole who taught Latin, another very authoritarian, bald, and we were all frightened of him. And then there was Ken Daniels who taught maths and geometry, and he had a very important influence on me. And I think this is probably a good juncture, because we're talking about preparatory school, I remember being introduced to geometry, and he had a blackboard ruler and a blackboard compass, and with the blackboard ruler he drew a straight horizontal line, and he told us he was going to construct a right angle; we had no idea what a right angle was, but... He then just drew, he made a mark in the middle of the line, a short vertical stroke across the line, which created a point at a particular place on this horizontal line, then he put the point of the blackboard compass on there, and then there was a piece of chalk in the other end of this compass, and keeping the same radius, he made a mark across the horizontal line on the left and a horizontal line across on the right, equidistant from this first, seemingly arbitrary point, but now it was very specific, these two. Then the compass point was moved to the left-hand end, and a stroke was made above the line and a stroke, you know, an arc was made below the horizontal line, and the compass was moved to the other point and an arc was again made which crossed the first arc above and across the arc below, then he joined the two lines vertically, and it created a right angle. And this was one of the first experiences I had where it made my hair stand on end it was...I was deeply thrilled by this, and, I don't remember when I first remembered back to this moment, but I can remember it happening, it was obviously very important. I recognised something, something was being actually constructed in front of me which I had a relationship with, I already had something in me which related with that; I didn't understand that then because I was only 11, 10 or maybe 11 years old. So geometry, maths and algebra, I was very good at, I really connected with those. Algebra less because it was abstract; geometry more because it was in picture,

there were pictograms. Maths, they were beginning to relate maths to the real world then and so there was a certain quality of narrative with maths which made me...so I was able to connect with that. Very important experiences for me later on because I've got a confidence with mathematics and with engineering as a result. But these facts, that there are 360 degrees in a circle and there are always 180 degrees in a triangle, no matter how long the lines are. But to go back to that image of the right angle being constructed, what's important is that where the lines crossed there was a specific point, but it didn't matter how long the lines were, they were of arbitrary length. What was important was the point where they crossed. So it was specific but loose, and that's a fundamental quality in my work, that I think that's one of the things I've been trying to bring into the sphere of sculpture. Tight but loose.

Were you as interested in art at that point as in algebra and...?

Yes, I was very good at it so I was praised for it a lot, and we had a wonderful woman called Miss Pennington as our art teacher, and...

What was she like, and what did she teach you?

She smoked Kensitas cigarettes, and she had rather straggly grey hair. I think she was probably a bit like Claire, although Claire doesn't smoke Kensitas cigarettes and she hasn't got grey straggly hair, but she had rosy cheeks and she had a certain life about her which was not present in the other teachers.

Do you remember her better in fact, have a more vivid memory of her than the other teachers?

Yes, but the first teacher I had when I was 6 years old after kindergarten, my first one, her name was Mrs Thomas, she was the wife of our doctor, she was a very kind woman and I felt very secure there. And then we had Mrs Hole, and this was in my second year so I was 7, 8 years old, she was the wife of Major Hole and she again was a very kind woman, not with the same warmth that Mrs Thomas had but she was nice. And then in the third form we had Miss Woolly who was a...she was a pretty

tyrannical teacher. She was a very odd looking woman, she was big, and she was a professional teacher, she wasn't like the others, she was going to teach us something, and I didn't get on with her way, there was a lack of warmth I suppose, and I was pretty bright but I slipped with her. I remember she was very...she did a lot of plays and making puppets, and I was good at all that, but my maths slipped back, and, she had a way with doing nature study which I just loathed, I thought, oh God, no, not nature study, which is interesting, thinking back, considering the way I work. And then we moved on to the fourth form, and then we had Mr Coates. He smoked all the time. He wore very tight trousers. He had long wavy hair, he was quite vain I think, he was a bachelor, and he was just a prep school teacher as a way of making some money, and he taught history and he was terrible, a hopeless teacher, and that was like a limbo-land really. And then we moved into...I guess this was probably quite an important experience, we moved into the next, to the fifth form, and lower fifth, and we got through six teachers in one year, we just, we became a demonic mob, and we found that we had a power, it was quite frightening really, and it just...

How old?

11? 12 maybe, getting on for 12, 11. We had a teacher, Mr Osborne, that we, he was the first one and he had been there for some time but actually, he was pretty good really, but, he cracked up I guess. Then after that there was a succession of assemblies when the headmaster would say that Mr so-and-so, the teacher of the lower fifth can't be with us any more because he's had a nervous breakdown, and it was us. It was terrible really, thinking back on it, but we were...we would ambush these teachers, we would get there really early in the morning, this whole class, and we would take all the furniture out and hide it, all the desks, and then we would all go away and then pretend we were arriving. 'Where's the desks and...Sir, where are all the desks?'

This was a boys' school, was it?

Yes yes, it was an all boys day school, you know, preparatory day school. And then they got a really heavy guy in and we got very...Mr Bright, and he used to knock us

around something terrible, but we got rid of him. (laughing) We set fire to the classroom, and... These are aluminium-clad, prefab sort of classrooms which were built for us lot, and it had sort of frames, metal frames up in the roof. I remember we put all the library books in our class, library books balanced on this angle-iron up in the roof, and this Mr Bright would always come in and really slam the door, and the whole building would shake, so all these books were poised ready for him as he came in. And he would always pause and look at us, glare at us and tell us to get to our desks, and then he would slam the door so then he would make his great entry. And as he slammed, all this cascade of books. And then we seemed to calm, we went into...then we moved on to upper fifth, lower sixth, lower sixth, or 6B I think it was then, with Ken Daniels, he was a very experienced teacher, he was our maths teacher, from when we were in this other class, and we all liked him, he was our games teacher. And we just settled down, no more problems.

Were you good at games?

Yes, football, cricket, hockey especially, I could really whack it, and I really liked that game.

Wood on wood.

Yes, yes. And cricket was fun, we had a lot of fun doing that, we had a lot of laughs, and I was a bowler, I was very good at bowling; I wasn't very good at batting but bowling. So when I went on to the next school it was very serious and it wasn't fun any more so I just stopped, I quit. But rugby, we were taught a little bit of rugby at this preparatory school in...because we were...the ones who had stayed on after the 11-plus were obviously being aimed at public schools, or grammar schools, so we were taught a little bit of rugby there, and I took to that game, and actually that's been, although I'm embarrassed to come out with it, there is a...it is a game where you use your whole body, and there's a lot of strategies involved, and it's a very intelligent game, but it's very raw at the same time, so there's a sort of a similarity of it being tight and loose, it's sort of intellectual but very physical, and I was good at it, and again if you're good at something you... And for my age I was quite big actually, I

was... Wallop had been a very healthy experience, but when I went to Brighton I just was stopped really, and I actually stopped growing.

Do you look upon it as quite a happy time at Wallop?

The last couple of years were, yes, and I was... The big thing for me then was the big local hotel had an outdoor pool, a swimming pool, and one could, if you were a local resident you could join, you could buy a season ticket and become a member of this, of the Oaklands Park Hotel swimming club.

What was it called?

The Oaklands Park Hotel, which we lived almost next door to. Because there was an experience I have left out, which is, at the age of 10 my father bought at auction a very big house in Weybridge, he was doing very well with his property company and had a very good promotion in Eagle Star Insurance, and he was able to buy a beautiful house built around 1790, 1800. It had the oldest mulberry tree in Britain in the garden, it was in the 'Guinness Book of Records', planted by James I. And it had a very big garden and he was able to sell five plots, five building plots.

You kept the tree?

Somebody else got the tree, but we planted another mulberry tree in the front of this garden. And there had been a servants' quarters built on to this house which my father pulled down, had pulled down, because the house, it was too big, and he wanted a yard, and there were a lot of outbuildings, there were some old stables, a two-storey building. And one of the jobs that my brother and I had was cleaning bricks, and my father kept all the bricks from this house which, this part of the house which was demolished, and with these blunt old axes we would cut all the cement off them. I remember one great event when these bricks were stolen, or some of these bricks were stolen, somebody just came in in the night and nicked them, and there was this great drama. My father found them and put them back again. (laughs) And he built a big wall at the bottom of the garden with these bricks. And there was a

great deal of wood that came out of this part of the house which was demolished, and there was a big scrap pile which was going to be used for fire wood, and there was a big pile that my father kept which was useful wood. Because of the war and the rationing etcetera we all got into the habit, everyone was still in the habit then of keeping whatever might be useful. So I used to make soap-box carts with this wood, and I built a fort, you know, with several storeys in it, I built a tower at aged 10, 11. So wood as a building material cum play has sort of always been with me.

And the tower.

Yes, the early towers.

Perhaps just to finish with your time at that preparatory school, what subjects interested you most?

History, we had an incredible man teaching history. His name was Somerset Plantagenet Fry, and he won...

Was that his real name?

Yes that was his real name. And he won 'Double Your Money' with Hughie Green twice, I remember we were very proud of him being on TV. But he never went for the £1,000 prize, he always dropped out at 500, because he didn't want to loose the 500; he was smart. And he had been teaching at the school when I was very young but I didn't have him as a teacher, but my brother did, and he was a brilliant teacher, and whoever was in his class became a historian. And he just made it alive, really alive. And he became a friend of the family, so he used to come round quite a lot, my parents had him for dinner. He was bald and he had a bright red beard, and he wore very tight trousers and winkle-pickers, and he was just such a gas, he would make us laugh. And I took his lessons very seriously and I took the homework very very seriously, and I would write very long essays and I would really research the topics. So history was very important. Geography I liked very much, physical geography, because a lot of what we were doing related to Wales, you know, to the valleys, the

glacial valleys and the erosion and everything. It was not evident in Weybridge but it was very evident here, in Wales. Geometry, maths, algebra were all subjects that I was good at. English I was good at. The languages I was never good at. I went to extra tuition in French so I could get through the Common Entrance. Latin was interesting because I learned grammar through Latin, and we had quite a good Latin teacher, this was Major Hole who taught us Latin. He terrified us into Latin. He was always fascinated how inventive we were with making, to doing it wrong. He said, 'There's only one right way, but you always think of something else.' (laughs)

So who would have been the key influences on you? I mean, you've obviously already mentioned a lot, but I wondered who particularly stands out.

What, at this very young age?

Yes.

The key ones were the Peacock family next door for art; my brother for playing. These games would go on all weekend, it was always outdoors too, in all weathers. He made snow really exciting, taking me tobogganing and things, and for a very young kid to have an older brother letting you join in with what he was doing. So that was very very important. My father's practicality and my mother's practicality.

I was thinking particularly of that school.

Yes, yes, school. The early teachers, I guess Mrs Thomas, Mr Coates was quite an experience, this guy who smoked all the time and was just dreadful, this was an experience of somebody who really was not doing his job. And then there was the art teacher, Mrs Pennington, and then also, she left and we had Mr Williams, who wasn't a very nice man but he was a good teacher. My father got him to come and give me extra tuition in art because he wanted me to go in for an art scholarship to Brighton College, so that extra art was very important.

How were you taught art?

It was just painting with Mrs Pennington, and we could do sort of whatever we liked, and if we didn't...or she would think up some topic or image that we could possibly do. It was a bit of a lark and mess about.

Were you sculpting at that point, or modelling?

The first sculpture I made was in kindergarten where I collected all the stalks of Virginia creeper that had come off the Virginia creeper and were lying on the ground, I remember they were pink. And I had a bunch in my hand of them and I stuck a stick into the bunch and then I tied a bit of string round it and I had a brush, that was my first sculpture. And my first experiments with gravity were at kindergarten, it was in a typical big detached suburban house, and it had a lawn behind which was sunk and so it had sloping grass, sloping banks coming down at about 30 degrees angle, and I remember trying to stand vertically on the angle, but I couldn't, I kept falling down. That was an experiment with gravity.

What about...you'll have to go back to kindergarten I think. What about, who would have been your main friends at that prep school?

Yes I had a lot of friends then, because we had this big garden and inheriting my brother's skills in playing games, we always had quite a gang around, and especially having these stables, I used one of the upstairs rooms as a gang hut, and we were always fooling around in there, making guns and... You're looking at this tape.

I don't want to overrun it. We're coming to the end of it.

End of F4718 Side A

F4718 Side B

Do any particular, your school boyfriends, stick out in your mind at that time?

Yes, I met in my last year, I got very friendly with someone who was a little bit older than me, Will Seymour, and really throughout my adolescence he was my main friend. And at this swimming pool in the summer there was like a gang of us, you know, sort of getting interested in girls. My brother always had a girlfriend so again it was like imitation, you know, having a girlfriend. So there were...because it was an all-boys school at Wallop, but, you know, I met and learned how to socialise with girls around the age of 12, 13. And then, Will was...he looked a lot older than the rest of us, so aged 12, 13 we started drinking beer, and we used to get Will to go and buy it because he looked old enough to...he used to get away with it anyway, brown ale. And we used to...then, this gang hut became like a, much more of a, like a social meeting place. So age 13, 14 is where we are at now. So, it was quite a big gang of us, and we used to hang out in these stables. And my parents were very supportive of all that, they enjoyed my brother's friends very much and they enjoyed my friends very much, and for that I am grateful.

I would like to go back to your earlier years actually, Steven[sic] because we haven't...David, we haven't talked about your mother very much, or hardly at all in fact, and, maybe you could give me an impression of her. I'm talking about going right back now. Were you close to her?

Yes very, and I thought she was...I can remember, she used to walk me to school in the morning, and I can remember her teaching me to tie my shoelaces up, and I remember her coming with my grandmother in a car which we had just bought, it was a van, number plate MLK, and she bought a dog, it was a harrier hound which had been rejected for being useless from this pack of harriers. Harriers are used to hunt hare on horseback rather than beagles, hunting hounds. His name was Worcester because they were all named, all this pack were named after the counties of England, Britain. And he was a hell of a character. And there was...my mother I can

remember, I remember one time walking to school looking at my mother, she was the most beautiful woman in the world.

What did she look like?

Well, sort of Twenties... Because she died very recently, we've been, my brother and I have been going through all her things and we found photographs of her when she was, like 19, 20, beautiful, big eyes.

How old was she when she got married?

About 23, 24 I would imagine. I haven't really sort of...you know, if I thought about it I could give you an exact date, I would have to do the maths but I don't really want to have to get into that, it would take me too long, but I imagine she was about 23. My father was probably about 27, 28.

You were saying what she looked like.

Yes. Sort of very fine hair, she had had an illness when she was young and she had lost a lot of hair so it was very...well she had very fine, used to wear it in a bun. She had a wonderful old bicycle, I remember her cycling up to the fishmongers to get a block of ice which would go in the carrier on the back which I could also go in when she used to take me up to kindergarten, I think she used to go on the bike and I would be in the back, and I can remember being lifted out of that and being presented to the, you know, I was put into the kindergarten, mob going in through the door. So I was always felt very safe with her.

This was after the first two years which were maybe difficult?

Well I don't remember them, I'm only told this, I wouldn't have known about it unless I had been told, and I can't really remember who told me. But I think she obviously got her confidence back and...

Was she lively?

Yes, a lot of fun, and, always reading to me. I mean I was really loved by my mother. I used to get tonsillitis quite a lot so I remember missing quite a lot of school, and she used to read to me, and that was always great.

Can you remember what?

Oh, these adventure stories, things like 'Captain Hornblower' and the William stories. She really liked 'Just William' stories, and we had all the books, and I remember they were great favourites. And I guess it would have been Enid Blyton and stuff like that, early on.

Did she make up stories?

No. No I don't remember her ever doing that. They were both very dutiful people, they would do their duty, my parents, and I've only just sort of thought about it. So a lot of their motivations, or why they did things, were out of a sense of duty, doing the right thing.

She sounds as if she was very warm.

Yes, yes, and, she was very protective of us from my father's disapproval and his admonitions, is that the right word? Yes, admonitions. And was always telling us, 'Stick up for yourself.' And if we needed something, like new clothes, we were never, neither my brother nor I felt that we could go and ask my father for something, we would always go to my mother, she was the great intermediary and she was the diplomat.

But, it doesn't sound as if money was short.

It was...they sacrificed a lot to get us into this private school, and my father would always go up to the office on Saturday morning to do some...to earn a bit extra. It

was carefully husbanded, the money, and carefully invested, property and stocks and shares etcetera. Though it was, I wouldn't say there was wealth, it was average middle class. My father always thought of himself as a plodder, you know, he would gradually build up, build things up. I think he was underestimating himself.

What would a typical day at home have been like, in those early years?

A school day, or a...?

Well both if you can remember.

Yes. Well the weekends were great, I lived for the weekends. I mean Friday at school was great, because it was the last of the week and try and get the homework out of the way on Friday evening, and so, and Saturday was wonderful because there was still Sunday, you know, it was still, it was free. Sunday always had a rather doom-laden quality about it because the next day was going to be Monday and back to school. And it would be having a friend round to play, or going to somebody's house to play. It was just not being at school and being able to...be creative I guess, whereas at school it was all very structured.

What would the family have done together?

(laughs) My father telling my mother to take us to church, because that was, we should go to church, but he didn't go because he was too busy with his various businesses, his properties. And my mother quit doing it, because she said, why should she go when she didn't like going. (laughing) And my brother always called the vicar 'the manager', always regarded...because we used to go to the local cinema and the manager was my father's friend, and he was always referred to as 'the manager', so my brother assumed that this similar person we met at the church must also be a manager. I can remember going to the church, I remember the stained-glass windows, I remember the smell in the church. And I later discovered it was where my parents were married, they were actually married in this church, the same church where we used to go.

So, was it a religious upbringing?

No.

Was religion important at all?

Not in the family, no. No, my father would say grace on Sunday out of sort of, ought to be done but, I think they were both pretty agnostic really. So there was a token gesture.

Did you go to Sunday school?

Not that I remember, I don't think I would like that, I wanted to be playing, it was like, it was like school again, something like that. I heard about it but I...they weren't going to get me into something like that because this was my weekend, it was my time. So I guess thinking now, because it's the first time I've thought of this, is that I did consider the weekends to be something to do with myself, what I could do, it was my time, and just to be involved in a game outside which involved digging or building or some sort of adventure game was what I really lived for. And then when we got into the summer terms, the long evenings, these sort of games could actually take place after school.

Did your parents talk about politics?

Well yes they did when I began to listen to that sort of stuff, and it was always an assumption of, the Conservative was the only way. They were members of the Conservative Party so they were...there were always jumble sales and there were...every year at this same, this Oaklands Park Hotel where this pool was there was a big firework display, probably on June the 21st would probably have been the regular date when it was. And that was a great adventure, going there in the dark, and there was a bank and there was a lake at the bottom of the park, so, up on the other

side. So all that was in aid of the Conservative Party, but I didn't really know what that was, when I was very young.

I think I asked you before but I can't remember if we went into it. What did the family do together?

Yes you did ask and I didn't say. It was being at home, my father would be gardening and my brother and I would be playing, or as it got to be later on, my brother was off on his bicycle somewhere with his...

So your parents wouldn't have been involved?

Not...they were always busy. I remember, if ever I was left in my father's charge, he would say, 'Just wait here, I won't be long, I'll just be half an hour, I've just got to go and see someone,' and he would be about three hours. I used to be terrified of being on my own.

This was at home?

Yes, yes at home. I hated it. Or he would take me along and it was, sometimes it wouldn't be convenient, because I would start whining that I wanted to go home and I was bored, I expect, so that's probably why he left me behind.

What did he look like?

Dark wavy hair, a small moustache. He had a scar on his upper lip which the moustache completely hid, because I didn't know about this until I was told later on, he had a bad accident on a motorbike and he was determined that my brother and I would not have motorbikes, but that comes later on. Dark, very dark complexion, and big, he was a boxer, he was his regimental champion, middleweight boxer. So he was very keen that my brother and I did that at school, which I did at the preparatory school, it was, you know, boxing was part of the curriculum. So I was quite good at that, being quite big and being quite quick.

Do you remember any of your toys from that early time?

Oh, train sets, lead soldiers which I inherited from my brother, so, a lot of my games were imitations of what he had done. And I inherited his Meccano set. And I also, there was, because of the advent of plastics and Bakelite, you could buy kits to build houses with, it had a green plastic base with lots of holes on them and then you could put these poles in, and then you could slot these various bricks and windows over. So, I guess that was the first interest in architecture then. I was a very busy little boy, I was...

You sound...[LAUGHING]...very. Was your dog a great friend to you?

Yes, yes I was very close with that dog. He was a hell of a character, he used to go next door to my Aunt Mary. Every morning - well I told you this, it was a typical day, we would be woken up with Elizabeth playing the piano. The piano was in front of a doorway which went into an air-raid shelter, because the Peacocks had stayed in that house, they hadn't evacuated, the kids had been sent off to New Zealand, they had been evacuated to New Zealand, and I think Geoff was in the Army, but Mary Peacock stayed there and they had built on to the side of the house an air-raid shelter. And they always kept tins of food in there, after the war; because there was this potential war with the Soviet Union, they were always stocking up with, these big parcels would come from New Zealand, great tins of apricot jam and tins of peaches, and they were always stashed in there behind Elizabeth's piano. Anyway every morning Elizabeth was playing the scales, my godmother Mary scraping the toast, the smell of her boiling fish up for her cat, she always had loads of cats, and then always at a certain point in the morning their dining-room window would be opened and they would throw out the bread for the birds, and at that point our dog, Worcester, would hear the window open and he would shoot round and get in their garden to eat the bread. And then, he would be shouted at. So either the...you know, this was routine every morning. And then I would be walked to school by my mother, and later I would walk on my own, it was about a mile, and I remember every inch of that walk. And then walking back, homework. And then, you know, probably next door to

watch my Aunt Mary's TV, or, some other people moved into this cul-de-sac two doors round who had ITV, so I used to go and watch the Children's Hour there, ITV. My parents always listened to 'The Archers', there was the news and 'The Archers' and then we had dinner. Radio Luxembourg I think, Dan Dare I think was on that.

What was Dan Dare.

And 'Dick Barton, Special Investigator', he was on Radio Luxembourg.

And Dan Dare...?

He was out of the 'Eagle', he was a character out of a comic called the 'Eagle'. They were quarter-of-an-hour episodes every night and I used to get right by this old radio set, my ear right by the...because my parents weren't very interested in hearing it, they wanted to chat, but I was able to hear it so long as it was quiet. And then, getting on with some project that I had going, some building, or with these games I had going, or construction things, boys building things out of balsa-wood. And then go to bed.

Do you remember any of the television programmes?

There was...it was all black and white. There was 'Mounties', and there was a thriller called 'Little Red Monkey' that I never understood what on earth was going on, but everyone else was very excited by it and they all watched it, and I was allowed to stay up for it but I hadn't a clue what was going on with that, but I can remember some images out of it. There was 'Whirligig', 'Billy Bean and his Funny Machine'.

What was 'Whirligig'?

'Whirligig' was on Saturday, it was an hour's long...it had 'Muffin the Mule' on it, and it had 'Billy Bean and his Funny Machine', 'Billy Bunter' I remember, 'The Lone Ranger'.

You sound like you watched quite a lot of television.

Oh yes I watched a lot of TV, although my father would not have one, and my mother got one when we moved to this other house when I was about 11. I am so grateful for them not having one.

Why?

Well I wouldn't have done all those other things if we had had one in the house. My father was very against any of this new technology, and anything that wastes people's time, because he was into investment, capital investment. All he used to say about smoking, 'I would rather buy a brick than a cigarette; the value of a brick, each cigarette...' Whenever he saw somebody smoking he thought, 'That's worth a brick in a building.'

What about comics and magazines?

Oh, yes, there was the 'Dandy' and the 'Beano', which I have to admit enjoying late into my thirties. (laughs)

Actually I saw some in your studio just now. Was it old copies of the 'Beano'?

Yes that's right, yes, they got left behind. Yes, yes, we used to get them. And the 'Eagle' was big, I remember that coming out and my brother used to get that, and the 'Lion', there was a comic called the 'Lion' which had Roy of the Rovers and football, football heroes.

And were there fiction books at home?

My brother got into reading war stories so I tried to read them, but reading diminished, this was from when I...I used to read, when I was reading to myself in bed, you know, 'The Famous Five'. There was a lot of Enid Blyton stuff I can remember, because that was what I was given. It wasn't very inspired reading that I was offered.

Did you have any of those traditional children's books, you know, Beatrix Potter or...?

Yes, yes I can remember them. I can remember the kitten being rolled up in a jam roly-poly by the rats in the chimney and being very frightened about that, very upset about that. Peter Rabbit, Mr McGregor, was terrified of Mr McGregor. Something came by my mind then, what was going on then, maybe it will come back, you talking about reading and the...

Do any particular books stay in your mind?

Another Enid Blyton one called 'Mr Meddle', I had great sympathy for Mr Meddle and the sort of chaos which he would create. I guess he was my first meeting with an anarchist I think, albeit in a...(laughs) Something came to my mind that I thought was important. Maybe it will come back.

Did your parents read?

No, my father was a workaholic really, and he had not only the property business which he, renting these flats out, there were always these leases, and he also ran his own little life insurance agency which he would develop with his friends, he would sell life insurance. So he was acting as an insurance agent, independent insurance agent, but he was always linked with this Eagle Star. So my mother, having secretarial skills, one of the spare, one of the bedrooms was the spare bedroom, was actually an office, so every night they were working, typing letters. So there was this work ethic lived very strongly in the house, and when I started to get interested in music and reading myself it was disapproved of, I should be working, I should be getting off my arse. I can remember my father being furious that I was reading a Solzhenitzyn book, 'A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch' when I should be mowing the lawn.

This was obviously much later.

Yes, yes this was at the age of about 16 I should think.

Did they take you to plays, concerts?

My father used to get given tickets through a friend of his at the office, because they did the insurances for some theatres, so, they weren't dramas, these were real entertainments. So, I remember seeing 'Damn Yankees'; oh, I can't remember some of the other plays, but there was...they used to take my grandmother up and go on the train. It was a big outing, getting on the train.

To London?

Yes, London, dressing up and going to the theatre. I remember Father was a member of the RAC Club so we used to go and have dinner there, it was all part of it. So yes, it was fun, that was good. But my godmother from the age of about 6, I remember there are photographs of me aged 6 in Trafalgar Square, she would quite regularly, maybe three or four times a year, would take me up to London and we would go and see a museum, like the Natural History Museum, and she got my mother to also do this, so the cultural input came in through my godmother. I remember her taking me up to see the Tate Gallery and the National Gallery aged 10, 11 probably, maybe even younger. We went to see a film, 'The Jungle Book', one of the first ones, not the cartoon one but there was an acted one, that was very exciting.

What sort of an impact did the...?

A puppet show she took me to with, the puppets were really big.

This was your aunt?

Godmother, Mary, who died actually quite young. She went back to New Zealand, yes, she probably died when I was about 23. But I had lost touch with her really, and it was only later that I began to really understand the value of what she had given me.

Do you remember what sort of impact going to the Tate, art galleries and museums had on you?

She introduced me to it with a sense of great reverence. It was obviously very important to me, and I wasn't bored by it. She used to take me to the zoo as well, London Zoo. Those sort of visits metamorphosed, and that's something that's interested me, which is very clearly articulated by Michel Tournier in 'The Erl-King', how very early experiences are repeated but in another form, and they metamorphose. So these visits to London when I was a child, and then going there on my own as an art student, or when I was 16, 17 I guess I started going to London on my own, and going to galleries and...but it had been introduced to me by my godmother, and so I knew where these places were, I knew that they existed and they were accessible.

But, the play-going which you did was more to entertainments than what I suppose we call dramas, was it?

Yes, to go to the theatre was entertainment, that was what my parents regarded it as.

It would be a show?

Yes, they weren't into heavy duty culture, my parents. (laughs)

And what about any pictures at home?

As I said, I can remember a picture of my father because we still have that picture, my mother had it obviously after my father died and then my brother now has it hanging there. But I don't actually remember any other paintings actually hanging in the house in Woodland Way, this is the first house that I mentioned. I can remember some of my grandfather's pictures being brought down to be photographed to be valued, and I had a sheath knife and I remember I would be playing it in the garden and I decided I wanted to take my sheath knife off, and I came into the living-room, and I chucked the knife in its sheath over the back of the sofa on to what I thought... And there was a painting there, and it had chipped the painting. Of course this was in

front of my father and the photographer. (laughing) My father went completely crazy about this, and, when I think, you can imagine, it's such a stupid thing to do, and I remember getting on my bike and just getting out of there, waiting for him to cool down.

What were the sort of things that you got in trouble for doing?

Using his tools and forgetting where they were. I think whining a lot, I used to whinge a lot I think, so he used to sort of clout me around with... I used to play with my food, I used to make dams with the gravy, with the mashed potato, you know, Sunday lunch, and... Because I was an impulsive player, and you would get wacked round the head for playing with my food. I think I pretty much stayed out of trouble but I knew I had to make an effort to stay out of trouble. I guess getting very dirty, you know, being out playing and I should have changed my clothes and my best clothes were all wrecked, you know, I would get into trouble for that. You know, the usual stuff.

The garden sounds like it was important.

Yes I can remember every inch of that garden.

End of F4718 Side B

F4719 Side A

[Interview with David Nash at his home in Blaenau Ffestiniog on the 8th of June 1995. Interviewer Denise Hooker.]

How old were you when you went to kindergarten, David?

I reckon I must have been 4, about 4. I can't remember the first day there but I can remember the mood of it; I can remember the kindergarten teacher who left after about a year to go abroad somewhere and there was a replacement woman. It was very benign, they were teaching us to read then, which I subsequently realised is far too early. Reading and writing and, I think I've already mentioned my clearest memories were, I actually made my first sculpture there which wasn't part of, it was something I had done, I did completely on my own, it was playing outside this big old house, Virginia creeper, and all the stalks of the leaves were lying on the ground, a very strong pink colour, and I just picked them up, I picked up a bunch and put them into one hand, so I was holding them, and I remember thinking it looks like a brush, so I got a twig and stuck it into the, amongst these twigs, and tied a piece of string round it, and I had a brush. So I think that was my first sculpture. And I also mentioned my personal experiments with gravity, because, I've already mentioned the Peacocks next door, and conversations about things like gravity and what it was would come up. And so I assumed if I stand on a flat surface standing vertically, that works, but what happens if I stand on a slope? Because the gravity in the earth should hold me vertically, even if it was not at horizontal, spirit level horizontal, it was at an angle, and I found that that didn't work. I also tried lifting my own weight, I think the Peacocks were talking about being able, one can always lift one's own weight, so I remember getting a stick and trying to sit on it, holding it up, and taking my feet off the ground. So that was...I found that didn't work either. So these were early experiments with physicality.

Did you have any favourite teachers there?

No, there was only the one teacher. There were about twenty kids, mixed boys and girls. Another memory I have which keeps coming back to me, because I keep making the same mistake, I remember a little girl next to me in the nearby desk asked if she could borrow a pencil. I only had one pencil which is the one I was using, so...I've always had, seemed to have had a very generous nature, so of course I lent my pencil. Then I realised I didn't have one to work with, if I did that. And, I keep making that mistake, even now.

So was there lots of painting and drawing and modelling?

I don't remember modelling, but, yes there was drawing. I don't remember painting. There were plays, like Nativity plays. I remember the tail of my rocking-horse I used as a beard, I was a shepherd. And in one of those plays I can remember being introduced to the Absurd or...I was a shepherd, Joseph and Mary came on to stage and asked me the way to Bethlehem, and I pointed in one direction and they went in the other direction, and it brought the house down. They were following...I just pointed the wrong way. But apart from that, very little memory of it other than it was benign and I didn't seem to mind going there.

You being 9? Oh, benign, sorry.

Benign.

Yes yes. I read somewhere that you said that at 7 you had taken out a book with the name Paul Nash on its side.

Oh, yes in the library with my mother, I was waiting for her while she was choosing a book and I saw the name Nash on the spine of a book which intrigued me, so I pulled it out and had a look, and it was paintings, these strange paintings. But they were, because there was the connection with the name I was looking more personally at the pictures, which is probably why they sort of went in.

Did he have any sort of influence on you? He wasn't actually a family member, was he?

Apparently my grandfather claimed him to be a distant cousin, but, I don't know any more than that. I have never researched it, as I keep saying on this tape I haven't been looking into the family, I've always been looking outside of it. But later those paintings did have an effect on the work I was doing when I was at Kingston, which we will get to eventually.

And did moving have a big effect on you, moving house?

Yes, because, in a very positive sense in that we moved to a much more exciting possibility with all these buildings and demolition and...

And was life very different there?

There was a lot more space.

What was the inside like? I think you've already described all the grounds earlier, haven't you, the stables and...

Big rooms, windows over the fireplaces, and these windows had mirrors which rolled into the walls, so one could shut the window off by pulling out these mirrors. So the fire was under the window, so the chimney obviously went up and sort of around; it was an early bit of architectural conceit. It was a very beautiful house. It was a big house but not like my grandfather's house, it was practical, and we had a lot of old wooden furniture. My father, being Edwardian, he preferred dark oak furniture. He was more like a badger. And my mother always preferred lightness and light and white, and pastel colours, so there was a very interesting contrast between the two. Because my father snored so dreadfully, I mean the house would vibrate with his snoring, it was impossible for my mother to actually sleep in the same room as him, so they had separate rooms, and his was always like a badger's lair, very dark and

heavy, and full of oak, and my mother's was always, it was like going into a greenhouse with sort the sort of lightness, light.

Do you think of people in terms of animals?

I tend to, yes, make metaphorical associations, yes.

And what was your mother then?

She was more like a bird, but that's the first time I've ever thought of that. My father was, his lair was like a badger's lair, or how I had imagined, like 'Wind in the Willows' badger, underground, dark, broody.

Did you think that at the time?

No, no that's come later, thinking about... I think my wife probably came up with that analogy.

How old were you when he died?

Well, eleven years ago, I am 49, so I was 38 when he died.

At the previous house, you sound as if you had had quite a strong relationship with your neighbours and the community. Did that carry on in the new house?

It wasn't very far from where we used to live, so, it was only like a mile, if that, so that my parents' friends and my friends pretty much stayed the same, but had less connection with my godmother then. And, there wasn't the same community feeling as there was down this cul-de-sac. Like, November the 5th was the big event for me. Christmas was great, birthdays were great, Easter was OK, but Christmas, that was - beg your pardon, November the 5th, that was the big one, and all the neighbours would combine to build a big bonfire in the middle of the turn-around at the bottom of the cul-de-sac. Because it wasn't a tarmacked road we were able to build a huge

bonfire, and everybody contributed fireworks, and it was just the most wonderful event for me.

And what about birthdays, or special occasions, what would happen then?

Well there would be, you know, kids come round, friends would come round for a birthday party, there would be birthday presents. It was very much a one-day event, whereas Christmas was a sort of, a bigger festival, and there was much more preparation towards that event. And similarly with the November the 5th fire, the Guy Fawkes fire, there was a lot of preparation, you know, we as a gang of kids going off and getting wood, persuading people to prune trees and let go of some of their stashed wood.

Would you say your parents were quite sociable, did people come to the house?

Very sociable people, very very social, yes. Very warm, they always had an open...the house was very open, and as I mentioned before in the tape, they were always welcoming to my brother's friends and my friends, much more so than any of my friends' parents. I mean, my friends were always around at my house, it was very rare that I was around their houses, mainly because there was a disapproval of us being there for my parents because we made a mess, and we were all smoking, and, you know, this is adolescence, so... My mother wasn't so keen on that. But she knew the value of friends, she always had a close friend wherever she lived, very quickly she always found a group of friends.

Was anybody outside of the family other than the Peacocks, were you close to them, or were they influential, other than teachers who we've talked about? Or even another family member.

Well I've mentioned my brother who was fundamentally important. I can't really remember the cousins being of any much use, or aunts or uncles. And the grandmother I mentioned who was my mother's mother, who was quite artistic, and encouraged me in that way. No I can't think of anyone.

And the other people who lived in the cul-de-sac, what would they have done?

Oh, well Geoff Peacock I mentioned was a graphic designer in an engineering firm, a big one, Babcox & Wilcox. Monty and Beryl Sawyer were in the next house, I think he was in oil. And then there were the Hoares, I don't know what he did, business of some sort. And there were the Copuses, they were the odd one out in this street, they never really joined in with anything. And then there were the Ormondstones who were a Scottish family, they lived on the other side of us, and they did Highland dancing and things like that, and they had two kids my sort of age, Wallace and Helen Petronella. And I did quite a lot with them, I made...because Geoff Peacock and Mary they used to make puppets, string puppets, and every year they would put on a performance, and I and my friends imitated this with glove puppets, so all these poor neighbours, we were only about 8 or 9, would be invited to come and see our puppet play which would last about five minutes, and we would make a collection afterwards.

And so, you've mentioned the Peacocks children that you were friendly with then even though they were older, and what about the other children in the cul-de-sac?

Well we were a gang, you know, so we...but, the Peacocks were the ones, we were just like one family, sort of moving in and out of each other's houses.

And they played with you and your brother?

Yes.

There would be epic games?

Yes epic games that go on all weekend.

And when you moved to the other house, were you as friendly with the neighbours there?

Yes there was a family next door, the Williams family, there was Gillian Williams who was older than me, and then next to them was Rosalind Bull who was, Gill and Rosalind were about a year older than me, so, I became even more aware of them when I was aged 13, 14, 15. I remember Rosalind was a stunner, she was a very attractive girl. And then Richard Williams, and there was a guy called Ian, we had all been at that same preparatory school, or we were from the age of 10 up to 13, we were very close, so we made a gang; I mean I sort of imitated what my brother had done at the same age, and we had a gang, and we had a gang hut and all the usual gang stuff.

It sounds a lot of fun.

Well in those times it was very innocent really, there was no drugs and...

Maybe we ought to talk about your brother because we keep mentioning him. He was four years older than you?

Six years older.

What was he like? We don't only have to talk about him, you know, at that time, perhaps you could...

Yes. He was quite small and slight with very dark curly hair, although if you saw us in the same space at the same time we don't look alike at all, but I was always recognised when I went to Brighton College; he wasn't there then but everyone was saying, 'God, you're just like your brother, you look like your brother,' but I couldn't see any resemblance. And, he wasn't so academically able as I turned out to be, he found it all a struggle academically, but he was very good at sports, very good at cricket, rugby, and, well as I've said he was just great at playing, very inventive, and you know, bonfires, and all these army games that we used to play, he was the instigator of them.

Because actually that was a big age difference between you, wasn't it.

Yes.

And he didn't mind you tagging along?

No, because as I've said he felt very protective towards me, with that age difference. I was incredibly fortunate with that, because if there had been that... There was a degree of antagonism. Apparently I got up very early one morning and hit him on the head with a cricket bat when I was...I can't remember doing that so I was probably 3 or 4 years old, he had upset me about something and I kind of whacked him with this cricket bat, and... There was an apple tree in our garden which, there was a branch that he could, he was tall enough to jump up and get hold of it but I couldn't, and swing on it, but I couldn't, so I remember him, I was always whining about not being able to do it. And anyway he lifted me up so I could get hold of it, and then he just left, he ran off and I was just left hanging, and I just was terrified of letting go, but wailing, and my mother coming out and rescuing me.

And, what did he go on to do?

Agriculture. While he was at Brighton College he had summer jobs. He was very industrious, very keen on earning money, and as always had an open fire and a big property with a lot of trees, there was always a lot of pruning going on, pruning of trees, so, one of his jobs was cutting wood, fire wood, with a handsaw, bow-saw, and he was endlessly out there with this...[SAWING NOISE] this wood. I never had the patience to go on. He was incredibly tenacious, he was a very good long-distance runner at school, he had that tenacity of just hanging in there, whereas I was always a sprinter, I couldn't be bothered with anything that was more than a 200 yards spring, anything else was just painful, not interested.

When you say agriculture, did he have a farm, or does he have a farm?

He went to Cirencester Royal Agricultural College, did a course there, but he managed to get a job in Montana on a farm. This was a big event in our family, my father was dead against it, and then I think his friends at the office and at his clubs really admired my brother's ambition and encouraged my father to actually support this venture, so a friend of my father got him a passage on a boat, so he worked his passage across. And he spent a good year, maybe a year and a half out there, working on various farms. He had a cousin out there, one of our cousins; Robert was in Vancouver and he teamed up with him on occasions and travelled in the States. Came home just for a visit, and my father was very keen to get him established here, so, because he was worried about him just being a roving, beatnik was the word my father always used. My brother got into the Teddy boy fashion, he sort of, he had very curly hair so he was able to make that sort of long wavy quiff in his hair, and he wore winkle-pickers and drainpipes, much to the horror of my father. So my father bought him a partnership in a farm in Buckinghamshire, but it was a factory farm, it was these four big buildings, two buildings with 600 pigs in them and two other buildings with, I think it was as many as 10,000 broiler chickens which would be processed through on a 10-week cycle. And the other partner was really a sleeping partner, he was a publican, and so my brother was doing all the work. I think they eventually bought him out. So my father was backing it financially and my brother was doing all the work. But it pinned my brother down really, I think it was a mistake, he should have gone back to the States, where he would still be now I think, and probably very successful. His nature and the American pragmatic ways is very very compatible. Being the oldest son he took the brunt of my father's ambitions and assumptions, and as I have found having children of my own now, that parents learn from the first one, from their first child. So I was given much more lassitude, or latitude, latitude, as a result of my parents' experience with my brother. And also I had the experience of watching what developed and what to avoid, which I have already mentioned in the tape.

And did your brother stay with that farm?

Yes for quite a long time, quit, got...well he never actually worked directly in farming any more. He got married to a girl from the village, Julia, who was quite a few years

younger than him, and it's been a very successful marriage, and they moved up here eventually, probably round 1970, 1971. And he works for a big agricultural company called Dalgetty's, who supply feedstuffs to farmers, so, he manages the local reps in north Wales, and he works from home in Llanrwst.

So have you always stayed close to him?

I think...it's been difficult, because he had ambitions of taking on my father's property company, because my father, when they retired and moved here to north Wales they sold all the properties in Weybridge and bought holiday cottages around the Ffestiniog Valley. They had as many as eight or nine cottages, so in their retirement my parents made an income out of these holiday cottages, and my brother was keen to take them on, but it never, they never sorted it out. And I think, I was part of the problem because I wasn't interested, I didn't want to get involved, and my father couldn't see himself...he wanted everything to be equal, whatever my brother had I should have too. So I think that made it difficult for my brother.

Did it cause tension between you?

Yes, and also the fact that, well he was more connected, he felt much more connected with the family, and I think I was much more rebellious in terms of, or more angry about having been sent to this boarding school, and as a result felt very rejected by the family, so retaliated by sort of rejecting back, and was very determined to find my own way. So I think I probably rejected my brother along with the family.

But he was nonetheless very supportive of you...?

Very. I remember him, because of his stammering and the difficulties that had caused him in his life, I mean he was always upset that my parents had never acknowledged it, or never helped him, so he insisted that my parents got me some help. So one of the most important influences at Brighton College was in fact a speech therapist that I used to go to once a week, and he was just someone who I could talk to; it was much more of a therapy of just conversation than of actually speech exercises. Because it

wasn't that bad, I mean I thought it was really bad until she gave me these stories and situations of people who were in a much worse situation than myself. So he was instrumental in that.

And did he encourage you as an artist?

He was...I don't think he was ever very interested initially, but gradually took more and more interest, and every Christmas and birthday I give him a work, so he's sort of building up a little collection, mostly small drawings, and for his silver wedding anniversary I've given him a big sculpture which we're in the process of putting up; it needs a big concrete foundation which his boys are working at at the moment.

What do you think his influence was on you?

Well it's just playing, it was the playing. It was like advanced playing. His being six years older than me I was...I had these sort of scenarios were being created for me to sort of, have an imaginative life in. I think probably that was the most important experience as a child, was what he gave me, and it wasn't...I don't know how conscious it was, but the fact that he included me and didn't exclude me. Because I've had the experience of my two boys, and my elder son having a very strong personality, and actively and violently rejecting the younger son, and excluding him from everything, which has been incredibly damaging for the younger one, and that's made me realise how much value my brother's contribution has been.

Well, I hate to broach the subject, but perhaps we ought to talk about the dreaded Brighton College again.

Yes. Yes I have...so there are in retrospect very positive aspects about it, because here was the challenge, and the first challenge had been sorting myself out in terms of this stammering, and developing a competence when I was at the preparatory school in those young years, and actually moving into early adolescence confident and very happy, I was enjoying life immensely, I was working hard, and having a good time. And then, it was like going to hell, it was extraordinary. One of the things which was

very unfortunate was, I had glandular fever in the summer of 1959, which was the summer between leaving the preparatory school and going to this boarding school, and, this is quite a serious illness, it needs quite a lot of quite careful convalescence. And I was sent off to that boarding school without the school being properly informed about this with the assumption that I would be able to say what needed to be done, but of course, they have a regime there, and it's a very macho regime, so I was expected to perform as everyone else was, you know, especially in sports. So, I survived that but it was a total...but I knew, I was very exhausted, and it was the rugby term too, and I found I was very good at that but it was also quite debilitating, I was in a debilitated state physically. And that my parents didn't take care of that, I found quite...so I think that contributed largely to my sense of being abandoned. And all the things that I was really enjoying were taken away from me, and as I've said before this concerted and almost conscious, well it was a conscious conspiracy to demoralise new boys, and to undermine them, put them in their place.

How did that operate?

Well there was a fagging system, so you had to do whatever the prefects told you, you were like a servant to the prefects. One was always being regarded as being rubbish, and you had to button... Oh it was endless trivia, and, I think sort of in my own personal development I was probably quite advanced intellectually, and I had quite a strong sense of justice I think, and the whole thing, there was no...all these school rules and house rules and...it wasn't logical, there wasn't a human justice being practised there.

It was all power games.

Power and hierarchical. So we were caned, and we were caned by the prefects for misdemeanours, like talking after lights out, and... It was...actually the school was in actually a pretty bad phase, the school had had a series of fairly weak headmasters I think and had run down, and the governors had appointed a very authoritarian headmaster who was really a megalomaniac, and the school was a background for his performance as a strong authoritarian. We were all absolutely terrified of him.

Terrified of the teachers and the older boys?

Well the older boys, yes, yes. Well this sort of power that was given. And I also saw, as I progressed through the school, that those who were victimised, when they were in the position they victimised the younger kids, so it was perpetrated.

End of F4719 Side A

F4719 Side B

Right, are we going?

Yes.

The sports, I was good at it. When we got round to the summer term I was looking forward to cricket, but that quickly became clear that this wasn't going to be much fun, this is all too serious, and, because I was used to it being enjoyable and having a laugh, and they weren't into that at all. So I opted for swimming, and every summer for the past three years all my summer, all from June right through to September, all my spare time had been spent at this open-air pool, so I was very good at swimming.

Did that manage to give you some kudos at the school and bolster your position?

Yes, yes well I was in the team and all that sort of stuff, but... I just hated the school, and as I said earlier, that I declared war on it, you know, in my second term, aged 14.

Was that an internal thing, or more external as well?

Internal, though I mean I was...I kept my head down, and it was quite soon that I didn't participate in sports, like athletics and things that I was good at, when it was...it all for the school and for house. Things that I enjoyed, the swimming I enjoyed and the rugby I enjoyed very much, I was happy to do that because I was actually enjoying that for myself. But in terms of playing for the school, you know, it was...they were the enemy, it was...

The school?

Yes. It was...there were a lot of...a lot of the youngsters there were having a better time at school than they were at home, so it was obviously, relatively, it was better for them there. Some just knuckled down and toed the line very passively, and there were dissidents, and of course I always hung out with these dissidents.

Was there a lot of bullying at the school?

Yes, you name it. There was a lot of buggery. I never got approached, but, I never...because I was quite big, and those...and I was astonished, in my third year, when this whole thing came out about the homosexual activity in this house of 50 boys, which I had been quite oblivious of, quite...

Your own house?

Yes, at school, you know, because these public schools are divided up into houses.

Yes, yes.

There's about 50 students in each house. And I was horrified at the...and the way that the school handled it, the way that the housemaster handled it, the way the headmaster handled it. I was really...I was shocked at the hypocrisy of it all and the cover-up.

When you say it came out, this was publicly?

No, oh no it was all internal, and it was, they tried to deal with it internally.

Well how did they try to deal with it?

Well through punishment, through suspension, through... But my aim was to get out of there as soon as I could, to go to art school was a quick way out, because you didn't need A'levels to go to art school.

But how did you feel about that? We're talking about the homosexuality.

Yes, but, because I had not been inclined towards that, which quite often there is a phase apparently of in a young adolescent to have that attraction for one's own sex, and because I hadn't been approached by any of the older boys, it had just escaped

me, as I have already said, I just was not aware of it, and the activity was obviously done very privately because it just wasn't evident. There were a lot of jokes around it, but it was as if it wasn't actually practised, as if it wasn't actually evident, or, you know, there would be people saying, 'Oh he fancies him,' and all that, but it all seemed like, in jest, in joking. I had a serious girlfriend from this point, from starting at school.

Age 14?

Age 14, yes, there were letters written back, she was very loyal, and the holidays were great, and that was really what I, that was what my fantasies were all about, were directed towards the opposite sex.

And who was your girlfriend at the time?

Her name was Susan Irvine, who I eventually married, but we will get to that. We had an off-and-on relationship through our later adolescent years, but she was the girl back home, she was who I would... Because I was at school for three months at a time without going home, it wasn't possible to go home, because we were only allowed exits for Sunday afternoons and it was impossible to get home and back in that time.

You didn't have half-terms?

Oh there was one half-term I think in the Christmas term, but that was all. So, but the holidays were quite long, they were about four weeks, so, we really made the most of them, we had a lot of fun in the holidays, great time. But the going back to school was absolutely dreaded. My mate, Will Seymour and I, a couple of days beforehand we would just be looking at each other just astonished that we were going back into this sort of barbaric... And, it was being locked up, it was a lock-up.

How had you met Sue?

Through the swimming pool.

Yes, that was the focus of your social life out of school?

Yes, during the summer months, and then in the winter we were hanging out in each other's houses, and, her parents had a hotel, they lived about a mile and a half along the same road that our house was on, and they had a den under the garage, they being she and her brother, her elder brother. She was the youngest of three.

And so you kept your sort of home circle of friends even while you were away at school?

Oh very much so, and Will and I would write to each other regularly, Will Seymour and I, I mean we were the closest of friends, and we both had...we suffered. He was also in a boarding school. But he actually became head boy of that school, he was a brilliant administrator and a great politician, great sense of humour. And his parents were kind of strange and not with the greatest sense of humour, quite tight, and so he virtually lived at our house, my parents were very very fond of him, and he has often expressed a deep sense of gratitude towards their welcoming him. He was always in our house, and he always came up with us to Wales from age 15 onwards. We sort of grew up together, you know, we were best mates.

Have you stayed friends with him?

Yes he's now a headmaster of a school, of a private school up on the north coast which my elder boy actually went to for three years after being in our Steiner school.

So what would your social life have been like during those school years, that early time? All hanging out together, were you?

Well, I had this, like kids' den in this old stable block developed into like a social club, I mean we had armchairs up there and a gramophone, and we would drink brown ale and listen to records.

Your parents sound wonderfully free and easy.

Yes, yes, girlfriends, and... And then parties in each other's houses, and, it was just great, going to the cinema, there were two coffee bars, one in Weybridge, one called 'The Big Toe'. This was early Sixties, and so, there was, the Sixties mood was developing then, the Beatles, Carnaby Street, you know, there was a youth culture beginning and it was just beginning to develop then. Yes my parents were very free and easy about all this, they loved it, and I think my father especially enjoyed us kids being around. The only thing he objected to was snogging with the girls in public. (laughing) Shouting as us, 'Keep your snogging private.'

Do you think your parents were quite open about sex, was it something that could be discussed at home?

Never. No, that was...anything like that was...no, it was just avoided, it didn't really happen. It was just an assumption that we were all very honourable. And that was a powerful assumption actually, because I remember I had...I was not promiscuous, I was very honourable with my girlfriend.

So your father didn't take you aside?

No he was too shy.

Yes.

My brother made him take, have a sex conversation with me about homosexuality before I went to Brighton College, which he hadn't done with my brother, and my brother had a few scrapes I think with being approached by older boys, and again was very angry with my father for not dealing with this properly. But we found, when this whole thing broke, this whole homosexual ring at the school, when it became evident, a couple of the other, my friends, we actually made a questionnaire for the new boys to fill in about what sexual education they had actually had. Because every family is

given instructions by the school that the children must be aware of their sexuality, you know, about sexuality. We found that about 1 per cent had actually had any sort of instructions from their parents.

Who devised this questionnaire?

Well, I was in the lower sixth and two friends and I did this. We got into a lot of trouble for it.

So, was anything...was there any sex education at school?

Not really, no not, other than the sort of jungle approach, law of the jungle.

You mean peer group?

Yes, yes.

And did you then find out about sex from your brother?

Yes, from my peer group.

Yes. More at home, and at school.

Did you overlap with your brother at Brighton College?

No, no, he...because there are six years gap you see.

Yes.

So he had left a year before me.

Perhaps we ought to go back to school a bit. What subjects interested you most there?

When you go into a school like that from common entrance, the bright ones, brighter ones go automatically into the fourth form, and the general and below average go into third form, so I was in the third form, but I was on the edge of...so I was pretty, I was well educated at this preparatory school, so, I remember winning the geography prize, the history prize, and the art prize, I think there was something else. I won AN art prize, it wasn't the form art prize, because my father was very keen I went to university, so to go to university I had to do Latin, and at the school you could either do Latin or art, so I had to do Latin, although I had got a scholarship, an art scholarship to go to this school, which helped my father financially, but they wanted to take, obviously they wanted to take the scholarship away from me because I wasn't doing art. So I think for about six terms, or five terms - no, beg your pardon, there would be a year, and then I managed to just...so this was absurd, and I dropped it, and then in the fourth form, the middle of the fourth form I started doing art. And that's where I met Gordon Taylor, John Gordon Taylor, who is an exceptionally good art teacher. It was mainly drawing, drawing cubes, spheres, cylinders. He was a Bauhaus man, in fact he apparently was continually being asked to teach in the Design School in the Royal College, but his family were in Brighton and he just preferred his set-up. And he was very independent in his art room and he had an autonomy in there; he always said he was much freer in this sort of education, in private education, to teach the way he wanted than he would be in a State school. He taught us life, taught us business; he taught in a way that, what real education is about is, is that you teach into the young person for the future, that they can be able to use what is given them in life rather than for an exam.

What do you mean, he taught you life?

He was very realistic about what the world was really like, and so this bizarre, hypocritical school was a wonderful example for him to point out hypocrisy, which didn't just live in the school, it lived in the world, and these were like classic examples.

What form did this hypocrisy take?

I really need to think about that to give you a clear answer, and so, in this form of interview there's going to be a very long silence from me to actually give you... It was on every conceivable level. It was just so dishonest. The pretence of grandeur, pretence of...it was still Empire-based, it was still... No, as anyone listening to this tape will already have realised, there was this sort of anger which I expressed earlier which welled up in me, and how I described it, I declared war. I mean it still lives in me now, I haven't properly dealt, I haven't dealt with it. But there was a creative edge to that anger, and it made me very aware of my own individuality and my determination to develop my own individuality, and not to be crushed by these bastards, and so, that was very positive, and I had great aid from this art teacher.

Who recognised your talent and...

Yes, and he would talk to us in a very adult way, and he respected the truth, and honesty, and would always address us in that way, and that we were citizens of the Earth and that we... This isn't New Age stuff, it was, you know, we had a place in society, we weren't just cogs in this machine, you know, and that rebellion and defiance was the way in which the world moved on, and art was a very good means of once doing that, and history of art as a means of studying how things have changed and how people have sort of heroically stood up against dishonesty.

So you studied art history as well as practical art, did you?

Yes, that was, one of the main things was this grounding in art history. And I could have left the school after my GCSEs, of which I passed nine with a fairly good grade, but he persuaded me to stay on, because he said, 'You're too young to go to art school,' and he would help me orchestrate a year, but it meant I would have to stay at the school, but he would orchestrate it where I would do the A'level in one year and I would take one other A'level, which I chose economics, because there wasn't anyone actually to teach economics and that I would do it myself. I think the staff, the housemaster and the headmaster had realised that, through his persuasion that I had great potential to have an art career, and that, not to mess me about, I was very

serious, and he persuaded them of that fact. So I was the first person ever to be allowed to go up to London on his own to go to exhibitions, and I went to the local art school and did evening classes, life drawing. So he and I between us sort of constructed a programme, which is really like a pre-year to going to art school, although the penalty was having to stay in this ridiculous school with this prefect system. But I was on the periphery of it then; I still had to go along with some of the rhythms of the school, you know, I had to go to assemblies and things like that of course, and every Friday we had to be soldiers, you know, in this combined cadet corps, but that was all right because I joined the engineering part of that, the Engineers, the Royal Engineers, so we used to go off every Friday down to this Territorial Royal Engineers depot and hang out with these guys down there, and take cars apart, so that was good.

A throw-back to games with your brother then?

Yes, yes, yes.

What exhibitions did you go and see?

I remember there was a Kitaj show on at the Marlborough, Henry Moore I remember going to see. I regularly went to the Tate, to the Tate Gallery. I particularly liked the Degas pastel drawings in the Tate, I liked Rousseau's 'Tiger in a Rainstorm' very much, I think it was there then, but anyway I was aware of Henri Rousseau. The A'level I did was Oxford and Cambridge, so, 50 per cent of that is an art history paper, which is both architecture and general art history, and it's very intense, and so that really gave me a very good grounding. It was exactly the right age for me to be getting hold of that stuff.

It was a whole span of art history, was it?

Yes. I was also introduced to music by, in the study that I was in at school there was a guy called Ralph Abrahams who was half-Indian, and he was a very good musician, and he introduced me first to Gershwin, Ravel, you know, these are quite easy, and

then we went on to Hindemith and Carl Orff, those sort of popular orchestras that Carl Orff did, which I like very much. Because I had no musical training at all, and I don't, you know, I never have had and I don't know anything about what scales, I don't know what an A and a B is or a B flat or a fifth, or, I don't know what they are, bars, chords.

Did you play anything?

No, no obviously not, because, I would probably know. But it speaks to me, it always has done. And my brother loved jazz, trad jazz, he always had Humphrey Lyttleton and Chris Barber, Glenn Miller LPs, so I was aware of that, but I sort of grew out of that.

So you already had a sense of yourself as going to be an artist?

Yes, sculpture was very important to me and I read a lot of biographies of artists and so on, sort of really interested me, and it was...I had to get out of the situation that I was in, it was family and school. And the art teacher had really revealed, was revealing to us what middle-class values were really about, and the sort of, the imprisoning; it isn't thinking, it's just maintaining values, bourgeois values, and he was trying to get us to think, you know, to have individual thought. So it wasn't really an art department, it was a philosophy department, but it was practical because he had all these great artists to illustrate his points, what Cézanne was about, what the Fauve artists were about, what Matisse was about, coming right up into the American Abstractionists.

Gosh. Were you more interested in 20th century art than the earlier stuff?

Yes, we had a solid grounding in the Renaissance, and really very clear comprehension of what early Renaissance, how it moved out of pre-Renaissance, out of the Romanesque and Mediaeval art, Middle Ages, and how it developed through into Mannerism and then into the Baroque and the corruption of that into Rococo. And he had...he really gave a world scheme, a whole, like an evolution of, as art as

being a being which has evolved, and so it's rolling on, it's growing on, it's moving on.

But tying it up into whole sort of cultural ideas rather than just formally.

Yes, and it doesn't have a programme of its own, it's these individual artists who find new ways to the truth, which always has to happen, because new things become established, they become recognised and then established modes and then they of course have to be overthrown, because the vitality of the art gets lost.

And when you say that he was orientated towards the Bauhaus in his teaching, how did that actually work? You mentioned drawing cubes and...

Yes, it was very minimal. We drew them, and we drew bunches of flowers, and painted, painting, but it was never anything very ambitious, never any sculpture, never any painting with oil on canvas, it was all kept very low-tech.

And what would he have been encouraging you to think about through that, do you think?

Fundamentals of drawing, of perception of the objects in space and the rendering of them, and that comprehension of perspective, on the one...just sound drawing. So that was really where my drawing experience really started seriously; I already had a talent which had been recognised, because I had - well he had given me the art scholarship to go there. He was also very good at getting people into colleges and into universities. Often he would help students who were going into science by having them up in the art room for just an hour a week and getting them to develop a little portfolio of drawings which they would take with them to their university for their interview, be it for a science thing, but you just present them you see, they've got these people... Because these people want to have something to talk about at these interviews, and it worked every time, I mean nearly everybody who went to him to get help for an interview and interview techniques. You didn't get that from anyone

else in the school, because they didn't know. He was very worldly, very worldly, a worldly person.

But at the evening class you were doing all life drawing, did you say?

Yes, they were two evenings a week, so that was a nude model. Part of my errands were, everyone, because I would pass a fish and chip shop on the way back and I would get back about 9.30 and I always had a great sack of fish and chips orders from my mates at the school.

So no sculpture at that point?

No, no, no. There was a person in another house who was a year older than me, Phillip Vaughan, who was a very big influence on me, he was always in the art room too, he was aiming much more towards architecture, and we have remained friends to this day. He was pretty wild, and his father had died when he was very young. He lived not far from where I lived, in a very restrictive, bourgeois family environment which he loathed, and when he left school he took a year out and hitch-hiked all the way to Turkey, you know, aged 18. I just was astonished, I didn't have the courage to do something like that. He was my hero.

Was he older than you?

Yes, and a great intellectual, and he was always showing me something he had discovered, or the latest technology about something which could be used in art. Yes, he was always showing me things. And another big influence was Will Seymour's older brother, John, who was very much into literature, so I was introduced to Jean Anouilh, Samuel Beckett, Albert Camus, aged 16 I guess. I don't think I necessarily understood them all that much but I loved this guy and the way he would talk, and he had a great sense of humour, and these writers meant a great deal to him, and he would write about what, he would talk about what they were writing about, so that was a very important influence.

Were there writers at that time that meant a lot to you?

Well, Samuel Beckett, I've got all his plays, and...

Why do you think you responded to him?

The Absurd. And also, is it N.F. Simpson, playwright? And then Harold Pinter. It's a group that our...this boarding school, they were day boys, they were involved in putting on some Ionesco plays, which I remember going along to watch. I mean I loved the Absurd, because, if you go to a boys' school and you have a sense of humour, no matter how angry you are about the place, there is...the absurd is always, you know, fascinating, and it always, the Absurd and the Surrealists have always been to me of great interest, Dada and...

Right from that school?

Yes.

Are there any other teachers at the school that were important for you, apart from the art master?

No I think I survived them. There was another important experience came from a very dry history teacher, this was in the third form. He taught us how to take notes, so he would just lecture to us and we would make headings and sub-headings and notes, and I remember, I was taking down these notes, talking about Mediaeval times and alchemy and the four elements.

End of F4719 Side B

F4720 Side A

.....Mediaeval history, the four elements of earth, air, fire and water, and how everything material in the world had these elements, had a combination of these elements. And I remember as I wrote this down I was thrilled, I was just.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Right, so we just carry on now is it?

Yes.

Yes. There was the same emotional and physical experience that I had when I saw the right angle being constructed on the blackboard, that I was recognising something. I had never heard of this before.

The four elements?

Yes, I had never been introduced to this concept. So something rose up in me, I had this welling up, which met this picture that I was being given as something very alive and real. And then he said, 'But of course we don't believe in that any more.' And I remember sort of, this, what had welled up was sunk, was sort of, like deflated, and I was so disappointed. But it doesn't really matter because the fact that there is something, when one does make a recognition there is a cognition, you know, something has happened in one and it's a revelation. And so, yes, that was something which I responded to, and I just use that as an illustration of things which have winked at me from the world throughout my life which have given me clues and indications, and so it can be an experience of a geometric form being made, being told about the elements. It can be just one phrase in a musical composition. In Béla Bartók's I think Hungarian songs, a series of small pieces, there's an extraordinary discordant passage, very short, but that really spoke, spoke to me as a sort of, there's suddenly a rawness there that...

And did that sense of the four elements stay with you from then? Presumably he was only talking about it in relation to alchemy.

Yes.

Mediaeval alchemy.

Yes.

But surely we haven't dismissed it, that notion of four elements? When you say that we don't believe in it any more.

No, no he said that. But, no I just...I can't remember doing anything with that, or talking about that or anything, for possibly years, but...

It just sowed a seed.

But I'm just using that, that was a seed sown, or...it isn't really sowing a seed because that's like something's been taken from outside and put into something which doesn't know about this. No, what...it's not sowing a seed, it's actually creating the right picture for something which lives in me, always in a young person, to respond to. Because I've always known, from a young child, I've known, I've always assumed reincarnation. I remember at age 10, talking with someone when I was in Miss Woolly's form, this is age 10, at Wallop School, we were talking about reincarnation, and just assuming it as a fact, and it was only later when I was sort of being more heavily introduced to Christianity that this notion was wiped out. So, I've always felt that one is born with everything that you need, but it isn't in a viable form; education is all about nurturing what is there rather than being treated as an empty vessel to stuff things in. And I had an education experience where the assumption was, I was an empty vessel to stuff things in. And there was just occasionally when, by chance, there was a right hit.

Are you talking about recognition?

Yes. Which one part of oneself recognises, because there is an emotional flash which is connected with it. This obviously happens much more often with a younger person, and far less when one is older. It happens in a different way when one is in the second half of one's life.

Can you say more about that?

It's a... I think.... No I need to think more about that, that is a question, and I would like you to actually bring that later when I am able to give you a bit more thought, to be articulate about that, otherwise it will just be a ramble.

Mm. When you went away to boarding school, did it change your relationship with your parents?

Well obviously. No I've told you, it was drastic, that I was rejected, so I rejected back. And I never trusted them again, it broke an assumed trust. I didn't know I trusted them, you know, but one just does, one's parents, unless something happens, in which you don't. They were great, and they were very supportive, but it was this sort of fundamental error in not handling this point in my life when I was put out of the home. It just could have been done properly, but they never did it, they just didn't do it.

Did you actually feel homesick, or had you rejected them too much to even want to be with them?

Well obviously there was a homesickness, and a complete bewilderment. And I hadn't been properly kitted out when I went to this school so I was punished for not having loops on my games clothes to hang them up on pegs. You know, there was this sort of bizarre treatment. It was basically inhuman, and they in their innocence assumed everything was fine, but were incapable of accepting that it wasn't, because they were putting a lot of money, they had made a huge sacrifice in their lives to be able to send my brother and I to this school. It was my father's dream, who had loved it, you know, look at all the advantages that one would have from having a public

school education. So they would never accept that things there were not as they were presented.

And did your mother subscribe to this as much as your father?

Well, as I've already, we've dealt with this in the tape, she was subservient in an Edwardian hierarchy. I mean she was very worried, I mean, by the third year she saw how desperately miserable that I was there, and was...you know, she was beginning to realise that, you know, something was very seriously wrong, but it was impossible to get my father to pay any attention to it because I was just being weak, that was always the answer, I was just being wet and weak. And it wasn't, I wanted them to see the truth, and they just would not. In fact I know she didn't show my letters home to my father because they would upset him, and I wrote home a lot. I think when you get hurt by somebody, there is, especially in a child, there is an instinct to hurt back, so I was trying to hurt them, so when I wrote back about how bloody awful it was it was...you know, I wanted them to be upset.

Did your father write to you as well as your mother?

Only when my grandfather died, and when I walked out of school, I just left, and I went home, and then there had to be a re-negotiation, and that was when things radically changed, when I was in...we made my own curriculum really that was...it was in the year coming up to the O'levels and it was obviously important that I did them. And the housemaster was quite a reasonable man although quite weak, and he stuck up for me, because I actually hadn't...although I was very defiant and rebellious I didn't actually break rules of the school, I was quite shrewd in how I manifested my non-cooperation, I think is the way I went about it. But quite articulate.

And so what form would that take?

Just not joining in, and just keeping...just right on the edge, being disruptive but right on the edge. Sort of think I knew what I was doing. But they knew I was...it

obviously was quite apparent that I was deeply miserable, and I think that actually worried them and I sort of just thought, my whole demeanour...

To school, this is?

Yes.

Yes. So what form did the re-negotiation take?

Well that was when it was understood that I should go up and see exhibitions in London, that I was aiming to go to art... This is when my father accepted the fact that I would go to art school and not go to university.

Now how did your father deal with that, how did he feel about you wanting to be an artist?

Well I sort of tricked him in a way, because I said, I got an architect friend of the family who had invited me up to see his architectural practice to recommend that I first went to art school before studying architecture, so...

Which was a proper profession.

Yes. So it was a way of not staying on any longer than I needed to. My strategy was to get out of that school. And so that was one of the reasons to go to art school, it wasn't just to be an artist, it was...

Escapement.

Escape from all this shit, from all this middle-class, bourgeois shit.

Would you say then that your family encouraged you to it? It sounds like your art master certainly did, but your father having accepted it, did he then encourage you?

A reluctant support. So they paid...when I went to Kingston it was a local art school so there were no fees to pay, but I was supported, I wasn't slung out of home. And then when I went on to Brighton College he topped my...we got a small grant; because of his income I wasn't eligible for a full grant, and in those days a full grant you could actually, you could manage on. So he topped it up to what a full grant would have been, which is what he was required to do, or expected to do by the Government. But he was always saying that, you know, this was only really a hobby and that I would have to get a proper job at some time, and what about a pension. And so even when...before he died I made £27,000 gross in one year, which was for that time, which is 1983, was a good chunk of money, and I was very glad to see, I was very glad for him to be able to see that, that I was being successful. And I had represented Britain in overseas exhibitions. So, I gave him the picture, this is the same as me playing football for England, playing rugby for England, being in this show, I was in a show in the Guggenheim in Japan.

So did he in fact come to be proud of you do you think?

Well apparently he was very proud of me, but he wasn't able really to express that to me, there was always anxiety about pensions and not having a regular job.

Security.

Yes. Because of his experience of being insecure, but because he had given me security I was able to quite happily exist in quite a, a very financially insecure.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Now David, you made your escape then to Kingston College of Art.

Yes. This was the first year at Kingston College of Art where they had the new Diploma in Art and Design, and it started with a foundation course. They hadn't succeeded in being awarded it the year previously, as a lot of other colleges had done, they weren't quite up to standard of what was required, although it was very unclear

what was required of the staff, but there was a lot of more money being made available for the schools. They wanted to break away from the old NDD, National Diploma in Design, which involved a lot of letter-cutting and a lot of very academic studies. And the Summerson Committee had come up with proposals to the Education Department, so there was this new Diploma in Art and Design starting with a foundation year. And as most people still find, their foundation year was one of the most exciting years of all; one is young, life is new, you're out of school, most of you are doing what you really want to do, and what one is good at, and you're meeting a whole bunch of new people. Kingston was the nearest college and I was still living at home, I caught the 219 bus from Weybridge, took half an hour to get to Kingston College. The girl next door was going to that same college, she was, her name was Vivien Cohen, it was a Jewish family, who, her father was headmaster of an approved school, which was a big house in big grounds next door to our house. It was set up for delinquent Jewish children, but as there aren't any delinquent Jewish children it was delinquent Gentiles. And she was a good friend, a very intelligent young woman, and she was doing fashion at Kingston, so I used to go to college with her on the bus. [INTERRUPTION - BREAK IN RECORDING]

How was the foundation year taught?

They had a lot of part...young artists coming in, part-timers doing one or two days a week. They had a very good, what is now known as contextual studies, it was called complementary studies in those days; we had regular films, lectures. Huw, I remember Huw Weldon coming down, he was doing 'Monitor' as it was in those days, and they were just making a film about Elgar and he came and talked about that and about making these arts programmes, and the most important one was Cornelius Cardew came, and I think with David Tudor, I think it was both of them.

David Tudor?

Yes. Both, he was also a composer. And as part of Cornelius Cardew's talk, he talked about John Cage. This was the first time I had been introduced to the ideas of John Cage. And Cornelius Cardew used a very old-fashioned epidiascope and he would

through it a visual score which was for a musician to interpret, so it wasn't written as a musical score, it was just lines. And as it went through, it was in silence, but I got to...I could anticipate what the next lines and shapes were going to be, and again it was one of these thrilling experiences. And a friend who happened to have been at Wallop called Richard Adams, he reappeared in my life, in foundation, and I remember after that lecture we went round the studios at lunch time in the painting school, these were the NDD students, and we were trying to make the noises and sounds of the paintings, we were trying to, you know, articulate them but not in words but in...similarly to... And we were...it was so funny, I mean we were laughing and laughing and laughing while we were doing this. But it was an important revelation of an alternative interpretation of the visual into music, or into sound, or the possibility of sound into something visual, which I met later with eurhythmy in the Steiner movement. I think it was then that there was a big Gulbenkian exhibition at the Tate, their exhibition of the Gulbenkian Collection, and there was I remember a big Anthony Caro, 'Early One Morning', was in that, and I remember liking Poliakoff and De Stael, and I think that's where I first met the Ad Reinhardt black paintings, which, I think Gordon Taylor had spoken about him possibly. And there was Pollock too. And it was so lively, and the teachers...I think I was introduced to Zen then, there was a lot of people talking, Zen stories, I mean it was quite popular at that time, early Sixties, but that was another thrill to me. It had never really occurred to me that there were other religions.

Were you responding mainly to the Americans?

The French particularly before, and then, yes, and then I guess to the Americans, because our painting teachers were I think. And Pop art was appearing. Gordon Taylor actually used to teach at Southend Art School where Peter Blake went, he was one of his students, he was very proud of Peter Blake having been one of his students.

Did you stay in touch with him when you left school?

Yes, when I left Kingston Art School, sculpture, at the end of the diploma third year and I was applying to the Royal College, I went down to see him to show him what I

was doing and to get some advice about application to the Royal College, and he wrote to me later saying that the way forward was really to get bigger and simpler, not more and more complicated as he felt my work was getting, more and more complex, and that this really needed to be thought about. And quoted Brancusi and Giacometti.

How was painting taught at Kingston?

Well something like a project of working with sketch-books and then trying to find the most undefined drawing which we could find in our sketch-books and then make up a painting out of that and work from that. Working with monochrome but then just introduce one colour. A still life was set up in which everything was painted reds but different reds, but we were to interpret it in green, we were to find the equivalent greens to these reds in relationship. So there was some very interesting challenging exercises like that. And we were taught the various skills of stretching paper, stretching canvas, application of oil paint. Something which has also happened a lot in my life, this is a good example of it, within the first week we were...when we were enrolling probably, I had to go and see...in turn we had to go and talk to a tutor about what our option would be. One day a week we could do an option for glass or ceramic or fashion or graphics. And I wanted to do glass, but I stammered so badly saying 'glass' the tutor in embarrassment was trying to help me, he said, 'Sculpture?' So rather than have to go all through that again I said, 'Yes.' (laughs) So that was how I first...I was really, was introduced to sculpture, it was one of those...

It was as gratuitous as that?

Yes, yes, as gratuitous as that.

Or maybe it wasn't.

That's how...that's how the angels work. (laughs)

Yes.

And stone carving with John Robson.

So you didn't actually have that predisposition to it before you went to Kingston then?

No. But although, as a child I was always making, but art, because of Gordon Taylor and the way, and we never did sculpture, it was painting, and I was good at drawing and I was good at painting, and I was looking at painters, I wasn't really looking at sculptors. So when I left the foundation course and went down to...I looked for a...in your foundation year you have to apply on to the next course, and I chose painting. I tried to get into the Slade but it was premature to try that, but... And I needed to get away from home, and Brighton I knew a little bit of having been to school there, although I hardly knew the actual town but it looked quite an exciting place. But I used to go to the art school doing these evening classes so I was a little bit...I already had sort of, like a familiarity with that college, and they did a painting course in this new National Diploma in Art and Design.

Just to finish though with Kingston, were there any particular teachers there that were important for you?

Alfred somebody, a painter; Brian...Brian, what was his name? Something like Gooch. Donald Pavey, he was interesting, he was really a designer but he was really into the psychology of colour, so, he was a very interesting, very odd little man with a suit with a moustache. He sort of took an interest in me. I remember he first asked me what my name was, and he said, 'David Nash, David Nash. Good artist's name, that'll work.' (laughs) I remember during that year going to a play, it was an N.F. Simpson play done in Walton-on-Thames, the local repertory company did this, it was a Theatre of the Absurd, and I remember I went with my girlfriend Sue and when we came out we heard the news that Kennedy had been killed, shot. And I remember wearing a black arm-band or a black tie the next day and I remember Donald Pavey being very impressed with this gesture of mine. Because I had loved Kennedy, I mean he represented youth and young, and, or I thought he did then.

What about the sculpture at Kingston, how was that taught on this one-day option?

Well it was stone carving, and I was introduced to it, I was given this lump of stone and just to make a simple form, and I remember making sort of an oval, sort of an oval shape, a standing oval shape, very quickly, and I remember John Robson being astonished at how quickly I had been able to find that form within it. I can't really remember what else I did, what else I did there. There was...they had an anvil and a forge, and I think, I just heated up metal and wacked it. I loved that, fire and steel and hitting it. Pretty low tech. We did a bit of welding I think, just making up forms. It was like, just have a go, have a go was really what this thing just... Learn by doing was really the emphasis rather than a more dry, academic and theoretical approach, which it had been before.

Were you doing your own work outside of what you were directed to do in the class?

There was very little time because it was a very intense course, and we were given home work and weekend work and holiday work. And I was also busy with my love life too, I had a girlfriend, and learning to drive.

What about the other students?

Two particular people, called Tony Tidy and Richard Adams, and we three were going to go to Brighton Art School, we went down there and we had our interviews, and two girls, Francesca Reilly, and I can't remember her other name, Jennifer, Jenny, Jenny something. The five of us went there, and they took me and the two girls, they didn't take Tony and Richard, and we were like, we were real buddies and we were like the stars, or we would like to think that we were, but we were...you know, our tutors felt that we were really serious and we had very good portfolios, and I was devastated that they didn't get in, and actually it was the large part of why for me it didn't work down there in Brighton.

It didn't work?

No. But I think...if there's anything more about the foundation course that we should look at? Meeting new people, Sue didn't find she, or felt very shy or nervous or was quite threatened by my being in another social environment.

What was she doing?

She was still at school then, she was a year younger than me. She subsequently went on to do a secretarial course. So we sort of parted then, and...

This sounds as if it had been a pretty serious relationship.

Yes, well she was my close confidante, she was my...because, you know, I could talk to her, I could talk to her and my friend Will, but I couldn't talk to my parents about anything, so we were very close, and I was very serious about it I guess, and you know, we wanted...it was planning a life in the future together, very naively as it turned out.

Why do you think you parted? Because you had gone into this different world?

Yes, yes she found it very difficult, and just didn't want to come in on anything, didn't want to meet anybody there, didn't want to come to the college, come to any of the parties there.

It was all very intimidating.

Yes, and I just think she felt very threatened, and so we parted. Anyway, obviously we got back together again later on, actually just when I started... That was partly why I went down to Brighton I think as well, there wasn't that attachment any more in the area because, the girlfriend situation didn't exist any more, so...

That must have had a big impact on you, that break-up.

Yes, yes it did, and I was very disappointed by it, and I don't think I ever...I didn't...I went out with some other girls but it was never the same, it didn't...you know, it was just trying to build a new relationship again, and it just didn't have the sort of history to it somehow, well looking back on it now, I wouldn't have thought that then. So I went to Brighton, and I had digs, you know, with a family, I think it cost something like £7 a week rent or something like that, incredibly cheap. It might even have been less, it might have been £5. I think it worked out at 14s.6d. a day, and I used to come home at weekends a lot, and that was when I passed my test and I had a car then.

So it was your first taste of independence really.

Yes, yes, independence. And, it just didn't jell for me there, it was rather an odd bunch of students. There was one particular student who was a bit older than the rest of us, he had been to medical school, called Rod Harman, who is now a course leader in the foundation course in Hastings, in Hastings Art School, and he introduced me to how to look at a lot of painters, introduced me to how to look at Rothko, what Rothko was about, which I hadn't got before, Mondrian, Gorky, Malcolm Lowry; quite a lot of literature. And all through my college years, and for quite a few years afterwards Rod was like a major influence in introducing me to different writers, going to visit him in Blackheath where he was with his family and two little girls, and that was always like a little pilgrimage for me, it was like going to see a mentor.

Was he older than you?

Yes, yes.

Oh yes, you said he had been a medical student.

Yes, yes.

What was he like?

Well, looking back on it now, incredibly romantic, and he really understood what the mysteries of sport was about, and the sort of, what horse racing was all about, and he was also really into rugby, I used to go and watch all the internationals with him. We were great supporters of England in those days, in the Sixties, they were dreadful, and the early Seventies, it was an appalling team and it was quite miserable supporting them in those days.

But these, Rothko and Gorky, they were important influences on you?

Very, because I hadn't got Rothko, I just hadn't got him, and he just told me to go and sit in front of a Rothko for five minutes, just wait. So I did and then it sort of happened, it wasn't...there wasn't a surface any more, it was just a warmth, and then that became a revelation of something human, a very human, moral quality, and later discovered that Rothko actually said that his paintings were moral statements, and that moral quality had always been important to me about art, I think quite early on realised sort of, the healing qualities of art, and the truth, that it works if it's true and it doesn't work when it's not true. And it's a way, it's a way of life. I've always seen art as being a way of life, as something which is whole, and it's a learning way, route, and it's unique to.....

End of F4720 Side A

F4720 Side B

I was asking why Gorky was important for you.

Well he became more and more important when I went back to Kingston to study sculpture, and the main influence there was Eddie Pickett, who was very aware of both Malcolm Lowry, who I had already met and we had long conversations about what that was all about, but I think we can come to Gorky later when we're in that period. While I was trying to be a painter down in Brighton the main teacher there, the one who had the most influence, was a man called Peter Cresswell, who is now I believe the Dean of Goldsmiths', a real intellectual, a very sophisticated intellectual, and possibly he is one of the reasons why Goldsmiths' is as it is now. We were all terrified of him, he was very to-the-point, very blunt, but very serious.

Was he teaching painting?

Yes, yes he was a part-time teacher. There was a guy called Cyril Reason, Ian Potts, but Peter Cresswell stood out a mile really from them.

How did he teach?

I can't really remember now quite what the projects were. There was one when we were trying to do a...we were to find a place in Brighton where we could do a mural or an art work and then make a scaled-down model of it, and I found the gable end of a building and then I scaled it down in an outside space in the three-dimensional area of Brighton, although Brighton didn't have a sculpture course, it was only a day, and they had paintings and graphics I think, and illustration. I remember there was a woman teaching there called Paula but I can't remember her other name, Paula Brown possibly, something like that. The Blaue Richter exhibition was on at the Academy, and that was a big influence on me, and that was quite a revelation about colour, and expression, Expressionist paintings. It was anathema to Peter Cresswell so he was quite surprised when I chose to go that way, but really during that year I became completely lost, I became lost artistically and socially, I didn't know what I was

doing. I obviously had a lot of talent and everybody could see that I had a lot of flair in how I started a painting, but I just didn't know what to do with it. I was a bit short on the intellect I think, I was much more drawn to anything which was more emotionally based.

Was Peter Cresswell teaching within a theoretical framework?

I can't remember. I guess he was. There was another student there called Tony Bachelor who admitted he was totally lost and asked him to guide him, and I remember Peter getting him to figure out the colour of a triangle and the colour of a square and that really interested me, the actual colour and the form and how that worked, and about trying to comprehend how we recognise objects. So that was very interesting, watching those two, what they were doing. But by this time Sue and I had got back together again and I was kind of keen to get back to where she was, which was, she was living at home still.

So, you saw Phillip King's show, didn't you, in 1964 while you were at Brighton, or was that earlier?

I'm not sure when that New Generation show was, whether it was during the foundation year in '63 or '64 or '65.

Well the New Generation show was in '65 I think, but wasn't there a Phillip King show at the Rowan Gallery?

I don't think I saw his show there, but I remember seeing the Phillip King show...you're probably getting that out of the essay, Hugh Adams's[ph] essay, 'Sixty Seasons', which, the dating might be inaccurate there, but the New Generation show was probably...that was in 1965 and I think that's when I first saw 'Tra-la-la' by Phillip King. Yes I think it was then, I was doing, I had gone back to Kingston. So, to go, to be able to get out of Brighton, to get out of this situation which I felt very uncomfortable and very unhappy in, I needed to, if I was to get out of it and get back to Kingston I had to change course, which one was allowed to do, and if the college

you are at didn't offer the course that you wanted to do you were eligible for a transfer. So as Kingston did sculpture, so again, it was like the stammering about, trying to say 'glass' and I ended up doing sculpture, they were really social reasons why I was opting to do sculpture as a course because I wanted to be back near where my girlfriend was, Sue was. So I left Kingston - Brighton, and got into Kingston and started on the second year, and quite quickly found myself just as lost as I was with the painting.

Why do you think that was?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT]

Was it what we were talking about last night maybe, about not having found your voice as it were?

Well yes, and it was very unlikely one was actually going to find one's voice even when you're at art school.

Sure.

I think because the foundation year had been so successful and there was a lot of expectation, and self expectation on me to do well, I was finding it very hard to find I wasn't doing very well, so that was a difficult thing to come to terms with. And I needed teaching, I was very arrogant I think, probably quite proud. Although, yes I've got a note here about, a very important experience was going to France with two friends from school, their names were Henry Brett and Nick Rubridge, both were in agricultural college then, and we went in Nick's Ford Popular, just to tour around France, and we had a hell of a lot of fun, but the most important bit was going to Paris, and we camped outside Paris for about three days and travelled in and we went to the, what was the Modern Art Museum, and they had the reconstruction of Brancusi's studio within the museum. It wasn't like it is at the Pompidou. And, I had known about Brancusi's work from Gordon Taylor and from Rod, and Rod Harman had spoken about it a lot, so I looked at it with sort of great interest but I didn't realise

how much of an impact it was making at that time. I also managed to buy some of Henry Miller's books which were banned in Britain, 'Sexus', 'Plexus' and 'Nexus', 'The Rosy Crucifixion'. And I think Rod probably introduced me to reading Henry Miller, and through those books I was introduced to Lao-Tzu and the 'Tao-te-Ching', and to Jacob Boehme. And I just loved the whole image of Henry Miller as this outrageous character, and very anarchic.

Well why were those other books, I don't know how to pronounce it but...

Lao-Tzu's 'Tao-te-Ching', it's not really a Tao text, it's not known as...it's not really a scripture but it's, the end of his life he was persuaded to write down his teachings. And Henry Miller talked about them, so I managed to find, Penguin had just brought them out in Penguin Classic, and I read them, and whatever Henry Miller recommended, because I loved Henry Miller I took whatever he recommended seriously. But I actually didn't get on with it, I found it very middle-of-the-road and very conservative and passive, mild, it didn't have enough action in it.

But nonetheless you often cite it as a big influence.

Yes, well later, when I met it again, about three years later I read through it again I realised I was working out of reading it, and I realised that, also similarly seeing the Brancusi studio, I didn't realise how much had gone in. Seeing the big David Smith show in the Tate Gallery also was a similar experience of being very thrilled by the exhibition but only later realising how deeply it had affected me, and actually enabled me to do things, or had shown me the way, without my realising it. And I think in retrospect the truth speaks to a part of one which is behind one's intellectual life, which is living much more in the moment, full of one's own ideas; and even ideas which intellectually one refutes, the truth nonetheless reads or is recognised.

So, to be more specific about the Chinese philosophy, what do you think you were responding to there?

The space, his ideas of the spokes, the space in, the spokes of the wheel. A house is only a house from the virtue of its empty spaces; a cup only works as a cup by virtue of its empty space. The whole point of a cup is its space. Probably in that 'New Generation' show there was the Caro piece called 'Hopscotch', was all about, I actually saw articulated space, that the space was as important as the actual material substance there, so that was a revelation and that related to this 'Tao-te-Ching'. The insubstantial wearing out, the substantial, like water wearing away stone. All these sort of references to nature. The greatest emperor is the one that you never hear of, that one never hears about. All those paradoxes.

Yes. Caro particularly you were struck by in the 'New Generation' show?

Yes, and I started making Caros with, putting colour into space. When I say I was at Kingston and I was lost, but it was actually quite right, because one is lost, and you've got to try a lot of different...

Find your way.

A lot of different things. And eventually... I also went to Chartres cathedral on that French trip, and that made a very deep impression, particularly the quality of darkness inside the cathedral, it was incredibly warm and benign and loving. And I was very impressed by the Romanesque sculpture there too, so my first attempts at sculpture at Kingston were sort of wood carvings in a sort of Romanesque style, quite sort of small.

Really?

And then that moved into...it's quite figurative work, and the Vorticists, looking at that, and making Vorticist-like figurative sculptures. Trying to work from the life model.

Was it the same time as you were looking at Caro and David Smith?

Yes, that sort of came later. And also I read one morning before going to college a paragraph out of Henry Miller, it just happened to be where I had got to, and about fear and the tyranny of fear, and I realised this was what my problem was. You know, I knew I had a problem, and I was just afraid of being a fool, appearing to be a fool, so what he was saying in this text was, you have to allow yourself to appear foolish. So that just opened the door for me, and I remember going and getting a whole lot of garbage and taking it into college and just fooling around with it. And Eddie Pickett, who was teaching part-time there, who had been at the Royal College, he was 27, I think I was 19, sort of recognised something was actually beginning to stir in me. We had had some conversations and I think, which he admitted later, he said he just felt I was just a middle-class kid, a sort of, quite smug middle-class kid who felt quite comfortable. And in fact he gave me a hell of a kick up the arse and sort of took me under his wing and took up where Gordon Taylor had left off I think.

And how did he do that?

He got me to come up and stay with him and his girlfriend up in London, and he took me to his studio. The way he talked about art, about the British art establishment which he hated.

How did he teach you?

He was very...from just example. He was a very passionate person. Absolute antithesis of Peter Cresswell. But interestingly Peter Cresswell had since been fired from Brighton for some social misdemeanour I think, and he was teaching design at Kingston so he used to come and seek me out, and we had long conversations. And then the next day Eddie Pickett would be in, and it was, I thought, I must get these two people together, and of course they loathed each other, they sort of, they just represented each to each other what they couldn't stand.

And so your own work at this time, you're talking about doing, after Chartres you were doing figurative...

Yes, well that, I quickly worked through that, quite lost, then I started getting into colour, putting colour into space, and that seemed to be what Caro...well what I thought what Caro was about, I got very disillusioned when I realised actually the colour was not his main preoccupation. But the big thing was to move up out of the college main building up to an annexe called Coombe Farm, which was a dumping ground for the Surrey Education Authority, so there were loads of blackboards, easels, desks, broken desks, medicine balls, wooden hoola-hoops, all in these old barns, and the art college had taken over the farmhouse and made studios up there. And I went up there to work outside, and then found there was a lot of big...a big barn which I just cleared out, or I stashed all their desks up, I went in and made a space for myself. And then went quite wild in there really, I was using all these old desks, breaking them up and nailing them together. It was very hard to get tools out of the technicians at Kingston; this is often the case in art schools, that if you don't get a sympathetic technician in the sculpture school it's very hard for anybody to do anything, because they hold the keys and the authority and responsibility of these quite sophisticated tools. So I gave up on them and just used a saw, a hammer and a bag of nails, and a lot of household paint, and really had the full support of Eddie Pickett and to a degree David Hall, who was also teaching part-time then.

And so what would your work have been like then?

I got a lot of scrap windows, and nailing them onto four-by-twos and other... I just put these big windows up into space and put paint on them, sort of partly, they were sort of partly painted. I got very interested in the difference between the experience of looking at a view through a window, or through an open window, and what the actual difference was; one where it was real, you had a real physical connection, but looking through glass it made it like a memory, or it distanced you from it. So it was looking into a space from a distance, and then that space had the possibility of other quite surreal things happening in it, because one didn't actually have a physical real connection with it. I was very under the influence of what Eddie was going on about, I was a devout student of Eddie Pickett, as were quite a lot of other students there, because he had this passion which we all responded to.

What was his work like?

Plastic and colour, and sort of tableaux. Very surreal. He rented a church hall basement along with a Canadian artist called Jerry Pethick, and both of them were experimenting in plastics and they were finding ways of getting like each thick 8 x 4 sheets of plastic for hardly anything, they were rejects, I mean things which would have cost the equivalent now of £300. And finding ways of heating them and forming them, vacuum forming them. Got into holograms, but in the very very early days of the discovery of the possibility of making holograms, so that was very exciting to be along with. Jerry and Eddie and this scientist friend that they had were actually making a hologram photograph and then actually reproducing it and trying to find the hologram, where was it in the room?

And what about David Hall, who was he?

Oh, quite a strong, one of the Sixties artists, British Sixties artists. He later went into making film, and I later came up, or came into relationship with him again teaching at Maidstone when I did my first part-time teaching. Very intelligent, very sophisticated, more like Peter Cresswell, and intellectual.

What, he was teaching at Kingston?

Yes, though he sort of supported anybody who was having a go, you know, it was like throwing caution to the wind was what we were being... So there were these young part-timers coming in, getting us to show caution to the wind, and there were these full-timers like Charlie Lewis who was head of the department, John Robson, they were the two, and a guy called Wayne Hobson who was Bernard Meadows's right-hand man at the Royal College, and on the strength of that he could get part-time teaching wherever he wanted, but he was quite a dangerous character to have around, really he was an academic and... He couldn't get Giacometti really. I remember him talking to one student saying, 'Giacometti's work's just complete codswallop.' You know, it's nothing. Which to me was just an extraordinary statement to make, having fallen in love with Giacometti.

You had?

Oh yes, through Eddie, Eddie again, like Rod, was showing me how to comprehend things, which I had an instinct for but I hadn't...I needed the conversation I think. And 'The Palace at 4 a.m.' and all those early Surrealist works by Giacometti in particular, linked with David Smith's early work, which was quite Surrealist. And then how Giacometti moved into those figures and what they were, and those tiny little figures, and about recognition, how you can recognise how somebody moves from their sort of etheric movement, that you can recognise someone that you know a very long way off just by the way that they move, and I think they were what those tiny little figures was all about that. What I later discovered was this sense of the individuality of a standing figure, which is why he had to make those figures small; he tried to make them, you know, in normal dimensions in width but they inevitably became these very, just these vertical images which activated the space that they were in in the equivalent reality of a human being standing there, you know, it was like having somebody there, there was somebody there. And those heads of his brother and of his mother, and of his girlfriend, they look at you. Because he always made his sitter look him in the eye, and he would look them in the eye, and that's what he would make, he was trying to make that communication between two people. And there was a big Giacometti show on at the Tate I think while I was a student, I'm pretty sure there was, with the paintings. And again it was like a whole life, it was like Brancusi, it was like a monk-like approach to art, and that was very important to me. And the way that Eddie made a commitment to being an artist, to what he was doing, was a very important role model for me.

Why was David Smith important?

The last sculptures, the 'Cubis' were arrived as a result of all the other work, they couldn't have got there without that, and I remember Eddie saying that, like the Brancusi, his very minimal heads, Brancusi got to that, you can't start with that, you can't start with simplicity and minimalism, you have to find your way to it. And the big 'Cubis' David Smiths, these geometric shapes piled up, but it was the polishing

marks which loosened them, so it was loosening the specific, like the forming of the right angle where you have these loose marks but you have a specific form.

And this was the time of Gorky as well, wasn't it?

Yes, Eddie was making Gorky-like forms, they were like Gorky paintings, his sculptures. They were[??] actually going into a Miró or into a Gorky painting. And the way that Corky evolved in his imitation of other artists, he learned by imitating Picasso, then he imitated Miró, before he found his own voice, and that was very important to me to have an acknowledgement that it's OK to copy other artists as a way of learning, because you... Also, if you try to avoid doing something which excites you, you will always be avoiding it, you can't work through it, you have to do it to go beyond it.

Was Miró important for you?

Not to the same degree, but again in the Tate early on, maybe when I was in foundation, or maybe earlier, it could be looked up, there was a big Miró retrospective at the Tate Gallery, and it always interested me to see a one-man show which was a retrospective, to see how an artist worked through; it was a life and all the works were stepping stones, and were a part of a whole corpus of work, and if you like the whole opus, the oeuvre I think, the egg, of the artist.

Like the way you will have your family trees.

Yes, yes. And Malcolm Lowry, reading that, Malcolm Lowry's letters where he wrote to one of the publishers when his book 'Under the Volcano' had been rejected, explaining how each chapter related to the next chapter and how it worked on many different levels, and that there were three or four books there that you read. When you read 'Under the Volcano' the first time you read a narrative, then when you read it again you know what the narrative is so you are able to become aware of another level, the inter-relationships. And then there is another level if you read it a third time

and possibly a fourth, if one reads it a fourth time. So it is a circular book, and it does begin where it ends.

Now it did have a direct, that had a direct influence on your own work a bit later, didn't it?

Yes, from, when I moved up here, those towers, they were... One of the stories about Malcolm Lowry was, when he was writing 'Under the Volcano' he had the whole book up on the wall in different rooms; there would be one chapter in one room and one chapter in another room with alternative sentences, so if you changed a sentence in one chapter it would reflect on a sentence in another chapter, he would have to go and change that. So he was working on it as a whole, and this way of working really interested me, and I thought I would try to work in a visual equivalent of that. So the first tower I made when I came up to Wales was really very literally trying to work, trying to recreate these rooms with these different feelings and activities in relationship with each other, and how one layer of the tower would relate to the next upper layer, and then the next layer above that until the very top layer which was very sort of cosmic, I like to pretentiously call it. Thinking back on those works now they're incredibly pretentious, but, my advice had been that, I think from Rod Harman, when you are a young artist you have a lot of ideas, and somehow you've got to commit yourself, or at least you've got to bring them into the world, even if it's only a note or a sketch, and you can spend the rest of your life working them out, sorting them out, which is what I did. So when I came to Wales, which, I think we're jumping the gun a bit because we've...we need to...

You haven't gone back to, I don't know how to pronounce it, Boehme? You were talking about reading...

Oh Jacob Boehme.

Boehme.

Yes, this was very pretentious really, but Henry Miller describes how he went into a bookshop and he had been looking for Jacob Boehme and he eventually found the book and he just sat on the floor and read it, and that very same day I went into a junk shop in Weybridge and there on...they only had about six books in this junk shop and one of them was the 'Signature Of All Things' by Jacob Boehme, so I bought it for about a shilling. And I was living in Kingston then, I had a little bedsit I was renting for £2 a week, because it hadn't been decorated, I got it at a really cheap deal, and it had two rooms, it had a little fireplace in it, and I was sharing a kitchen, and I can remember sitting faithfully each evening for half an hour trying to figure out one paragraph of Jacob Boehme, and I would make notes, I've still got the notes, trying to interpret from that English into an English which I could understand, and then the next night I would do half an hour's study of this. And I only worked through three or four pages I think, but nonetheless it was enough.

Why do you think that was important for you? Because you often cite it, don't you?

Yes, it was...it was really meeting with mystic Christianity for the first time, and I didn't really realise it then, esoteric Christianity, and he was obviously an initiate, he was initiated by an initiate, and his task was to write these texts. And I haven't been a great student of Jacob Boehme, but he is a major influence on Rudolph Steiner, he was someone who Steiner quotes quite a lot. But it was an introduction into the...I could say that it was the fact of the esoteric, that which lies behind the physical, like a sense of origin. And also realising at the time, at Kingston, that what originality really means is not to be innovative and make something that nobody has ever done before, think a thought which nobody has ever thought, which is really like an invention, of which there is an awful lot of that, and Lao-Tzu warns one of, woe unto him who innovates while ignorant of the way, and really what originality means is getting in touch with origin, which is something very ancient and deep and completely invisible, and it can take on many forms. And Jacob Boehme I think introduced me for the first time to someone who was actually working at that, and trying to provide a path to a comprehension of that.

What about the other students at Kingston, were any of those important, your friends particularly or anyone?

Yes there was a guy in the year before me called David Lewis who was very interesting, he was also very influenced by Eddie. Richard Adams and Tony Tidy remained at Kingston in the painting department so I used to hang out with them quite a lot. I don't really think that there was anybody else in particular. And, a lot of my holiday periods from then on were focused up in Wales, because then I was planning, where was I going to be when I leave art school, so, in 1966 I started seriously looking for a house. One, it was a way of leaving England. Under the influence of Eddie I had become, he had taught me how the British art establishment really worked, and how closed it was. And he also advised me, either you go right in to an art centre, live in London, don't live in a suburb, you've got to live in London, right in the middle, or get right out; don't go to a provincial town like Birmingham and Cardiff or somewhere, go in or right out.

End of F4720 Side B

F4721 Side A

There was also, Sue and I were planning how could we be together, away from parents. She was living at home, secretarial college, and it was at a time, we were in a family situation where living together was not going to be tolerated. And my father still had a big presence in my life I think. So we decided we would get married as a way to be together, which was a mistake because really we were already, looking back on it, going in different directions, because we were still growing up, we were still finding ourselves. But we both wanted to be out, and it was a very romantic idea to come up to Wales, so, for my own agenda I needed to be somewhere where I could live very frugally, so I would have time to develop as an artist and to have freedom of time to do that. Because I knew I would be able to buy a property here very cheaply, which I did, I bought one for £300. When I started looking for somewhere to live in Wales there were various places in very remote areas, derelicts which really was going to cost a lot of money to sort of make them habitable. And I happened to be walking through Blaenau Ffestiniog, which I had come to like the slate tips very much, I used to go up there and play with the slate and go and make drawings of the sort of atmospheres that existed then. And I was walking through Blaenau and there was a little envelope stuck on the inside of this shop window that said, 'Freehold property for sale, £10'. And cottages in Blaenau and terraced houses were exchanging hands for £15, and if it had an indoor toilet it might be £25, that was what the prices of places were then, this is 1965/66. So I went...no, I beg your pardon, this envelope didn't say £10, it said £100.

Quite a difference.

But it was sold for £10, because I went down and raised £100, or promised people...'Yes, I would lend you ten quid,' 'I'll lend you twenty quid', came back and found it was sold, you know, it was sold for £10. So anyway that, seeing that envelope triggered it off, get something in Blaenau, it's possible here. And with my father's support too, he was very supportive in me being bold enough to actually try to buy a property, and of course he loved the area himself and he was planning to retire up to this area later on.

Your grandparents had died by then, had they?

Yes, yes. Yes my grandmother had died quite recently. Anyway I eventually managed to buy a cottage for £300, and this was, the money was partly advanced to me by my father who had promised me, as he had my brother, £1,000 when I was 21. This was a lot of money then. And I also was doing a lot of odd jobs. I had a van, a big van, so I did quite a lot of deliveries, helping people with removals.

This was down in Kingston?

Weybridge. I also did a lot of pub drawings, I went around the area drawing pubs and going in and selling them to the owners, which I made quite a bit of money on, anyway enough to assist with the purchase of this place. And got a housing development grant on this property so we were able to put a new roof on it, and with the remaining £700, and along with this little semi-detached cottage which was next door to a farm, the people living in the other bit were running a small-holding, who later had a big influence on me too. There was also a detached derelict house with a bit of garden, which I patched the roof and pulled the floor out and had one big space and it was my indoor studio. So all this preparation for this was for Sue and I to get married as soon as I left art college and we would come up here to start our life here.

You also said something earlier about you wanted to leave certain influences behind, which was one motivation for you to come to Wales.

Yes, I was very aware of how influenced I was, how easily influenced I was, by people like Eddie, and I was also seeing what was happening to people who had been influenced by him and how they were trying to survive in London still in the presence of this influence. I still loved the guy, I was absolutely devoted to him. So, I was looking forward to the opportunity of just being able to work in a completely non-art space, place, environment, because I didn't really know anyone here. I had also in the meantime met an electrical apprentice who was working in the nuclear power station, was doing his electrical apprenticeship in the nuclear power station, his step-father

had a little quarry here, a quarry business making slates, a real Welsh quarryman with his brother, and Alan had wanted to get out of being this engineer and he had met Will and I and he liked our ideas a lot, and saw the opportunity of starting a little slate craft company where we would make slate lamp-stands and candlesticks, coloured slate coffee tables and things like that. So he set up a little business in the anticipation of me and Will moving up to the area to work with him. So I had work planned here. And Sue worked in the local - well, in the local power station, in the nuclear power station here as a part-time secretary. And I also was doing one evening a week evening classes here. So that was what our income was, was this part-time work with this slate craft business, which didn't last very long, it was a disaster really.

But this was obviously after you got married.

Yes, yes. So we were married and we were living here, and we both had jobs, so we were sort of, seen from the surface we were doing OK.

What was the wedding like?

Oh, a formal church wedding in Oaklands Church, which is sort of where my parents were married. And both sets of parents thought we were far too young, which, they were obviously absolutely right to, but in a way they were forcing the issue by the assumed pressure that we couldn't live together, we wouldn't be able to...you know, so it all needed to be formalised. So it was a church, white wedding, and it was great, and we went to Paris for a week and I saw the Brancusi - well I should say WE saw the Brancusi but really it was I saw the Brancusi, space again, and the Jeu de Paume, and, just in the magic of Paris. But it was early August, incredibly hot, so it wasn't a very good time to have gone there. And then we moved here, and then Sue I think met the reality of what I was really on about, you know, I was wanting to be an artist, so when I wasn't working earning money I was working making art, and really she wanted some fun and some life, and I think she sort of quickly realised that this was not what she had bargained for, this actually was not what she was imagining for her life, and did various things to try to wake me up to this fact. So it was a very difficult, really quite quickly quite a difficult relationship and a stormy relationship, and

eventually she left with somebody else who, she had a relationship with somebody and they just left. So I was left here.

Was this somebody local?

Yes, he was actually the guy who was helping out with the accounts of our business. So, you know, there was this whole thing of me trying to get her back, and... But I should go back to say that one of my decisions at Kingston was not to apply to the Royal College in my third year, because it seemed to take up an enormous amount of time and attention and expectation and false hopes, false hopes if you didn't get in. And then people didn't get into the Royal College and then they would try the Slade and then they would try somewhere else, and it all seemed to be terribly distracting and I really wanted this year to really focus on my work, because I felt I knew what I was doing, I really was getting somewhere then. This sort of looking down into this space, this sense of recession in three stages in plaster, they were like plateaux. There's a way of getting the beholder to feel that their eye level had risen up a thousand feet and they were looking down on to a landscape. It was like trying to distance the viewer.

This is, you were doing this in your third year at Kingston?

In the third year at Kingston.

Yes.

And I tried to write a thesis on time which is incredibly pretentious and I didn't give it proper focus and I wasn't really very interested in writing a thesis, so it didn't...it wasn't very...it certainly wasn't very good. It was on time, I was trying to write it on time.

How did you approach that?

Somebody recommended that I look at Ouspensky and his ideas about time and about the dimensions of possibility. A load of crap really. But I think I tried to write about artists, but I didn't accept the guidance which was being offered by the complementary studies staff, and I sort of had it typed up and I didn't present it very well, so that was...that didn't do well. But the work was...it was a good show I think, and I think people felt that I was doing something.

Your degree show?

Yes. And Peter Cresswell was amazingly supportive, and typically of him he was saying, 'You've got no competition, you're going to do great, you've got no competition.' He was obsessed with competition. (laughs) He was always looking at art magazines to see if anyone was doing what he was doing.

So, Kingston was...you think of it as a positive experience?

Very, yes, particularly with Eddie, Eddie was my teacher, he was my mentor, and I was also seeing, going down to Brighton and seeing Rod Harman a lot. Yes, let's.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

David, you wanted to go back to talk about the break-up of your marriage.

Yes, the...because we have mentioned my parents so much and the relationship, they were very fond of Sue so it was a great disappointment for them, I think it really upset them a lot, and consequently put our relationship back quite a long way, not so much with my mother but my father felt personally disgraced I think, this was something... So I think he mentioned something, 'We've never had this sort of weakness in the family before,' this sort of...yes. But the result that it had on me was like being Jonah being spat out of the whale, because it was, all my plans and my assumptions and sort of romantic illusions were very seriously challenged through the space of the next two years. I had to re-appraise a great deal of what my intentions were or what my vision of the future was, because up till then everything had been based around us being

together. So it certainly wasn't my wish that we should split up, but in the three months that it took really for us to part it became more and more evident that Sue really wanted quite a different sort of life than I was able, than I was going to be able to actually give her.

And how far into the marriage was that?

Oh, only six months, and then...so yes, it was between July and Christmas that things were all right, but we were beginning to experience difficulties and Sue was beginning to show signs of her disenchantment with the whole situation. And for example, when we arrived it was...we were in a fog for six weeks, and I can remember looking out of our bedroom window and the clouds parted and we could see the nuclear power station. (laughing) I mean we knew what was there because she...we had both been working on this place and we knew what it was like when the sun was shining, I mean the view was absolutely fantastic of the, looking down the Ffestiniog Valley and the Moelwyns, and the sun would rise on our sort of, to our left and would set behind the Moelwyns. Just unbelievably beautiful place.

This was in the middle of the country, it wasn't...

It was up above Blaenau Ffestiniog, a little hamlet called Fuches Wen, the house was called Cynnon House. A tiny, tiny, tiny little house, two rooms downstairs and two upstairs. But I stayed on in the house, and I actually rented it out to holiday-makers and moved in with my friend Will who lived just down, like a little pathway from my house. He was renting a house from the woman who I bought our house from, Bunty Vaughan, who was the heir of a lot of property in the area, a middle-aged lady, spinster, quite a gas, I mean really a very funny woman, and she rented Will this little cottage for 15 shillings a week, so when I moved in with Will I paid him 7s.6d. a week towards the rent. And then I was renting the cottage for about £15 a week for holiday lets. I then also moved into the basement of the Lindale Hotel, in the sort of cellars there, for a studio. I had become very disenchanted with working on the tower, I had seemed to have stopped working on the tower, there was still more to do to it to finish it. I also ran into planning problems with that because there had been

some complaints. The first tower I built was a very rickety contraption and the gale blew it over and it broke a cable which went to a communal aerial, TV aerial for the whole town, and so it put all the TVs out in Blaenau Ffestiniog. Apparently that's...people used to say when there was interference on the TVs after that, they used to... 'Oh it's the modern art,' they used to call it. The problems with modern art. Anyway after that I built a much more substantial tower, so the first tower was really the second version. Then working down in the Lindale basement, there was an Indian, he was the only Indian in north Wales I think, who was running the hotel, his uncle and, his uncle had been an electrician when the nuclear power station was being built then he had won money, some lottery or something, and he had bought the Lindale Hotel which was a thriving business then because there were all these Irish people working on the nuclear power station. And then he left to work in London, and Paul came over from India and was...he was told to go and run the Lindale Hotel, and he had a little café on the high street which was a part of this hotel, and then behind the café there was a restaurant. And I moved up...only I needed a bigger space to build my next piece, which was a sort of broken archway. It was again a development from the arch and relating to work which I had been doing in Kingston of looking through into a space. The lavatories for the café were at the other end of the studio, so I soon met most of the people who lived in Blaenau Ffestiniog, because they would come through and were sort of astonished at what I was doing. And so it was the socialising of me here really, having been forced into a meeting with the local population. Because I was quite an anti-social person, and was quite content with just a very few friends. But I should talk a bit about some of the key friends who I did make here when I first came.

Could I just ask, what were you working on in the studio? Did you mention the archway?

The arch, yes, it was called 'Broken Arch', which subsequently developed into another piece which developed into another piece. That was really the main work that I was focusing on. I was tending to think of my work in epics, sort of like an on-going sculpture which I would add and change and metamorphose, and it was completely mobile. So this was before - well yes, we'll get to that later.

How much time were you able to spend on your sculptures? Because you were running this business with the other two. And you were doing lots of other things, weren't you?

The business dropped out about the same time as the marriage dropped out. The actual moment of when Will and I quit was, Alan tended to spend most of his time in the pub chatting up clients to buy our slate tables, I mean work that needed to be done, but the workshop was an old barn behind the Penguin Arms Hotel in Llan Ffestiniog, and the most recent residents before us were chickens and they seemed to stay there even though we had moved in to it with all this machinery. Well there was one machine with one light bulb, one light point and one socket which ran a slate cutting machine which involved water, it was a Carborundum disk, and I was the one, I was the operator, and I would be cutting slate into shapes to make these mosaics for these coffee tables, and cutting shapes in slate paperweights. Our only water supply was off the roof, it was rain water. As we moved into winter it was getting colder and colder, and I needed hot water to be put into the machine otherwise my sort of fingers would just go rigid with cold. So Alan, being an engineer, rigged up this heating system which involved a big oil drum with a lot of holes punched in it and with a lot of sort of garbage in it, coke and old... This is...he had been taught that this is how it worked. And you get the fire going in this drum and then you drip oil in, which he got from the local garage, it was old sump oil, and this was supposed to create, you know, heat. But what it did, it didn't create much heat but an incredible amount of fumes which, as there was such a large hole in the roof, most of the smoke... We often had people running in to say, 'You're on fire, you're on fire.' But it was actually this sort of poisonous...it was green smoke pouring out of this end. When it snowed, a lot of snow came in through that hole and, there would be a heavy snowfall one day in the winter and we dug our way, we dug all the snow out from the door, the big door going in, and we opened the door up and there was just as much snow inside as there was outside. Will, on this particular day Will was drilling a hole by hand to make a hole for a candle in this candlestick, so he was on top of this bench putting all his weight onto a brace and bit with this hand drill, making this hole. I was working on the machine. We had put the heating system outside because of the fumes, but we had

it going with all this oil dripping in to heat a kettle of water to put into my machine. And this candlestick that Will was drilling into split in half, as slate tends to do, split, so he fell off the bench and then he hit his head on the vice which was holding the candlestick. And he was so angry that he picked this vice, this brace and bit up and threw it out of the door, which was open, and it hit the spout on the kettle which knocked it off this kettle, and so all the water poured into this heating system, which then put the fire out. And we just looked at each other and started laughing, and then we just felt, well that's it then, and we just downed tools and went up to the Penguin Arms and had a pint and left a note for Alan saying, 'Sorry, we quit, we can't go on'. (laughs) So after that it was working with Fredwyn in the Economic Forestry Group, sort of part-time work planting trees, digging drains, drainage ditches, and poisoning gorse with a spray. And Fredwyn I met very early on when we moved up in August.

Fredwyn Jones?

Yes, Fredwyn Jones, who was born and brought up in the area, had a Welsh father and an Irish mother, Catholic. And Alan Evans, who was this electrical engineer who was, I was partner with in the slate products business, we often met at the Grapes Hotel in Maentwrog and he introduced me to Fredwyn, who was slumped on the bar quite drunk. He had just come back from Mount Mellory which was a Cistercian monastery in Ireland where he had gone to be a monk, to join up. Fred would have been 32 years old at this time. And he had stayed there a week or so and the monks had talked to him, and they made the decision that he was doing more work in the world, his place was to work in the world, not to be cloistered. And he was incredibly disappointed, and so this is consequently why he had had quite a few pints and was slumped on the bar. Anyway he was introduced to me, and engaged me in conversation, and asked me what I did, and sculpture, and asking me about my sculpture and I started describing this tower and how one moves through the stages progressively towards some representation of the universe. And he said, 'Well what about the stage beyond that?' And, very challenging questions, and he was very interested. Anyway, a couple of days later he came up to visit me, and I was working on the tower and he just appeared, and, he loved it, and he was talking about it in the most interesting way, and using analogies and metaphors which were sort of images

which were floating around in my mind but hadn't been articulated. So, that was the beginning of a very long and very meaningful relationship, and he sort of took to me I guess. I was ten years younger but he was very intrigued, and he was a bit of a painter himself, he was, sort of did moonscapes and... Lived with his brother Jack in a tiny cottage in Gellilydian, so we would regularly see him at the weekend in the Grapes Hotel and we would often go back to his place afterwards and talk. It was always philosophy, and he was very into Thomas Merton then who was a Cistercian monk, esoteric Christianity really. And he became really my next mentor, as a teacher.

He talked to you a lot about Christianity?

Yes, but this was...this wasn't Catholic dogma in any way, this was actually related to Jacob Boehme, this was actually somebody who had had a mystical experience and a revelation which they were working out of. And he wasn't a preacher, he just...I think, he was one of the few people you found you could really talk to and come out with where he was at. A lot of people locally thought he was doolal, you know, sort of daft, but if any of them were in any emotional trouble they would go to Fred to sort of talk about the problem. He was, you know, a spiritual guide in the area, and always has been.

Is he still alive?

Oh yes, yes.

Of course he would be.

Yes.

I haven't really got a sense of his personality I don't think, what he was like.

A leprechaun. Very Irish face, a pixyish face. Very wiry. A great smoker. He used to sit in his little A30 when we couldn't work because it was raining and we would

talk and smoke roll-ups or Woodbines. Woodbines reminds me of Phyllis Playter, we must talk about Phyllis Playter too.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Was it through Fredwyn that you really began to get seriously interested in religion, or had that been when you were reading Boehme before?

I had never closed the door on it, that's something I didn't mention when I was at Brighton College, that one was automatically confirmed, you know, one went right through the instruction aged 14 for Confirmation and was confirmed. And I had never been that drawn, but actually that was an experience, and I actually, it was...something seemed to happen, but it wasn't anything that I could work with. But you know, we had to go to chapel every day and twice on Sundays, and... Though I was quite agnostic but I never really closed the door fully; I felt when I heard somebody say what Gandhi said when he was asked about Christianity, he said, 'Well I like this Christ but I don't like his Christians', and that seemed to be how, in the sort of direction that I was feeling, and...

Was it Anglican, was it?

Yes, it's like cold porridge, that's my description of it. Fred's religious life was a religious...he is a religious experience, so...and how things really are. You see there wasn't really a scheme that he was trying to...well he wasn't preaching.

But it was Christian?

Yes, yes but it had a human warmth to it, and he had like an eagle eye, incredibly astute, into reading people and situations. He would talk about love a lot, what love was, and there was a time in the Grapes when there was a university professor or something who had got engaged in this conversation and he said to Fred, 'Well I don't know what you mean by love, I don't know this love is.' And Fred banged the table with his fist and said, 'Well you'd better make your mind up because I need your love

now!' Quite a hell of a character. He was a boxer, he was in the Army, he joined as a paratrooper and he was a demon boxer apparently, he really would flatten people. You know, a bantamweight I guess. And there were a few occasions in the pub when it was necessary for him to lay somebody out who was bothering somebody else; it wouldn't be something which he would instigate, he would just stop something before it got out of hand.

So you felt that he was opening doors for you?

Yes, yes. And it was so extraordinary to come up to Wales where I thought I was just going to be without anybody else watching or getting involved with my work as an artist, and here was somebody who really seemed to be the next step to help, to sort of lead me on. I was very like a child then, I looked much younger than my... Still at 20 I was being stopped by the police thinking I was too young to drive. (laughs)

Can you be more specific about the way you were thinking about religion at that time?

Only that I was assured of a spiritual presence which I didn't understand, which is different from being confident that there was no spiritual presence in.....

End of F4721 Side A

F4721 Side B

And was it through Fredwyn that you then went, you spent a month or some time in a monastery, didn't you?

Yes, it was just a week. So...are we on now? Right. So when Sue left I sort of went to Fred for support, and he was incredibly supportive, I remember he just took me immediately on this walk up to a very particular place which he likes to go a lot, by a lake, and he just really sort of, one of the first things he said, 'You know, really she has done you a big favour, and it must be terribly painful for you now but you will realise that this is a gift, and it will make a man of you'. And he said very positively about her, she has probably gone off to make a man out of Martin now. So that was...that was really his attitude towards everything, that there was just this very positive aspect to human experience, it's in all guises that it came, that you need to be...steel needs to be forged in fire, is always one of the things I remember he always used to say then.

But you tried to get back with Sue, you said?

Yes, worked at it. I didn't have any wheels, I didn't have a car then, and I needed to sort of pursue her once I found out where she had got to. Anyway...

Did she leave very suddenly?

Not really, it was a three-months, maybe-maybe not, maybe-maybe not, and I just couldn't bear it after long, and I think I said, 'Look, I can't go on living like this, I mean this uncertainty is just, it's excruciating, and you've got to make your...you know, you've got to make your mind up.' I really loved her, I didn't want her to stay with me and not be happy, but I was just absolutely distraught at the idea of her going, and I like to think that I really loved her. And eventually, you know, she had actually packed her bags and everything and she even then was still sort of hesitating, hesitating, and so I sort of helped her put them in the car and took her to her rendezvous spot. It's all very young and very romantic and very silly really, and it's

all the result of doing something which one in hindsight, it was too early, you know, to enter into that sort of depth of a relationship far too young. But anyway, so be it.

So the marriage in itself changed everything in that relationship.

I think we would have split up anyway, I think we would have found that we were actually growing up and growing in different directions, and the marriage might have been an attempt, we were probably recognising that, and it was an attempt to prevent that from actually happening. Because we had been in each other's pockets for so long. Yes, I was pretty much without money, and Bunty Vaughan suddenly appeared on my doorstep, this is the woman I bought the house from, and Will rented his cottage from, with Miss Playter, who, Miss Phyllis Playter, who was John Cowper Powys's housekeeper as she was politely known as, you know, she was his companion. He had died in 1963 so I never met him, but Ted and Margaret Harris, who lived next door to me, who I must mention too, can remember him walking up the hill in his very thin-soled shoes because he wanted to feel the ground, and he would hit this stone with his walking stick and then walk back down again. And they lived in a tiny little house and, or Phyllis lived in this tiny little house now on her own, and she could see the tower as it grew from her kitchen window, and was very intrigued. So, she was a great friend with Bunty Vaughan and they were always laughing when they were together, and so she...

Bunty Vaughan had been...?

She was the woman who had inherited a large section of Blaenau Ffestiniog and was selling it off so that people could own their own houses. And Phyllis was thrilled with the tower and with my paintings, and she bought two paintings, I think it was about £38 that the two paintings came to, and with that money I was able to buy a car, which I think was about £20 from the local garage, and then set off looking for Sue. (laughing) So that was quite a game, and for about...

How long did that phase...?

Oh, about three months I think. In the meantime I was back in Blaenau a lot and working on the tower, on this new sculpture in the restaurant of the hotel, in the old restaurant of the hotel, living with Will, renting the cottage, in a very extraordinary and strange mental state of being... Underneath it I think beginning to admit that I felt incredibly free, possibly for the first time in my life, and that's where this image of being spat out of the whale, it was like I was really being launched into the world. And so I dedicated my work, my life to my work almost exclusively then.

But at the same time you were trying to get Sue back?

Yes, well I think then it was...it just wasn't going to happen, it had gone too far, and she... We kept in touch for a few years but I didn't see her, and then the letters just stopped, and I just didn't want to see her again, it was just going to be too painful, and we only...she went apparently to, later to Cardiff University as a mature student, and has a child and is a single parent, but that's all I know, we have no contact at all, and it was really my wish that it was like that, because I just found, I didn't trust her, I didn't trust her coming back in my life to... I think I felt she wanted a lot of excitement, and so, to stir things up, and she sort of liked the drama of relationships being difficult; she liked making up and then going into another trauma, and just that seemed to be a pattern that I certainly wasn't able to handle.

So when did you get divorced?

Oh, two years later, in Caernarvon. We didn't see each other, it was still a time you could have an uncontested divorce, and it was in the early days of that. I remember the judge sort of annulled it by a strange sort of, he hated, he said, 'The more I see of these uncontested divorces the less I like them'. It was a most bizarre experience, it was my only court experience, and he sort of made a, I think he sort of sneezed or something but it sounded like he was vomiting, he sort of made this sort of, [VOMITING NOISE] gesture, and that seemed to be it. (laughing) That was like the...that's what annulled it. And the house had been in my name, and Sue didn't contest anything at all, so she had everything which belonged to her and I guess you could say it was fairly amicable, but rather odd. But it made me very nervous of

getting involved again at any depth, and there were subsequently a few quite superficial relationships. Well I should talk a bit more about Phyllis Playter, because she came to play a very important part in my life.

Was she a local person?

American, she was from Boston originally, and she was...she left home, she was a single child, she left home to be a waitress on the railways when she was about 18. There was a connection with the Quakers in some way but I can't really quite remember what that was; I think she might have been a librarian briefly in a Quaker library somewhere in Boston. And she can remember being with her parents in a covered wagon going in to Oklahoma to claim land, and her father had the privilege of naming a small town, and he called it Pittsburgh, and she always used to tell this story and say, 'But why Pittsburgh? He had the opportunity of naming a town, and he called it Pittsburgh!' she used to say. She had a lot of stories she would often repeat. In the Oklahoma little cabin that her father made she heard this noise of a frog on the veranda and she went out and there was this frog hopping along the veranda and there was a gopher snake coming after her and it, and she was very young, she killed this snake, and she took the frog about a mile down to this creek, to her favourite place where she knew there was nice damp air that a frog would like, and then she would say, 'And do you know, it took that frog three days to get back to the veranda'.  
(laughs)

How old was she when you met her?

Well she died in 1982 and I guess she was about 86, and I had known her for 14 years, so 14, 86 minus 14 is 72, and so she was in her seventies. A tiny little house, she smoked Woodbines and was very sociable and liked to offer people a cigarette, and she had this big chest of drawers and one of the top drawers she would heave open, she was very small and very frail, and it was full of every sort of cigarette you could imagine, and she would say, 'Well help yourself'. Because she didn't want to oblige people to smoke Woodbines, which was her favourite cigarette. Gin and tonic and lemon also was always out. And then there was a clock that ticked in this room,

and a beautiful mirror, and it was like visiting a shrine going to visit her, and the conversations were always interesting, very interesting. And I would be complaining about something that was going on, like in advertising, I think...and she would say, 'Oh you English, you're so protective. In America we don't take any notice of advertisements, we know what they are.'

What brought her to England?

John Cowper Powys. She met him in the States, he was a great orator and lecturer, and she came...he left his wife and I guess they lived together. They lived in Corwyn, and for quite some time she nursed her parents until they died in Corwyn. He was very sociable and a lot of people wanted to visit him and interview him, and they had a spare room, and they always...there was always people there, so it was difficult for him to work, so they made the decision to move to the smallest house possible in a really inhospitable town where people wouldn't want to come, so they chose Blaenau Ffestiniog. And they bought a pair of cottages, both, right next to each other, you know, they were semi-detached by this little waterfall sort of tucked away, and he lived in one and she lived in the other one.

Why was she important for you?

Somebody who was deeply connected with the arts, was really interested in what I was doing, was always wanting to come and see the work, and very supportive to Claire and was always telling her, you know, you don't... She liked to give us a present at Christmas but she would always give £5 to me and £5 to Claire, she wouldn't give us £10 as a couple, she respected us as being individuals. When I was teaching, I was going off to Newcastle or Maidstone, I always...which would be, could be a week long, could be ten days long, each trip, and I would usually go and visit her before I went and then I would go and visit her on the way back and sort of report in what I had experienced on these trips. So, a bit like Fred really, she was just somebody who I felt very connected to, and there was this sort of support. So between the two of them, Fredwyn and Miss Playter, I felt what Henry Miller had advised, he said, 'You only really need two people to believe in what you're doing.'

One isn't good enough because they might be mad, but two is usually quite sufficient.'  
And they sort of filled that role.

And where did Ted and Margaret Harris fit in?

Well Ted and Margaret Harris lived next door to the house, Cynnon House, up at Fuches Wen. They had met in Canada and had a child up there. Margaret came from Porthmadog, from an Irish family, the Gaffeys, and Ted was a Londoner, and they had just come back to visit the family and they rented the farm from Bunty Vaughan I guess, and there was about four acres, so he grew hay and he had a couple of cows, he qualified for sort of a grant because he had a couple of cows. And they had six kids, and it was a tiny little house and they all fitted in there, and the hospitality that they offered anybody who came through that door was phenomenal, the sort of warmth. Margaret's Catholic. And they became surrogate parents for me I think, and they were very supportive again when Sue left, and played a big part in Claire and I meeting, because in the Easter of '79[sic] Eddie Pickett, who was still teaching at Kingston, Claire...

Don't you mean '69?

'69. When...?

You said '79.

Oh did I? I meant '69, yes, sorry, in '69. Three of the students on the sculpture course at Kingston were planning a jaunt up to north Wales, camping, so Eddie gave them my address so if anything went wrong, if they got rained out or anything. And he was also reckoning I could do with some female company I think. And they did get into trouble, one of the girls got bronchitis and they got rained out, so they came looking for me. I was out with a girlfriend, Avril, who was a local girl. And they arrived in this rainstorm and knocked on Ted and Margaret's door to try to find out where I was, and they just invited them in as they would normally do, and Claire said she had never experienced this warmth before. There was a fire going and there was tea and

cake. And Ted said, 'Well, it'll be open next door, just go on in and make yourselves at home, I'm sure it's not a problem,' which is what they did. So when I arrived home with Avril, this is about half-past 10, there were three girls in my house who were cooking soup, had the fire going and made themselves very comfortable. (laughs)  
And Claire was one of them.

Was there something immediate between you?

Not really, because, actually I really liked her but it was having been burnt by the marriage failing with Sue, I just couldn't...I felt quite early on with Claire it was...it would be something, it would be like all or nothing, she was just too nice a person to mess about with, or to take lightly, to take a relationship with lightly, if it was a full relationship. It was about this time that I was buying Capel Rhiw, and there was another individual and his wife, this is Dai and Erien Hughes, and Dai is from the area, Welsh, and Erien, his wife, is Welsh too, they had two little girls, they lived in a flat in the high street in Blaenau, and I was an artist, or trying to be an artist. He was a signwriter and local chimney sweep, and he was very interested, he had seen my tower and wanted to meet me, and he followed me into Woolworths one day and got talking and invited me back to his house, and again it was another open door, they were just incredibly generous and I could go there any time, and being quite lonely at that time it was quite often I would go and see them and drink coffee and smoke cigarettes with them and talk, and Dai was very interested in art. And he told me about Capel Rhiw being for sale, and he and I thought of buying it together and starting some sort of...I was still doing evening classes then, my evening class in Penrhyndendraeth had grown to two evenings because it was very very popular and I couldn't handle all the people so we were able to divide it into two. And I had started another evening class in Blaenau above the old library which was funded by the WEA, which is the Workers' Education Authority, or Association, Association.

Was it...was that how you were keeping yourself, through teaching?

Teaching, renting the cottage, local decorating, a little bit of carpentry, a bit of building work, helping people out. Very frugal, because my overheads... Because

one of the points of buying a place in Blaenau Ffestiniog, because I had no rent and no mortgage to keep the overheads down, because the less one had to spend out the less you had to earn in, which was what would be so difficult if I was to live in London, because you would need somewhere to live which means the rent, you need somewhere to work which means the rent, two rents. So, all my friends were spending all their time earning money to pay their rents and not having any time to actually be in their studios to practise being artists. So that was part of the strategy, was to come to a place which is really also like rock bottom, and to work up from there. I hadn't imagined staying here then, when I first moved here, it was just like a, where we would start. Blaenau sort of means the end of the line, it's like the end of the valley, you can't get any further than that, and that seems to be what I was doing here, it was like...

Starting at the end.

Starting...yes, at rock bottom. And also realising that, or feeling that the odds are really on that I will not succeed as being a successful artist. I couldn't see. Phillip Vaughan said, 'You know, if you're going to be an artist you've got to be known, you've got to work at being known, and you've got to have a strategy.' And Phillip was really into that. Phillip built the tower with Roger Dayton on top of the Hayward Gallery, that neon tower, and he had a show in the Serpentine very early on. And I sort of, I realised he was right, and I couldn't see myself doing that. I was very reclusive, and I'm not competitive, and seeing what Eddie was having to put up with in London in his struggle to try to get recognised, and both he and Phillip were tough people, and my God, if these people are tough and they can't, they don't seem to be doing it, I don't see how I could do it. Which was again part of my thinking of being somewhere...at least I could be somewhere where I liked being, and I could make a a life here, I can earn enough and have a lot of time.

So you didn't expect to earn your living from art?

No. I think deeply in the back of my mind that this might work, by going right out, it can work the other way. But it was certainly not an expectation. There was a very remote possibility of that actually happening.

So, you didn't think of leaving after your marriage broke up?

Yes. Yes I actually got a...Phillip helped me get a bedsit and I was going to share a studio with him, and I was all packed and ready to go, and I had one sort of last weekend here. I actually had everything packed into the car.

To go where?

To London. And I had a weekend with Will, who had a relationship with a girl here, who has subsequently married, Shirley, and then with those two and some other friends we just had a great weekend, which involved rowing on this lake at Crabnant, and then I had a walk up in the quarries here. And I can remember walking on these big slate rocks which were up on these slate tips, and they tend to be out of balance and you can sort of crash down on these sort of rocks. And I was on this slate and I was rocking it, and it was banging on the slates, and these rocks underneath, and there was an incredible resonance, and I could really feel...feel my way into the earth here, into the rock here, in this resonance. And then I also realised that there was a lot of demolition wood, or big pitch-pine beams in these old derelict workshops that I could have access to, you know, I could find out who owned them and...

This was all the last weekend up here?

Yes, yes it was the last weekend. And I sort of really, I was nervous of going to London but I had made the decision, it wasn't working here, I wanted to get out of here, it had a lot of memories that I didn't want to go on being connected with, and it had been a romantic dream to come up here, it didn't work, I would go to London. And then I thought, I changed my mind, and I just unpacked the car, wrote to Phil saying, no, sorry, I've decided I'm going to stay here. And it was then probably that the chapel came up for sale, and talking with Dai about my decision to stay here and I

would go on doing this teaching, and we saw that we could make the chapel into like an art centre, and we actually got the Welsh Arts Council to come up, I remember a woman called Sue Edwards, one of their first officers, Welsh Arts Council officers, and she told us how we had to be a committee and have minutes and... And I started bidding for it, it was going for £50, and there was someone else, a scrap dealer wanted to get the scrap out of it, and he dropped out at 200 and I got it for 210. It wasn't an auction, it was just through an estate agent, Farmer's Mart, Dolgellau.

Is it a Methodist chapel?

Yes, Calvinistic Methodist apparently. And a very popular and very successful chapel, it was one of the most successful chapels in terms of popularity, of people coming to it.

So how had it come to be for sale?

Oh, the congregation had dwindled to 15, huge over...heating costs, and the plaster work was falling off the ceiling, and they couldn't handle it, and they had a smaller church so they would put all their resources into that. And they assumed that whoever bought it was going to pull it down, because the person who was bidding against me would have pulled it down, and they were a bit surprised when I didn't. They were also very surprised to see how young I was, I was 22 when I actually bought it, 22 or 23.

At what point did you go to the monastery?

Oh right. This was a little later on. I got myself into the chapel. My father bought, first he bought the single, the detached derelict cottage from me and made that into a holiday cottage as part of his business, he paid me £300 for it, and then he bought Cynnion House from me, again to be a part of his holiday cottage business, for £1500.

Oh, those two cottages were the two that you had bought before?

Yes, that I had originally bought for £300, I had a grant and I had done them up, so they were both viable, so he got quite a good deal and he was helping me out too.

Were they in the area by then?

Yes, they were just moving up, I think in '69 or '68 they had bought the old tannery in Maentwrog and then they spent eighteen months to two years doing it up. They also had another house down in the valley, Bron Turner, which is near the stream where the 'Wooden Boulder' is. So they were living there while they were working on the old tannery.

So what was your vision of the chapel when you bought it?

It was a dream of a studio, it was, like, you know, I was committing myself to being an artist and I didn't, you know, marriage prospects, family, all that had been abandoned. This was just an amazing opportunity to have a great space. I remember showing the photographs to Eddie down in London, and I had been telling him about it and I had been writing and telling him about what I was doing, and he said, 'I don't think I want to see these pictures,' because he knew he was going to be so jealous. (laughing) Because it was...in a way he was encouraging me by his role model, by the sort of space which he had and what he wished for, which is actually the church hall above his studio where he and Jerry actually had an exhibition, so this was very like that space. And so with the profit that I made from selling Cynnon House I put electricity into the chapel and plumbing and made a little, like a monk's cell in one corner of it, and I just imagined living on my own there in this sort of, imagined the life rather like Brancusi's I think, just living here, earning my money from odd jobs, I seemed to be working, doing these evening classes. Well then Eddie said, 'There's a new course at Chelsea that you ought to look at.' Because I had applied to the Royal College but my arch enemy, Wain Hobson, was on the interview panel, so there was no way I was going to get in.

Why was he your enemy?

We've already mentioned him in the tapes. He and I had really seriously fallen out at Kingston when he was telling me I shouldn't be doing this work which I was doing in this barn, which was quite wild. He used to say, 'This would be all very well if you were in the College, or when you are at the College.' And I said, 'Well I have no knowledge of whether I'm going to go to the...' and I remember telling him just to fuck off, he was just, get off my back. And of course that was extremely rude. I had some more runs-in with him later on, one of them being this interview, and he sort of really poisoned Bernard Meadows against me. He didn't like Eddie Pickett either, I think they had seriously fallen out while Eddie had been a student there, possibly, I'm just surmising. Bryan Kneale who was teaching was very keen on my work, Eddie had really recommended me to him, anyway Eddie was pretty miffed. Bryan wasn't at...Bryan Kneale wasn't at that interview, but I don't think it would have made any difference, and I think it's just as well that I didn't go to the Royal College, I think they would have professionalised me too soon.

So you had set up this monastic life here, and then you went for this short trip to the monastery. Was that an important...?

Very. I got a place... I would like to get to that in just a bit, just, it's going to fit in. Before I moved into the chapel I had moved the archway I had built in Paul's restaurant down to Pen-y-Mount where my uncle was now living in a part of it, and my grandfather's vegetable patch had become abandoned, it was a flat area, and I asked my uncle if I could erect this sculpture there so I could take photographs of it for my application for Chelsea. And then after my grandparents had died my uncles and my father were selling off bits of land for people to build houses on, and there was a very modern house built very near Pen-y-Mount which overlooked the vegetable patch built by the Moulds, and Anthony Mould, who now is an art critic and has done quite well in the art market I believe, he was just a kid, and I remember catching him firing stones at my sculpture with a catapult, something which he later repeated by writing a very scathing article about my work in the 'Daily Telegraph' a few years later, several years later. And then I moved all that wood and the wood from the tower, which I had been made to take down because of the problem with the planning permission, but I was having to get out of there anyway, so I started

recycling all that wood, all that coloured wood, you know, I had a whole sort, you know, a couple of tons of coloured bits of plywood and...

Coloured how?

Painted. No, I was putting paint into space, that was really what I...it wasn't just colour in an abstract sense, there was a narrative involved, and I was beginning to work in a way that Gorky did when he moved to the country, those last paintings he.....

End of F4721 Side B

F4722 Side A

.....finish what you were saying about Gorky?

Yes, about Gorky. When he moved to the country he was observing plants around him and the shapes and the forms and amalgamating them into these worlds, and there often, in his paintings there were microcosms of the whole painting, it sort of repeats itself in different ways, and lines in space. Very spacial, very landscape, the sort of landscapes that I was trying to make, and in a way that Eddie was doing, he was like making, in a way very influenced by Gorky and making Gorky paintings; these things are like trying to actually enter into a painting like Gorky's.

What was the narrative element in your work then?

How things related to each other, what was above, what was below. If one looks at my notes that I was making then there was a lot of probably very pretentious, but attempts to create like a scheme of things, or a logic. It's having something, it has its own logic. Marcel Duchamp published a book called 'The Green Book' or 'The Green Notebook' I think, and his text in there has this curious interplay between technical, factual description and sort of a mystical, something which is sort of, made hazy. So what was focused was made unfocused. A very interesting, I found a very interesting relationship between those two phenomenas, and it seemed to be where I was at. Narrative in that they were like, it was like something happening, characters, or some event happening within a scene, within a landscape, or within a village. And there's a quote, there's a paragraph in 'Under the Volcano' by Malcolm Lowry when he is describing himself as being so sort of broken down and drunk and alcoholic and in a mess, an absolute mess, and everything just sort of in fragments around him, but also saying at the same time, but underneath all that mess and chaos he was still there in his essential being, like a peaceful village. I think that's a fair rendering of what this paragraph was, but 'A Peaceful Village' was something I wrote up on my wall on the studio.

Were you identifying with that because of your own personal...?

Very, yes, yes, very much so, and the romance. I think it was also about Rod Harman and about Gorky. Gorky, I mean Rod looked a bit like Gorky actually with his moustache, very tall, handsome, but romance, there was a romantic idea of it, the sense of the artist, sort of an impossible...makes people impossible to deal with really when their view of the world is so unpractical, impractical. So, I had secured my place at Chelsea, I still had more time here in Wales before I started. It was a year, it was a twelve-month course starting in September '69 and went on to September '70. And Fred had continually been saying we should go to Caldy Island to the Cistercian monastery, they've got a guest house down there, so we drove down there, and, very profound experience being with these monks - or a monk really, there was a guest master called Brother Robert. And the whole island is imbued with this...again, a bit like what I've just said about, I was trying to say about the Duchamp experience that, these monks were eminently practical, they were farmers, I often saw one farmer going around with a shotgun under his arm, with his habit and a shotgun shooting pigeons who were eating their corn. And they made perfume, and it was very hot and one of the monks who was collecting gorse had put Bermuda shorts and sandals on. And so there was this...and their farming, you know, they were driving tractors, and there was this farm going on, and yet there were these services held in the chapel that one could go up on to a balcony and hear the Gregorian chants and take part in the services, so I was getting up very early, and, you can't actually take part in them but you can witness them. And it became, it was just such a profound experience. And Fred was there so our conversations were continuing and we met other residents there. And going onto the beaches and walks, and, it was...it sort of resolved me more. So, you know, I had twelve months in Chelsea and I had two years out making my own living, not always being able to have studio time when I wanted it, and here was an opportunity of a grant. Again my father helped me with that, he made the grant up to a full grant, for what is the equivalent of an MA here. And that period at Caldy Island resolved me, I was going to really discipline myself like these monks were disciplined, and I got up really early and I can remember having the habit of sticking my head under a cold tap and standing in a basin of cold water to really...because it really woke me up. And I had a bicycle and I cycled down to Chelsea and I would get there for 7.30 in the morning, so I missed all the traffic; it was the earliest that the

cleaners arrived. I got very friendly with the caretakers there, and they would sometimes open up for me, and I was there every hour that the place was open.

Do you really trace that discipline back to your time in the monastery?

Yes. Yes, well that was when I had the model shown me. It wasn't necessarily what Fred had taken me there for but...

That was just one week as well.

Yes. It seemed like a long time, a very long time. So that, I think that's when we get to going to Chelsea, and I think we've sort of covered everything in that period. I left the chapel with an artist in it who took on my evening classes, a painter called Geoffrey Stride who had been at Camberwell, he was a friend of a cousin of my first wife, of Sue's, and he just turned up one day with his suitcase and said...just came to stay. I had never heard of him before. He was a bit of a pain in the arse in a way, but he was a lot of fun and he wanted to stay on here, he made friends here, and he took on the evening classes, so they kept going, so I would take them on when I came back after my year away. So I was essentially based in London for twelve months in what had been Jerry Pethick's flat in Notting Hill Gate, and I shared that with somebody who I had been at school with, at Brighton College, called Rufus Harris, who was one of the founders of the organisation called Release, he and Caroline Coons started that off, so we were very near the Release offices, and I was often in there.

And what was Release doing?

Release was helping people who were busted by the police, helping them get lawyers, Legal Aid, proper representation, going through the courts in the right way, getting the police to behave themselves.

Would you have considered yourself political at that time?

No, I thought...my answer to that, because there was a lot of political...you know, the pressure on about taking a political stance if you're an artist, but I felt just being an artist itself, and if you were committed to the pursuit of individual freedom and the responsibility of that freedom, that was a political gesture in its own right.

I was thinking of all the things that were happening at that time, the '68 riots, everywhere, Vietnam. Did they impinge very much on you?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I'd like to say yes it did. I can remember the sort of horror of all that, of talking with Eddie about it at one time, but, I think I felt I had enough problems of my own to sort of deal with, and being very reclusive, I was not an extrovert in any way, so, I didn't see myself... I guess I had opinions, I can't necessarily remember what they were now.

But I mean, that late Sixties in London it must have been quite an exciting time to be in London. It was your first time living in London.

Yes. Yes, although the last two years at Kingston I spent quite a lot of time up in London staying at Eddie's place, so I was sort of aware of it, and it was very present in the art schools at that time. Blaenau is a long way from that, I mean I remember very late on, this is probably '69, girls in mini skirts here, and bells, you know, it arrived in Blaenau very late, all that flower power.

But did you feel very apart from it, going back into London from living here?

I had a job to do down there, I had twelve months. I had an agenda which was to get a lot more professional. But thinking back on it, the Royal College of Art would have done that to me, but here at Chelsea George Fullard really left his students alone, it was only a one-year course, and I wanted it to come out of myself, so, with this discipline I made myself do things properly. I've always been so hasty, I would never prepare wood properly, I wouldn't put the right...I wouldn't even bother to put undercoat on, I would go straight in with the top coat, which doesn't work. And so,

and I would just use any old thing, whatever I could get hold of. Those towers I made were right rag-bags, and technically very inept.

So this was a year really completely for working. What about your life - I know this is a strange way round to approach it, but while we're getting at it - your life in London, what you were doing outside of the college, or were you completely focused?

Well through Rufus and Release I met quite a lot of very interesting people who weren't artists, lawyers for example, and a lot of their clients. They had a great little library there with a lot of, is it Arthur Waverley who translated a lot of Chinese...?

Arthur Waley.

Waley, yes. There were a lot of his books there of translations of Chinese texts and poems and Buddhist texts, and I spent quite a lot of evenings there reading them and being awakened to the realities of life through these four people coming in to Release, an extraordinary experience. So quite a lot of the work came home with Rufus who, the whole house was attacked, we had to barricade the door all the time. (laughs)

And were you interested in drugs at that time?

Not at all, never have been. There was drugs about at Kingston, and they were anathema to me. One, I was always afraid of breaking the law, I think, I just didn't want...tangling with the police. I had had some tangles with them with car incidences, with, allegedly I had stolen a car, allegedly I was driving it without tax, and the police had a terrible reputation at that time, particularly in London. And also I really felt that this chemical interference with my body was just not meant to be, and I didn't want, I just made a decision. I didn't get into the pop culture either. You know that's something I meant to bring up with the music, earlier on talking about music which influenced me, I think I got to Carl Orff, and then there was Shostakovich and Bartók and Schoenberg and Webern. And Shostakovich stayed with me, I mean it's very passionate music and it suits a young person very much. And

Indian classical music. I think I saw a Satyajit Ray film while I was at college, and I loved the music, it was probably 'Pather Panchali' I think it was. And so, Ravi Shankar was around, the Beatles were working out with, hanging out with Ravi Shankar, and so I heard some of that, and I bought a record and I bought a lot of Indian classical music, and it was one of those things, as I have described before, that I really recognised. And it wasn't for a long time until I was actually taught about what was really going on, that there are these ragas which are, like archetypes, very simple structures, and they are appropriate to certain times of day, certain moods, and that the musicians would take, choose appropriate raga and then for ten minutes or so they would do what's called the elap and they would play with this between themselves, three or four musicians, which was part of the performance; it wasn't something they would go and do in private and then come out and perform, they would do this as part of the performance. And when they felt they had found their way with this raga they would then go into the performance, which was an improvisation which was unique to that time but it was based on this ancient archetype. Which is a description of what I've already described before, about originality, that you find a new form for something which is very ancient and original, connecting with origin. And I've later come to think that my, a lot of the way that I work, I find a raga, like the cracking, the warping and cracking, or the vessels, and each situation presents me with a different way of playing with that raga, or combining them. And Indian classical music, Indian architecture, Indian sculpture, I mean the figurative work, is so sensual compared to the European.

Did you know that then, at that time at Chelsea?

The V & A, I used to go up to the V & A and up to the British Museum. You were asking what else did I do, I met a lot of people through Release, and people who I am still very closely connected with, Bill and Vicky Richards down in London and their kids, you know, we're very very close and we met them then.

And who were they?

They were both sociology students in London University, and Bill had a room at Mike Armitage's house; Mike Armitage was a pal of Rufus Harris, he was a very successful young stockbroker. He was like an early yuppie I guess, he was very interested in art, he collected Indian miniatures which, I often at lunchtime at Chelsea went up to the V & A to look at the Indian miniatures because I was working with those colours, and I was working with those compositions too. In Indian miniatures you will often see people sitting on a sort of dais and with always lots of very intricate little objects in front of them, and then these curious shapes in the sky would be above them. So the towers I was making, I was often referring to Indian miniatures to find related shapes and forms. So he collected them.

What about Indian sculpture?

Well there was also in the room there were these carvings, and I just loved the figure, the women in them, and the elephants. And then, I would go up to the British Museum, above the North Entrance there was a whole room of them, and that was something which I got off on later I guess, but I was aware of them then. So I was going to the museums a lot, and I would often, in the V & A they had two or three Cézanne watercolours, very simple, very small watercolours and I used to go and look at them, they were like a little talisman for me, a touchstone for me.

So you were as much influenced by painting than as sculpture at that time?

Yes. Yes I still working out of painting. Because I wasn't a true sculptor, some people would probably argue I never have been, in the sense of the Henry Moore, of this extraordinary mystery of three-dimensions of how different something is as you go around it, how it can change in form as one goes around it. I don't think I was ever really interested in that, it was always, it was more like the tableau, the...from a frontal view looking at it. But I couldn't cope with the painting. I needed a lot of activity with the work. I think one of the problems, I decided the problem that I had with painting was, it wasn't active enough.

How do you relate yourself now to that whole Henry Moore tradition?

I recently saw the really big Henry Moore sculptures outside in the country park, at the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, which Henry, when Henry Moore went to the Sculpture Park and saw the country park, he said, 'That's where I'd like to see my work'. And that wish has only recently been realised, and they were absolutely fantastic. And I think for the first time I really got it, and he is great, a great sculptor, and working from origin too, you know, I think he found his ragas are in the bones and are in stones. But really he was...he was 'grandfather', or, he was like the problem I had with my father, one had to... I think a lot of the teachers that I had had been Henry Moore's assistants, so there was a lot of Henry Moore teaching going on through these people who had been his assistants.

He was a huge presence.

Yes, but I think, I was part of a new impulse, or people like Eddie was rebelling against that, those assumptions, which, what had been discovered had become assumptions.

Can you be more specific about that?

Well the abstract, the autonomy of the abstract form, again how something can change as you go around it, that was very much being taught, this is what sculpture was really all about, and thinking, no, there are other ways, there are other things that it can do.

What about the element of truth to materials?

Well that really didn't bother me very much, because I was more interested in the actual image, and I felt...later I came to that, later I realised what that was about. It was not just truth to the material, it was truth to the tool what one is using. But I think we'll get to that later on, but we're still in a...I'm making art school art.

No, actually I was talking more generally just at that point, about...

Right, yes. Well what happened was, living here, what I was doing in London and what I had been doing in Kingston, and then what I had been doing here in between the two experiences was really very urban, it was connected. It wasn't connected to the reality of being here. And I ran out of money, I couldn't afford to buy plywood any more from the local wood yard, I couldn't buy demolition wood; the access to wood from the quarries had dried up. And I started using some fresh wood, unseasoned wood, and...

And thereby hangs a tale.

Yes. (laughs)

Perhaps we ought to, before we do really run on, go back to Chelsea. [BREAK IN RECORDING] You were saying that at Chelsea you were very aware of Henry Moore as this great sort of figure standing there.

Mm.

Now, perhaps before we go on to talk about the teaching, I wonder how you would be situating yourself in relation to other sculpture work. You must have been aware of Minimalism at that point.

Now I'm not quite sure when the big Minimalist show in the Tate was, but I was obviously aware of it before that show, and it seemed to be incredibly sterile to me when I was first introduced to it.

Which was how?

Through photographs, probably lectures at Kingston. Really what I was talking about, you were asking about my sort of social life, well I think I would like to deal with that first, with this Mike Armitage, we used to have great evenings round his place, he used to get a lot of wine in and then he would take us...because he was so

rich he could take...pay for the lot of us and take us all to, a whole bunch of us to a Greek restaurant, the Anemos I remember we went to a lot. Some days, I worked Saturday mornings and then Saturday afternoon and Sundays were my sort of time off, and I would go over to Blackheath to see Rod quite often, museums; I was seeing Claire then as a friend, we were close friends then. She had come up in the summer of '69 and worked in the chapel on her own work. I made a lot of little cubicles, imagining that I could rent out to other artists.

How soon was it after Sue left that you met Claire?

A year. But it was a very platonic relationship.

But you stayed in touch.

Yes, and she came up, and she really liked, loved it up here, she loved Ted and Margaret Harris, she adored Fredwyn, and just the whole way of life here, and she, we fixed her up with a little cottage, part of the Lindale Hotel, there was a cottage that she could rent there. Then she went back to Kingston and then we would meet occasionally in London. I remember going to the circus on Clapham Common with Claire. She was working from circus imagery at the time, it was one of those big tent circuses, Bertram Mills or something.

This was wood sculpture?

Yes, she was making woodcuts, plaster, and I think she did some resin work too, and some enamelling I think. But yes she was in the sculpture department, and she made these figureheads, and she made a very big man I remember. She was really trying to compete with the boys too there, with big wood carvings, and it wrecked her, wrecked her shoulders which have never recovered.

Would she have been your main female interest at that time?

No, I have to admit there were other interests, but they were all, I felt there was no future in this relationship, and then I felt safe with them, because I didn't want to...I couldn't see myself entering into another relationship. So Claire and I got to know each other very very well before we entered into a full relationship. While I was at Chelsea they had some lectures, one of them was Oldenburg, Claes Oldenburg came and gave a lecture, he was doing a tour of Britain and Europe giving lectures about his work to raise money to build one of his monuments, and that was a very important experience to me, because there was a show of Oldenburg's work at the Tate Gallery and I had been to see it before the lecture, and I had felt, this is actually very formal work here, although it's presented in a very unusual way, but actually there's a lot of formal aesthetics going on here, and this is what he lectured about, about his work, it was very formal. But these were the images of his environment, you know, like plugs, typewriters, and went into describing how you can only recognise a soft typewriter if you know what a hard typewriter is. And talking about scale, like when he made a soft lavatory on the same scale as a real lavatory it was unrecognisable, he had to go on making them until it was the right scale before it became recognisable. He talked about how so much had happened in the Sixties in the arts, so many new possibilities, that art needed to go to the country to settle down and sort it out, and that seemed to me a real encouragement. I didn't talk with him, I just experienced this wonderful talk, wonderful lecture, and I found it very inspiring.

Why do you think it was so important, apart from that comment about the country?

It was working out of his environment, that really encouraged me to be much more honest when I came back here, to actually work out of the imageries, imagery of what was immediately around me, rocks, mountains, weather, the seasons are very evident here. I think that...he sowed a seed again which is the seed of my present work I think. I think, I was coming really to the end of this forced work, forced in the sense that I was totally dominating the material, it was...it could have been made of anything, it didn't need to be wood, it's just that I had a...I found that I was very fluent with wood and carpentry, joints and bolting it, and I could get something very quickly, which has always been something I have needed in my work. My temperament is very celeric and I tend to want to...I tend to make things...or the

objects tend to be made in one go, or my part of it is made in one go, and then I leave them and they crack and warp and bend over a long period of time. The 'Ash Dome' and 'Wooden Boulder' are my answer to, how does one engage with a very long-term project of something which can really develop over a long period of time, but my actual involvement with them is very, is very minimal really. I mean I planted the trees but they're doing the growing, I'm not doing the growing, I'm not standing there watching them grow, and I tend them and look after them, and I am very aware of them, they take me through the seasons. And the 'Wooden Boulder' has done the same thing, it has actually, it's what happens around the boulder which is important, because the boulder doesn't change itself very much but the amount of water flowing around it does, and the seasons change.

So, what were you discovering in your own work at Chelsea, and how were you taught?

I was winding up all the things I had been trying to do with the towers and the archways, and we weren't taught...George Fullard kept everybody away from us, and very occasionally we had, Peter Startup came to visit, Bryan Kneale came to visit, and a funny, a very funny old American guy called Ricky Oggins came, who was teaching at Hornsey. And there were the full-time staff. But really, I just got going, they were just astonished when I got there, I was really fired up, and I got going straight away. Most of them, there were six of us, we all had a little like stable each, and the others took a long time to get going. And George, well just loved it what I was doing, and he never came and talked about the work aesthetically ever, but he just made, he just told the technicians, 'Whatever this guy wants let him have it'. (laughs)

Did anybody talk about the work to you?

Yes, the painting staff would come down, and these visitors did. The other students.

And were they interesting, stimulating?

I can't remember. I think I was so self-absorbed, and self-motivated, that I wasn't hungry for work. I always tended to find that the criticism...I was very vulnerable to criticism or, I just had to...I developed a technique of just going for it, and if there was an idea, just bung it in there. There seemed to be so much faffing about and anxiety. And this is when I was really campaigning to find an anxiety-free way of working, because I would look at other people's work and I could feel the anxiety in it, the worry about whether, should I be this big, should I be this...am I the right colour, am I...? Do I have any real meaning, do I have any validity in the world? And it was really, it didn't need to be questioned, I felt, you just do it, just see what it is, find out what it is after you've done it, not try to figure it all out and have a cast-iron argument for what you're doing before you start.

Well that is impressive. So how did you arrive at that?

By being so fucked up myself earlier on at Kingston, it was the Henry Miller paragraph in either 'Sexus', 'Plexus' or 'Nexus' about fear: get on with it and figure out what you're doing later. Particularly when you're young, get on with it. And if it was...I just felt... And also Fredwyn, one of his teachings was, if anything gets a strain, just drop it, which was a hard one for me to swallow then, but it was good advice for a young person.

But how did you get from the reading and the advice to the achievement?

Well I think we...we've got it on the tape, I went into Kingston Art School in the second year, I took a whole lot of junk and I kept on bringing more junk, and.....

End of F4722 Side A

F4722 Side B

And Fredwyn then consolidated that for you, something you had already been arriving at yourself?

Yes, but I didn't really agree, I thought, you see, some things you had to work at and they were...which is true, I think there are some things that you don't just drop because they're an irritation or because it's becoming difficult. But it depends on your commitment and belief, which is there, but you can strangle yourself by... Oh, yes, something I found later on was that you can fool yourself into thinking something's OK when it certainly isn't because of the investment that you've put into it, like an investment of time, investment of actual money to buy the materials to build this thing. And I built in the very early Seventies two huge structures inside the studio which, one of them contained two drop tanks off American fighter bombers, I bought them in an army surplus place in Alrewas in Leicester, to try to work with them. They were terrible sculptures really looking back at them, but I sort of knew that they were but I had invested so much time in them I couldn't let go of them. And they were blocking me.

Is that what you meant by, you can strangle yourself?

Yes, yes.

So it's important to know when to let go?

Yes, and just, you've just got to jack it in, you've got to just admit when you're beaten, or know that you're going down the wrong path and even though you've made up your mind to put an enormous investment into it, you've just got to let go of it, because otherwise you're dragging a weight, and a very dead weight.

Have you destroyed much of your work?

Yes, very little exists from that early time. You've got one remnant of the first tower, it's a very little sort of plastic thing I was making in the early days when I was up at, the first period up at Cynnon House, which I was actually using to paint with, paint from, sort of gouache paintings I was making then. And those two big towers, big...yes I think when we're doing this catalogue raisonné as we are at the moment, probably about 25 per cent of the early...and most of the early stuff has gone. I used to hang on to it for sort of a bit. Often I found I would make something, and make an idea, I wanted to see what the idea looked like, what this notion looked like, and always it was a bit of a shock when it actually was there in front of you, but I knew you had to leave it for a while, you had to wait for time to go by to come a little more objective. I always had to involve myself in something else before I could see what I had done. I also found it was a mistake to make - well for me it was a mistake - to be only making one thing at a time, because it became too precious, it became... The feeling was, I had to get everything into the one piece, and I learned to loosen the point of finish by having a lot of things on the go at the same time. And being a very celeric and sanguine temperament, because one never is one temperament only, but I think the combination is probably sanguine and celeric, it suited me very well to have four or five sculptures going on at the same time, because I could move one sculpture on a step. And then I would, instead of just hesitating and waiting and worrying about it I will simply go and work on something else and then I could come back to that one fresh to see what the next step would be.

This might sound like an odd question, but given the self-sufficiency, it sounds like, the way you were working at Chelsea, why did you need to be there? Because you could have done it here, couldn't you? What were you getting out of Chelsea?

The discipline...well, one, there was a grant; there was being in another place, London. It's a bit like my going off on projects now where I am not interrupted by any other engagements. I wasn't having to do any evening class teaching, any building work. It was an opportunity to really structure twelve months of my life when I didn't have to do anything else other than just make art. And I made four towers while I was there, and the last one was exhibited in the first show at the Serpentine Gallery, it was a post-graduate show. They decided that the Serpentine,

'they' being the Arts Council I guess, that the Serpentine Gallery would be devoted to young artists, showing young art, and so it seemed appropriate to have all the post-graduate students who were on this one-year course, so there were students from Birmingham, Manchester, I think it was those two places, and Chelsea, painters and sculptors. And I had a big tower outside.

So it was a very confidence-building experience, Chelsea and that exhibition?

Yes, great confidence-building, just in terms of dealing with scale, I really sorted out my engineering abilities. The last tower was actually very well constructed and very...it was a beautiful piece of engineering. It worked like a telescope, there were three stages in it, and one assembled it, one didn't have to really get off the ground to actually assemble it, and then you by, with pulleys and ropes it just went up like a telescope, it just rose up.

So how much of what I would call creative doubt was there? It doesn't sound as if you were suffering this at all.

(laughs) Doubt is very connected with fear, and I was disciplining myself to deal with fear, so part of that is to say yes and have a go, and wait to see what I was doing, what it told me about itself, because it's the only way to learn. It was actually trying to find a way of working where the work would speak to me.

So you did have a lot of belief in yourself as an artist?

Well I seemed to have, but, I just felt there wasn't anything to lose. I don't know when it was, round about then, I've mentioned before, when I've heard a bit of music or I've read a sentence somewhere or I've seen an art work, and I remember watching Wimbledon, something that I always did because my mother always watched Wimbledon, because she had been a Junior Wimbledon player herself, so watching Wimbledon on TV was like an annual event, and I used to enjoy it very very much. I was never a player but I used to enjoy the dramas between these players. And Rod Laver was in the final, it might have been around this time, and he was losing. And

he just played a shot which was unbelievable, it was...it was an impossible shot, and that changed the game, he turned it round, his opponent was so surprised by it. And then it built him, his confidence up, and he just became unbeatable. There are phases in tennis performance when a player reaches a certain peak of, a plateau, a possibility, where they are...you just can't get past them. And he was interviewed afterwards and he said, 'Well, I didn't have anything to lose.' And that, I think that relates to, you know, this self belief, that there wasn't...that was really what it was based on. And this idea of, here was an opportunity to get through a tremendous amount of work and to try out a lot of ideas and bung them in and let them intermingle and... I didn't...the last one I think was exhibitable, the last tower, as a credible piece of work. But I think, also from Lao-Tzu, it's, beware of early success, and I declined being in a show which was being curated, being funded by the Arts Council, it was curated by one of the teachers from St Martin's, of young art. I think Tim Head was in it and Elona Bennet was in it, I can't remember who the other artists were, there were about six, and I was invited to be in it. And, I didn't feel quite right about the guy who was doing...his name was Bremmer, and I believe he was a South African, and he was teaching at St Martin's. But I declined being in it, and every...

Because of this early success?

Early success. And I sort of in a way felt that maybe this isn't really my work, and, if I start exhibiting this stuff I'm going to get stuck with it, which is... I think probably talking with Phillip Vaughan, and it might have been a conversation with Fred too might have led me to, encouraged me to actually decline being involved. It seems such a very odd thing to do.

At what point was this?

At Chelsea.

So how much were you taking from Chinese philosophy then?

Well I was reading all the Zen stories a lot, and I had re-acquainted myself with Lao-Tzu, and realised how much I had been getting out of it from before, from when I read it the first time.

I know we've begun to talk about this, but can you talk more about Zen and what you were getting out of it?

It wasn't...well there aren't any really heavy...there aren't any heavy texts, and it was...I loved haiku poetry for its brevity, and the Zen stories were always very brief, and what they were saying was really speaking to me, and something that I could really relate to.

And how was it feeding into your work?

I think looking at the Chinese painters, there were the Buddhist priests who were also painters, the sort of rapidity of them and the fluidity of them, that was what was helping feed me, to push me along. That wonderful spontaneity.

And did you build those towers rapidly?

Very, yes, I mean, a lot of work went into them, I mean there was a lot of engineering design went into that, figuring out how to actually get them to stay up. I didn't reckon so much on Japanese painting, it didn't seem to have a humour, or human quality, that, it seemed very much an over-serious re-working of Chinese, which I subsequently found, that's actually what it is. You know, they went and got culture from China, brought it back as sort of an import, a bit like importing a camera and then sort of developing it.

Were you more interested in non-Western art at that time than Western art around you?

Both. Anything that sort of interested me, excited me. What is this being interested?  
It's like, ah! that's...you know, it's like, you see something and you recognise something there. Very eclectic, you know, anything.

Is there anything that we haven't, any of those visual influences that we haven't mentioned, at this time?

I can't remember when Phyllis showed me a sales catalogue of Redon, Odilon Redon lithographs and the quality of the black. There's a...in this group of lithographs at the sale there was this view of a woodland, a woodland scene, and in the middle of it is this hollow tree that's got a triangular black hole in it in the middle, so it's like a triangle but one could just go down it, you know, one just sucked right down into this. So that was... Maybe Albert Pinkham Ryder, have you heard of Albert...?

I know the name.

There was a show of his at the Whitechapel. Rod's very keen on his work, so he introduced me to... And Rousseau.

You've said somewhere, I remember reading, that the theoretical implications of Minimalism interested you.

Yes, I think it was around 1970 or '71 that the Minimalist show was on, and what really thrilled me was the texts or the quotes from the artists written on the wall. But they didn't correspond to me with what I saw as objects, like the Donald Judd pieces, those very severe and... But they did a very important service in that they wiped the slate clean, I think, they just stripped it down, and I think, it needed to be done, and I think - well I know, when I had my show in the Guggenheim as part of the 'British Art Now' show in 1980, it might have been Robert Hughes I think, observed my work as being 'rustic minimalism', which I thought was actually very near the point. But I was trying to bring more warmth into the Minimalist ideas I think. But they actually encouraged me to get to something very fundamental and basic, like a white, pure white cube is. Because I was living here in Wales in a very organic rhythm of

weather and seasons and rock. And Blaenau Ffestiniog itself, if one looks at it, you know, it's hewn, it's delved and dug out and sculpted, turned inside out. Can we stop there, I'm going to.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Right. So, you were asking about the 'Tra-la-la' experience, of my seeing that piece by Phillip King; it wasn't in the Chelsea time, that piece was in the 'New Generation' show I'm sure in 1965. And what excited me about that piece was that I got a sense of a taste in my mouth when I looked at the piece, so there was...it wasn't just a visual aesthetic experience, it was something...I think it was possibly the pastel colour and the actual shape. It's like a...there's a type of a sweet that one could buy, quite a cheap sort of sweet that I used to buy when I was a kid, and I got that taste sensation in my mouth. So, that was very unexpected to get that from a visual experience. And so I think that was why I've mentioned it in, or it's been mentioned, in articles that have been written, because I've talked about that, and talked about Phillip King, who at that time with pieces like 'Genghis Khan' and, I think a piece called 'Black', or 'Place' maybe, it's big shiny columns. And the early works I think are great. And then there was that show in the Hayward Gallery when he had all his early work downstairs and then all the more recent work, when he sort of went to the country and it became sort of agricultural, like agriculture, or implements. And, I think there was an example of an artist who has really got very lost, but maybe that's what he needs to do to really find his way through, and it may be very interesting to see what he does in the very last years of his life. But anyway that's more than one needed to say about 'Tra-la-la'.

But I think you wanted to...you said you wanted to talk about Ted Harris.

Yes, well he, as I've mentioned before, is who I lived next door to, who became like surrogate parents to me, and Ted was a real character and quite a philosopher, sort of... This was...we can go on when we go into, when we talk about the teaching, but... Meeting people in Blaenau like this, like Fredwyn who is not art trained, not an artist, Miss Playter who was very cultured so had a connection with the arts, and then with Ted Harris who was by no means connected with the arts at all, but he was someone who was really engaged with their life, you know, very vibrant, and very intelligent perceptions which I had only associated with people who were engaged with the arts,

but here I was being really taught a lesson, that this is a prerogative of everybody on earth, is to engage vibrantly with life, it's not just artists, or sportsmen who do that. And Ted would get a phrase in his head which would amuse him, but it would stick in his head and he keeps saying it, like 'a ball of iron'. He would come up to me and say, 'David, a ball of iron.' He had seen a meteorite I think and somebody had talked to him about this, it's like a chunk of iron. And then a word, you know, 'foible'. So he kept using it; wherever he could use the word 'foible' it would just come out, he would just look at me and say, 'David, foible'. And then there was a rock in front of his cottage, there was a flat bit of field and then it dipped very steeply away, and then one could look over Blaenau Ffestiniog, and at the edge of this bit of field before the cliff there was just this big rock, it's like a hump, which Ted always called 'the bonk'. And a lot of his revelations would come to him about the cosmos, standing on the bonk. So often he would see me outside and he would say, 'David, I was standing on the bonk,' and here something would have come to him. But he would always introduce it by 'Standing on the bonk'. So those early sculptures which are just roundish shapes that I made, I needed a name for them, and I named them after Ted's bonk, that's why they were called 'bonk'.

And where did he get the name?

I have no idea where he got that from. Do you want to go into the teaching?

Well, then you moved back, after Chelsea you moved back here to Blaenau.

Yes.

And you were keeping yourself by teaching, weren't you?

Well I had been, and then Geoffrey Stride had taken on the teaching, and then...what happened then? Yes then I was...I was going to continue with the teaching evening classes, and then a letter came in the post saying would I come to give a talk at Maidstone Art College, which was great, like a day's...I was offered a day's teaching, and it was on the strength of the fact that I had been at Chelsea. So this was for six

weeks on, and I was...I think this, possibly this letter came to me while I was at Chelsea actually, because I remember for six weeks I was preparing this talk. I had never given a talk about my work in my life, I was absolutely terrified, and I spent a lot of time up in Wales in the preparation, taking photographs of the area and the things that I was really relating to, like holes in walls, how a little stream related to the big river, like with Gorky, it was like a microcosm of the macrocosm. And I went down to Maidstone. Eddie had been doing some teaching down there but I don't think he was responsible for... As I found, what had happened was that the students, they had got fed up with just the full-time staff's mates coming in to doing part-time, they wanted some other people, and also younger people coming in. So the staff, full-time staff had agreed to allocate ten teaching days to bring in one student, or ex-student, ex recent student who had seemingly quite interesting work, but I think they had sent letters out and 50 people had sent slides in and then the students had reviewed all these slides and then they had chosen ten people. So I was one of those, and I went down and did this day, and, it just went very very well, and I was one of the people that the students then picked to be a part-time teacher. So I was given a day a week, and because I was living in Wales, I would be living in Wales, it wasn't appropriate for me to be travelling up and down once a week, so they agreed to do it in a block of four days. So, from September of 1970 I was then employed, and that gave me enough, it gave me, it was £15 a day, so that was giving me £60 a month, and then there was the travel costs on top of that. And that, with a little bit of other odd-jobbing around actually provided me with enough income. I didn't have a car then, I was living in the chapel, the rates were virtually nothing, costs were nothing. So that was my introduction to teaching. And Roland Piché and David Hall were teaching there three days a week each I think, and I can't remember the head of the department's name, he was an American, quite a jolly sort of round, warm chap, but a practising artist, and they were all practising artists, all the teachers there. But Roland Piché was a strange character, and he would sort of play with his own ideas of psychoanalysis with the students. He played psycho games with the students which were I thought outrageous, and he upset them very much, and a lot of students just didn't come in as a result of just being very wounded by his criticism, by his very personal observations. And David Hall was a very blunt character too, and so between them they were like a couple of heavies. And I found my role, because I was

very near in age to the students I got on with them very very well, and I taught in the way that Eddie did, I sort of engaged with them on a very personal level and a very warm-hearted level, and a very enthusiastic level, and tried to find out what they, who they were and what they were really interested in. And I learned so much, it was an apprenticeship. I learned more teaching than I had being taught in fact. There were, oh, about twenty students I guess, and a good half of them I found myself very very close to, and some of them are still quite close friends now.

Can you be more specific about what you learned?

Well they were engaged in many different things. I think it was a building of confidence, it was...I'll have to think about that, maybe that will come through, what it was that I was learning. There was a lot of debate about art I think, Roland and David were actually very good in a sort of seminar situation, they liked to get the students together in discussion. I was still quite handicapped by stammering a lot and very self-conscious when it came to any group discussion, but I was very good I think, I like to think I was good on a one-to-one, and so that was how I preferred to work, and I think I managed to help quite a lot of students. At least I got them to come in, and I supported them in having to cope with this attack which they all felt they were under. They always seemed to have very nice groups of students. I think they all bonded together very well from mutual adversity, having to cope with Roland and Dave.

You've done a lot of teaching at different art schools, haven't you, and also worked with art students on your projects abroad.

Yes.

I mean, do you...are you aware of having a certain approach to teaching, or philosophy of teaching?

When I saw what David and Roland were doing, they were tending to bruise the fruit, and these were very young and they were very vulnerable, and that there seems to be, and there still is, an attitude among people teaching at art schools that it is a tough

business and you've got to treat `em tough and you've got to toughen `em up. But I think there are a lot of...we are losing a lot of artists as a result of that, sort of people who are more tender, and who...and who have a lot of moral quality too, who just find this sort of barbarous way of the treatment, of how they're treated, you know, just unacceptable, and if this is art then I don't want to have anything to do with it and then go and do something else. And they were bruising the fruit. I mean you've got to handle fruit, peaches, quite carefully, otherwise you lose the bloom, and I think that was a basic approach, and one had to find where that person was in the world, and where their problems were and try to approach their problems in a creative way, and actually often find that their problems were a real key to what they needed to really address in a creative and positive way and they could convert what seemed a weakness into a strength. So that's been an underlying principle I think, is realising the weaknesses and trying to convert them into something which can be a strength, can be a guide. It was my main way of making a living from that point on. Phillip Vaughan was teaching...well he wasn't teaching, he was a research assistant up at Newcastle Poly and he got me a day up there, and that was very successful. I gave a talk and the students seemed to like me a lot, and then I was asked back, and then that developed into two blocks of three days each a term, so I was going up there six times a year by train.

Were you officially teaching sculpture?

Yes, it was often more fine art based, but in Maidstone it was a sculpture school. Yes, David Hall was a very good teacher, and I guess Roland was too, so I mean there were some good people came out of there, and I think the... We were looking at how the police work, the good guys and the bad guys, and I was the nice guy and they were the heavies. When Roland took it on he got rid of me, he and I...I think he knew that I found him appalling, his methods appalling.

But how, on a practical level, would you approach teaching sculpture?

It was always out of whether...you know, like, I shared what I was doing. It was always in a tutorial situation, so I was doing it off my sleeve. I had had a...I

didn't...very rarely did I prepare a particular course or a project, because being a part-timer one wasn't really involved in that aspect of it; one was picking up on what other, of the full-time teachers who were running projects, I might be invited in on this idea.

So you would be talking about the students' work with the work, would you?

Yes, yes with the work, and about possibilities, and what it might be reminding me of, or... You know, it was...they were very exciting days. I loved it actually, I really did enjoy it, and there would be a pub in the evening, and I used to stay with one of the other staff, Adrian Childs or with a guy called Bob Chaplin.

You always seem to have had a lot to do with young people, I mean as well as the projects, there's your involvement with the Steiner school.

Yes.

The development of...

Yes well, this idea of the teaching has...being a severe stammerer in my early life I couldn't...I just didn't possibly imagine I could be a teacher. And Phillip Vaughan and his mates from Cambridge, because Phillip briefly went to study architecture in Cambridge and he met a lot of, he had a lot of friends from there, most of them out of their eyeballs most of the time, I mean very interesting and some quite dubious characters, and he used to rent a cottage here, a very remote place, Cae Connal, he often was up here with his mates and he would come and see me and he always had...he always had something new he was involved in. And he had come across the 'I Ching', and he fired me up about the 'I Ching' so I went over to Cae Connal, we threw the 'I Ching' and it was a hexagram, for the open mouth, which is the teacher, and I thought, this is ridiculous, this is absurd. (laughs) And anyway I got fired up with this 'I Ching' and I showed it to Fred and he was very sceptical about it, and anyway he threw it and he said, 'This is ridiculous, it says I'm going to get married,' which is the interpretation of it, he said, 'I'm going to get married.' Six months later

he was married. And he was, you know, he was the monk, he was the bachelor, no way was he going to get married. Very funny.

Do you still use it?

No, not for a long time. There's a certain...I like the interpretations, Confucius' and text. But it fitted...I was still young, I was still very romantic, and it fitted with a young romantic. But Confucius said in it that you shouldn't fool with this till you're about 60 years old, you know, and there we were fooling with it in our early twenties. And we were fooling, fooling with it. But nonetheless.....

End of F4722 Side B

F4723 Side A

Well you were asking about, was there a philosophy, well I wasn't aware of having any system. I was not taught to teach, I didn't go to an educational college at all, I just...I had role models from the way that Eddie had taught me, the way that Fred had been teaching me, and that was the way which I adopted, and it was very personable I think, that there had to be a human warmth there and a respect for that human being, for that other human being, and I was not a bully, I was not into bullying I found it appalling, as I've already said. Norwich came up, I'm not quite sure how I got to be teaching at Norwich, I was going there once a term. And then odd days, Winchester, Edinburgh, I had a very curious four days up in Edinburgh; one of the students, fellow students at Chelsea had got a job up there and she invited me up for a four-day thing, but the staff there just totally ignored me because I was from across the border. It was amazing, but... And one of the students, after I was talking about something, she said, 'Well that might be very well south of the border.' You know, that was amazing. Glasgow I taught. A lot of colleges. London Central, I always felt Stephen Furlonger I think one of the best teachers in the country of art, brilliant, brilliant teacher.

And what do you think is so good about his teaching?

Oh, just this warmth, kindness, his ability to listen, always seems to be fresh, and has a commitment to students which is really admirable. He's a great person. A bit of teaching at the Royal College. Wolverhampton, yes that was important. I met Jonah Jones here in Wales, he's like a local sculptor here, he had been on the Summerson Committee who designed the new art and design, the new Diploma in Art and Design, he lived here. I met him very briefly in his studio, he used to have a studio in the old town hall in Tremadog and part of the deal for him to rent it is that two weeks of the year the Breton onion men were allowed to string their onions there, and I happened to meet him then with all these Bretons stringing their onions. He was really, in a way a student of Eric Gill's, he was an artisan, a marvellous person, and a very good teacher. And he was external examiner at Newcastle-on-Tyne, and I happened to be there and he gave me a lift back to Wales and he came in to the studio and he said he just loved it, he said it was just like a forest inside a chapel. This was probably in '71,

or early 1972. He was also external examiner at Wolverhampton Art College, and he advised Norman Roe there that he should send students here to work with me, or just to be here in Wales. And so I was invited to come and teach part-time at Wolverhampton, and part of the commitment would be of my having groups of students here, so, I was able to accommodate six students at any one time, so they would come for a week and I would run sort of a project, but I used to go and...to go off on their own and come back with some ideas, just go...but not to go in pairs because they would just talk all day and they wouldn't look. And then we would work in the evening at what they had been looking at. If they were second or third-year students I would get them to bring their slides with them. And this idea spread, and I had students from Norwich, students from Kingston, students from Maidstone came up, and so a lot of my teaching was actually done here. And it was very, quite laid back, it wasn't really running intense projects in any way, it was just giving them a bit of a time, a bit of a space, to sort of reflect on what they were doing, and actually really experiencing the slate quarries here and the mountains and the rivers, and getting them to try to get their fingers into the ground. And the idea was that they would go back to college with ideas which were practical for them to do there.

And that proved fruitful?

Very fruitful. It didn't work after a while at Wolverhampton, because the other staff were getting quite, I think jealous of the situation, and, first it was disrupting students and actually sabotaging what I was trying to do. So I stopped teaching there, because it wasn't...and I was getting drawn into the politics, you know, I was teaching there more than anywhere else and I was becoming part of the place. I tried to keep it always that I was never there enough to become part of the, part of the politics, part of the in-fighting.

What date was that?

At Wolverhampton? Probably '74 to '77, about '77, '78 is when I pulled out. Other things were beginning to happen for me then. Do you want to talk about the first show and about the... No, let's go on with the teaching, the teaching situation,

because as my income increased from other means, other sources, which really was from my work directly, I had less and less time, or less and less inclination, to travel to do one-day teaching, so I...because for me to go and do a day's teaching, it was really a day to get there, a day's teaching, a day to get back, so that was three days gone for one day's pay, and of course if I was receiving enough income from other things it really wasn't necessary for me to be doing... And I didn't really phase the teaching out till about 1982 I think, and then, interestingly that was when we were realising that our children were under-achieving, or were being under-stimulated in the local schools and were getting worried about their education, and we started to think about moving away temporarily from here to get them into a State school somewhere in England, or somewhere else where there would more of a challenge for them. And that was when we met up with other people here who were actually wanting to start the Steiner school, so then we got involved with that group of people, because we had also met somebody whose children were at a Steiner school and were very impressed with what we heard, and what we saw as evidence in what their kids were like, and what their kids were doing. And so my involvement in teaching then moved down into the lower age group. I've always preferred teaching in further education, that sort of, 18, 19 onward, that sort of age, more adult, but here I was involved in starting a school, and which we actually opened in September of '85 and which is still running, and it's been touch and go all the time, as it is in most fledgling Steiner schools, it's very difficult to raise the money to keep the staff, to keep the confidence of parents, or even the initial confidence of parents to send their kids to us, because it's quite different. So it's a school for, mostly for incomers. But it's been an incredible social experience for us, and I also learned about being interdependent rather than independent. When I first came here it was to be Robinson Crusoe, to be on my own, self-sufficient.

Perhaps we can go back and talk about Steiner's ideas, and now try and talk about your own work when you came back to Blaenau in the 1970s.

Yes. One of the people who used to come to the evening classes...one more thing about teaching, I was invited to teach an evening class down in Penrhyndeudraeth that had been running and the art teacher couldn't do it any more, it happened in one of the

classrooms in a primary school down in Penrhyndeudraeth. I knew someone who knew someone who knew that I was living in Blaenau and I had had an art training and maybe I could come and do it, so I went down and talked with the headmaster of the school who was organising these evening classes, and we said, 'Well, we'll have a go'. I had never done any teaching before. But it was a job, it was, you know, it was money, which I was desperately...we were desperately in need of.

At what point was this?

'67, in the autumn of '67. And, I liked these people very much, and they were local housewives, they were engineers from the nuclear power station, there was a road haulier, there was an ex-headmaster from a school, there were a couple of teachers coming, there were a couple of sixth-formers. And, I hadn't really met people like this before, and it was a real eye-opener to me, and again, like I said about the prerogative of life exploration is not just that of artists, that we're all, everybody's involved in it, and it really hadn't occurred to me before. And, they were incredibly welcoming as a group and very supportive, and they liked what I had to offer, and as I said it grew and grew and grew until I was able to have two evening classes. But anyway, that's enough of teaching. To get back to what happened when I came back here.

Your work was changing direction slightly wasn't it. I mean, the wooden column was important, wasn't it?

Yes. I had already made some wood carvings before I went down to Chelsea, and they were made in the chestnut wood where I played when I was a child, and I've always known since I can remember, that's where the Cynfal is, where this great rock is. And it's chestnut wood, it's very...had been a very well and carefully cultivated chestnut coppice. Quite a lot of trees had fallen down and I carved a wood fibre, a giant wood fibre using an axe and a surform.

And what's a wood fibre?

Every piece of wood is built up, is made up of many strands, which is what makes the grain, and they create vessel shapes, forms, which will lift vessel spaces, which act as a capillary system to lift water. And quite why, how I got to doing that I'm not sure. I think Fredwyn had quite an influence on me in discussion and working in a more organic way, connecting much more with the earth. So that was really the beginnings of another strand, another possibility, but I was really on stream with this colour and all these other things I had been working with, and it was again like an investment that I put in, so I was following that, which as I said really came to an end at Chelsea. But in a way it metamorphosed into another tower, a very simplified tower, just three cubes on top of each other really, getting smaller cubes, a little like Sol LeWitt come to think of it, but quite brightly coloured. And then this big piece called 'The Waterfall' which was leant against the wall, it went right up the archway at the altar end, the pulpit; the Calvinist chapels didn't have altars they had pulpits. Where the pulpit had been there was a big archway, with sort of Corinthian arches on either side and a motto in Welsh which in English reads, 'Sanctify this house with prayer', which I left there, which I always felt I will continue to try to do that here. And the waterfall seemed to sort of pour out of that motto, and it was based on one of Gorky's paintings which is in the Tate Gallery called 'The Waterfall'. And I was abandoning colour then, I was, instead of painting the surface I was trying to stain the wood, stain it white to get the wood to have the colour, or feel that it wasn't just a surface, because everything up to then really had just been surface. And round about 1971 this would have been, early on in '71, I had got hold of a trunk, an ash tree had been cut down in the...it wasn't a playing field then, it was just some farm fields which was a very boggy wet place, and the local council decided to make some playing fields there and they cut some trees down, one of which was an ash, and I bought it for £1 this trunk, which was about 16 inches in diameter and about 10 feet long, and they dropped it over in the road for me and I rolled it across the road into my front yard, and just using an axe I just cut just a very simple round form. And I was then consciously trying to address this problem that I am still having with anxiety and about the process of working, how to work, and sort of realising that I wanted to make a real wood object, and how would I make that? And I would use an axe, a very very simple, you know, age-old tool, and just to cut the very simplest form. And when that roundish form came off the main trunk of the tree, that would be it, and then, I found

that object so interesting and the process so satisfying I just went and made another one and another one and another one, and I actually changed the sides of the axe as the tree got smaller, so that the mark of the axe on the wood would remain consistent with the scale, though the pieces were getting smaller. And I just had nine of them. And it was just like an exercise I had given myself as an experiment in a process so that the object was a pure result of the most simple process working with wood. And while I kind of liked the objects very much I was nonetheless quite nervous of them, and they seemed to be too easy a result. I was used to this struggle to find...although I've talked about this, trying to get rid of strain and anxiety, I had really successfully done it with making these pieces, it was completely in tune with my temperament, working like this, or acting into the world, into the physical world, in this way, with this rhythm. And I wrote a text which is in the very first little pamphlet that I made for the first show that I had, 'Briefly Cooked Apples', which describes this process and the actual feeling that I had and the rhythm of doing it. But I was still very involved in these towers and these complex constructions and related spaces, and so I didn't really take too much...I didn't respect what I had done I think, and I guess moved them to one side and some wood got piled up in front of them. And then I rediscovered them about nine months later and they had dried out and they had split, and they were like, they were like grinning at me, and I was quite surprised, they had changed a lot and I could feel my way into, inside the volume. And they were really calling to me to give this way a go, to actually focus more on this. So I made a lot of them, with different tools, different chisels, and with axes, different size axes, and I managed to get hold of different woods, metamorphosing it so it wasn't just a roundish ball, it sort of, had lengths to it. So I managed to fight my way or get to something very basic and fundamental.

Was that the first time you used unseasoned wood?

No, the first one was this big wood fibre, and at Chelsea there were some parts of the first tower which were carved, but then I got taken up with the, being in an urban environment again I sort of lost that thread I think, but then this sort of, I picked up on it again. But for a good four, five years, there were two parallel streams in my work going on at the same time; I mean I was still making these constructions, but I was

trying to bring these carved elements in, to place them in the structures. And then there was this big...this isn't until 1972, '71, '72 I was making these big complicated table-like structures, or like layers, and they were trying to refine what I had been doing with the arches but in a more rough and non-coloured way, I was using wood from the quarries which had gone grey, but depending on where they were they had gone a different sort of grey, and I was sort of like using these colourations.

You've talked about Brancusi, I mean I know you saw the studio twice I think in Paris.

Yes.

And, what about the relation between your towers, and the wooden towers of Brancusi?

Well I got to that because one of the...I actually made one, or one very similar, out of, which was a development out of these rounded shapes, and I was making piles of these, what I called 'the bonks', out of one piece of wood, but they looked like they were very precariously balanced on top of each other, you only had to blow at them and they would fall over, but in fact they were one piece of wood, there was an illusion. But I made three on a pedestal out of a big sycamore trunk.

Relating directly to Brancusi?

Not at that time, but then I got a big piece of pitch-pine, I managed to get it down from the quarries here and I carved a column which was very reminiscent of the Brancusi one, but instead of going, like his have like a contraction and then they, as one comes down they come out and then they do a swelling, an expansion, and then they contract again, and then expand and contract, which is really what I think the columns are about, they're about plant growth, that's how plants grow, they expand and contract, expand and contract. And we breed like that, the seasons, the world breathes like that. I mean, it's like through...well in the northern temperate zone it does anyway, in the summer and winter, it's like a breathing in and a breathing out,

breathing in, breathing out, and the human being does it, all the animals do it, the trees do it.

And what were you responding to in Brancusi?

Initially to a way of life, that he lived in the studio, that he lived with this work, and it wasn't like you live somewhere and you go to a studio, like a daily job, it was a life. But I wasn't... And later, I feel now that I've come, trying to, not to emulate Brancusi but to magnify Brancusi, which is different, and I quote that really from an observation by Herman Melville, Charles Olson wrote an essay about Herman Melville. Herman Melville didn't meet Shakespeare until he was 40 years old, because he couldn't bear reading small text, and it wasn't until he was 40 that somebody gave him a single play instead of a whole collection where everything was written in microscopic print, that he met Shakespeare, and he felt that it was just as well he hadn't met him until then, it was the right moment, and he felt after that, with something like 'Moby Dick', he was not trying to emulate Shakespeare, he was trying to magnify Shakespeare out of respect for, a great respect for him. And it was Brancusi's commitment to a way of life, sort of monk-like life, living in his studio, building up a world. And as Tony Cragg has observed about Brancusi when Tony went to see where Brancusi had lived in this forest, Tony felt that Brancusi had recreated his Rumanian forest in Paris, in his studio, and that when anything was bought he had to make it again because he wouldn't bear the absence, one of the elements, essential elements of this forest. And I have a similar feeling in my studio in that, it's been through many metamorphoses and I have continued to photograph the studio, and I think later that it could be a very interesting group of photographs of what's actually been in there, and how it's built up into a certain mood and then works have gone out, they've been sold, they've been exhibited, and, or they just haven't come back, because they've been...they're now in a collection. And then new works have come in in their place, and how those new works relate to pieces which I am now definitely keeping back as part of what's going to be in that studio. And the fact that Brancusi gave his studio and the contents to the French nation, I think it was a fantastic gesture, but that he had to be moved, and there's been now a problem and they reconstructed it eventually outside the Pompidou, and it was damaged in a storm,

and now apparently one will never be able to go in to it like one could, which seems a pity, and I hope I can do something like that. I don't think it will necessarily be as great as the experience of going in Brancusi's studio but it will be something where one can really experience the work as a sort of whole, and not as a museum exhibition where the pieces are very carefully placed in relationship to each other in a very neutralised space. The chapel is a very special environment, and it's...more and more it's beginning to be an experience for people just to be in that space, because of how, what's been built up in there over more than 25 years now, and hopefully I've got another 25 years in me, it could be 50, 60 years of a life in there.

You do very much see the work as an organic whole, don't you, in the way that you make these family trees, bringing everything back to that '67 tower and tracing the connections and links between them, developments.

Yes, I found that whenever I made a sculpture, especially when I was younger, there were five possibilities came out of it, and then I would try to follow up each possibility, then I would realise that this could relate, if I brought an element of that one into this one. But it's like 'Under the Volcano', how each phrase and sentence is like an autonomous thing, it can live in its own right, but it relates to the one next to it, and then it will relate to something which occurred before and it's something that's occurred later on. There's a short story by Giacometti when he describes a dream, and he wants to write a short story about this dream. Certain events happen in this dream, and certain events were happening to him in his life at the same time, and he can't remember which was in the dream and which was real, and he ends up, he couldn't remember which happened before what, and so, to write the story, what would come before? So he ends up imagining a sculpture which is like a plateau with a series of sculptures on it which, people could come out of this plateau from any direction and they would meet these events which would be depicted in these sculptures, in their own order, however they, this person came to meet them. And that was quite an experience, reading that, so that sort of led to this idea of the interrelationship of all the work. And I've always been interested in the whole work of an artist and the progression, and how pieces can relate with each other. But for most artists, because their studios are very small and it's too expensive to have storage space, a lot of work

gets destroyed, it gets distributed, it gets forgotten, but in the situation which I've got I've got the fantastic opportunity of creating a place for the work.

When you moved to unseasoned wood, that was a real breakthrough, wasn't it?

Yes, and it was not a conscious decision to work with wood which would crack and bend and warp, it was, I had been taught at art school that you cannot use unseasoned wood because it will crack and bend and warp. When I found that with these 'Nine Balls', the fact that they crack made them into a sculpture to me, it sort of made them really interesting. So, it was a conceptual decision on my part to take a positive attitude towards the behaviour of unseasoned wood instead of a negative one, and of course, it isn't right to do certain work with wood which will crack, because the cracks are not appropriate to the idea, but if I could...if my idea incorporated the fact, or incorporated the reality of the wood. And I also realised, here was an opportunity for me to step back from having total domination of a material, but actually to let the material speak so I could go into a dialogue with it. I was also finding with this very self-conscious work that I was doing, and all these romantic notions I was trying to put into it, that it could only be as much as I was, the work itself wasn't really teaching me, I wasn't allowing it properly to teach me, only that what seemed to work, what didn't seem to work, but I wasn't treating the wood as something which had anything life to it, which could... And the life of the wood is that it's an echo of nature wisdom, you know, it's come from...it's come from a mystery, an esoteric mystery, which I have later discovered. And if I can allow that to be my teacher, I could actually allow the material itself that I was working with to actually lead me, instead of me trying to lead it.

So it's living and changing even after it's dead.

Yes, it retains an echo. It's become a corpse.

But it's not living - that's the wrong word, isn't it.

It's no longer...it's not living and it's not developing any more, it has ceased to be developing, and it's in the nature of wood to break down, it is designed to disintegrate and to become humus again. But in the meantime, it lends itself, it lends its body to...every culture in the world, wood has played a very major part in the culture, in its architecture, in the fact that you can burn it to warm your house in winter and you can cook with it, and you can make a weapon with it. Carl Andre has written a beautiful passage about wood, a beautiful piece.

What does he say?

I can't remember, I've got it...

Yes. I think you said to me earlier that wood was a symbol for you, or trees were a symbol.

Well they've come to be a metaphor for, I think how a human life develops, through the pursuit of various ideas and the need for us to be alive, the actual practical needs. Wood, trees have leaves to create an income, and it expends its income, its expenditure is on creating a new layer of wood around every woody surface, and every deciduous tree, well every tree, has a commitment every year to wrap itself with another layer of wood, which is the annular ring, and this is done by photosynthesis through the leaves, so the whole structure is there, designed to create the greatest leaf area that it can, or a sufficient... There comes a point in a tree's life when it cannot meet its commitments, because its leafage area is not enough, so it actually starts to abandon branches. You can see it in oak trees, often the lower limbs die because actually there's very little leaf area on them that is actually working, so the tree can sacrifice those branches. But of course, as it drops branches off it's actually losing income; it's losing expenditure but it's also losing income. What I'm quoting is from Oliver Rackham, he had this amazing pragmatic illustration of how a tree works.

End of F4723 Side A

F4723 Side B

So what I've given you with Oliver Rackham's description is a pragmatic and in a way economic interpretation of a tree's intent and survival. But as a metaphor, it's continually dividing and spreading and exploring, or finding its way out into the world through its branches, through a linear outward growth, but all the time, all those branches are feeding back into the trunk, and of course there is a root system which is also developing so there's a...it's a weave of earth and light, wood, and it's also a weave of the four elements, the minerals in the earth, obviously the water, the photosynthesis with the air, and the fire element is in the warmth and light, and the light is woven into the being of the tree.

You said that you see it as an emblem of life, and a tree is nature's tower. You also said in John Christie's film that, 'The nature of wood and my nature correspond'.

Yes, I don't think I would be saying 'my nature' as me individually, I think the nature of the human being, I think there is a correspondence. But then there always is in all of what there is external to us, what is good and healthy in the world and what is bad and unhealthy in the world, you will find a mirror within my own being.

And different trees have different characters, and relate to astronomical...

Yes, I think it's important to make the point here that where I've always had a little bench circular saw and I use electric drills, the true work that I've found was deliberately with just the hand axe, and then later with wedges. That, I just wanted, with this much more organic and basic approach to the working with a material, and a given material. And I didn't have to buy this wood, I mean one of the practical aspects of why I was working with this wood is that it was available; I couldn't afford demolition wood any more, I couldn't buy, well it was too expensive to buy wood from the wood mill. They were widening a lot of roads around here, and there was a lot of wood available for nothing, I could just go and pick it up. And I decided to learn the nature of the wood and find what I could do with these very basic tools. I wanted to limit my means, drastically limit my actual means, to see what I could do

within those limitations, which was actually really meeting what lived in the wood as possibility. So, I didn't have a chain-saw till 1977, so from...so up until that point it was just hand tools, so a lot of the wood was about splitting, and the 'Nine Leanders' was how many lengths can I reasonably split out of this length of beech. Beech splits very well; elm and sycamore are very difficult to split, so one makes something different with them, there were different possibilities there. So I was learning the characters of each wood, and they are like different dialects of the same language, but they're quite distinct languages in a way, you can do things, say things with oak that you can't say with birch, and you can do things with birch that you just can't really do with oak. It was interesting, I was combining woods, like having the relationship, by having a piece made up of several pieces of wood, some will be oak and some would be birch, and how can I relate those two different qualities?

And you relate them to astronomy, don't you?

Well that is something from Rudolph Steiner. He pointed out that there was a Celtic comprehension of the woods from the Druids, that astrologically in a living oak tree Mars has a presence, a strong presence. And I didn't read this until I had a lot of experience of working with oak and with birch and with beech, and what he said about the astral qualities living in these things actually fitted with my experience. Birch, Venus, very feminine, sacrificial, gives itself, it allows other plants to grow under it. Oak refuses to allow it because of its thick canopy. But birch is actually designed to let light filter through. And it's known as the mother of oak, I mean if you have a birch wood you will probably often get very good oaks growing up through it. Birch has a short life, oak has a very long life. Birch has no heart wood, oak is nearly all heart wood. Birch rots very quickly, oak rots very very slowly. Opposite qualities, like polarities, very like Mars and Venus, of what I, in my limited knowledge of astrology, relate to. Also working with oak one's...it answers me back with oak, and there are other woods which are very hard, and it can, by working with a chisel or with an axe in oak, something resonates back through the tool into me from the...sort of, there's a...yes, resonance, is the word for it.

In the Seventies it was very much a period when you were finding the different themes which you subsequently explored and made variations on, didn't you. Where did it lead you from the 'Nine Cracked Balls'?

I was able to...one of my questions was, when you make something, how does it stand there, how does it stand in the world? And the engineering and structure I was very interested in, in these towers, but I found that one could make very simple tripods by tying one end of a trunk of beech and then splitting it, splitting the wood, so one was spreading the tree out, but holding it at the top, so one was forming a tripod or a multi-legged object, and then by putting wedges in up near where the rope is, one could keep those legs, or split pieces, spread out so that the piece would stand. So a lot of the early work was about how does the object stand in the world? It revealed everything about itself, it was about the material, it was about how it was standing there, it was about various ways, various possibilities of...the presence of the human being as... Yes, I think what was interesting me very much in museums, particularly ethnic museums, African museums, wasn't the actual African carvings of figures, it was their furniture, stools, looms, tools, where the sense of the human being was there, the presence of the human being within the artifact, and that's what really interested me. I found the tables by trying to make a cube in the same way as I had made the rounded 'bonk' forms, but they were constructed, they weren't carved, they were planks, rough, old rough planks. I mitred them so the actual cracks where two pieces of wood met were at the very corners, because I really like these dark cracks in wood, and I could articulate the cube more by having a black line around the very edge of them. So I made a whole series of cubes, and I didn't know how to have them; they didn't work on the floor, they didn't work piled up, but they seemed to work at sort of table height, so I made a table. And this is where the Oldenburg influence came in, the table wasn't tall enough; a normal sized table didn't work, I had to make a table for those cubes, and the cubes actually demanded the size of the table and how the table was made, so I made the table in the same way as I had made the cubes. So this was '72, '73 I think.

And was the work called 'Table With Cubes'?

Yes, yes. And that led me on to realising the table, so the...I was doing some construction work then, this is 1973, '72/73, at the Grapes Hotel, I was helping to convert an outhouse into a little bedsit, and I had ordered some wood, and they had read my measurements wrong and they were far too big. They were these massive planks arrived, and they were very expensive, but I loved these planks, and instead of sending them back and saying, 'No, this isn't what I wanted,' I said, 'No, OK, I will have these, and I'm going to make something,' and I made a giant table, it was an immense table, and I realised later it was my experience of a table when I was about 6 years old, it was... And when I had finished making it I invited a lot of friends, Ted and Margaret Harris, Dai and Erien, Fredwyn probably, other people who I knew in the area, to have a meal, and so I made some big benches. I made this meal, and everyone behaved...it was odd, they were walking across the table, they were playing snooker with some of my dowel rods with the hard-boiled eggs and tomatoes on it, and, it was a riot, it was in the middle of the studio.

So there was no treating it with the reverence of a pure work of art.

(laughs) No.

It was a nice...in between the two?

Yes.

And that was the work called 'Big Table'?

Yes. And I started it as a table, but the table was to put things on, I put these rounded forms on. And then I went to France again. When I left Chelsea I went with Mike Armitage and some other friends to the Ile d'Orloron, and it was a bit of a disastrous holiday. I got quite ill, and I never know what it was, I felt, I got incredibly debilitated. And these friends of Mike took me in, Annie Ardennes and her husband, and they had a beautiful daughter, Catherine, who invited me to come and stay with her in Toulouse, in the family home down in Toulouse, so I did that that autumn, and it was my adventure, and I took a notebook with me, and I noted anything that

interested me, any phrase I heard, any odd combination of objects. And stayed in Paris with Annie Ardennes a few days, and then I had a lift with somebody I had met on the train going to Paris down to Toulouse, and I stayed in Toulouse two or three weeks. I read 'Catch 22' on this tower. Because Catherine lived in this castle, it was a street of castles, semi-detached...you know, a terrace of castles. Each one had a courtyard and it had a tower. They had a clothing business then, like a sort of sweat-shop, and I sort of hung out there for three months and really enjoyed Toulouse, went into the Pyrenees for a few days. And then when I came back I worked out of this notebook, and one thing I had seen in one of the big churches there, I can't remember the name of it, it was of a particular Christian sect, where the altar was there was a blue curtain behind it and then an image of the Virgin Mary above the blue curtain, and if anyone went behind it, I found that the Virgin Mary was supported on an upturned table, so the table top was vertical. So they had put planks in, or some other object in under the legs to keep it level, and then they'd put another big box on top of the legs, and then the Virgin Mary was sitting on top. And I loved this image, so I made a note of that.

Where was it?

It was in Toulouse and it was in a cathedral, but it was in a very rough cathedral, they were renovating it. So I made a version of this, but instead of the Virgin Mary there was a cage, and I had an upturned table like that [INAUDIBLE] objects. And so on the table, the table became a place for me to build all these things which I had in my notebook, or a lot of them, quite disparate objects. They had a cupboard which opened, and then it opened again, it was a very curious...in this castle it was a double cupboard, it was a really weird construction, so I made one of those, and I also put that on the table. I also went to a film which Phyllis Playter had recommended me to go and see, I can't remember what it was, up in Colwyn Bay, and I went to the matinee, and I was the only person in the cinema for a while, and then a group of people came from some local institution who had handicaps, mental handicaps, and one of them was wearing the most enormous papier mâché policeman's helmet. And they were yelling and shouting, and, anyway I was fascinated by this guy's helmet, so I made one of those, stuck that on. It wasn't in papier mâché, I carved that sort of

shape, and I put it onto the table. So the table became like a collecting ground for all these disparate experiences which I was having. So I still wasn't committed to this more organic way of working with wood. I started it, but I was still trying to work out of my life experience. Also I think...yes, this was important then, and part of the reasons for coming up to Wales was, I was finding that so much of what people were doing had its credence because of how, or it was being given a pedigree, or a credence, by how it related to what was going on in current art, or it related to the history of art in some way. You know, like working out of a Gorky painting for example. And I was really trying to find the courage and the experience. How could I work out of my experience of life and not be totally dependent on trying to give my work credibility from other art historical sources? The Americans really do that, a lot of their art teaching is, this is the history of contemporary art, now what are you going to do? How does what you do fit in it? And they taught that, well they teach that. And I felt the artists who really interested me seemed to have found something, that they could work from out of their own life and out of their own observations, and I think that was what I was seeking. And I think, I hope actually I've found it, which is through working with the nature of wood.

You have also mentioned a photograph of Egyptian tombs that appeared at the time of Tutankhamun that inspired you.

Ah, right, yes, that was...

In the 'Evening Standard'.

Yes, this was...yes, this was a conglomeration of objects which had just been stashed in this tomb, and it seemed like they were just loading a boat in a way, which is what it was, you know, they were sending off a Pharaoh with all his stuff, and it wasn't very neatly laid out. And I just loved how they were just piled up together. This also seemed to relate in my memory now to, again an experience in Paris, and this time it was with Claire, because Claire and I got married in December of '72, two days before Christmas, so we didn't go anywhere then, and later when she was pregnant with William in April we went to stay with Annie Ardennes in Louveciennes in Paris, and

we went to see art, and we... Rod Harman had recommended me to see the Musée Cluny, and I think Henry Miller had mentioned the Musée Cluny, or something to do with Cluny, and that's near the Sorbonne, and there was a pastry and bread roll shop near the Sorbonne, marble, white marble and mirrors, and these piles of croissants, filled rolls, pastries, absolutely fantastic. And it related somehow to the Tutankhamun picture, all these rough shapes piles up. Very like my 'bonks' and the... So that's when I started making those split pods, much more formed, carved pieces, and I made...and the tables and those towers became things to stack objects in.

Was that the time of 'Clams on a Rack'?

Yes. Yes that's when it really got simplified down, that was when...I made that in '74, anticipating the Arnolfini show in '76, because for my show in...my first show was in the York Festival, and this was through my friend Rufus Harris from school who I had shared a flat with in London, who I have mentioned, and another friend of ours from school days, Gavin Henderson, who is now the Director of the Brighton Festival, he was director of the York Festival in those days, he had just taken it over, and he wanted to do an Austin Wright show with very established Yorkshire artists, but he also wanted to have a one-man show of someone who had never shown before, but how do you know of an artist who hasn't shown? And he was talking about this to Rufus Harris, and Rufus had just been in my studio, and I had never had a show, and I was not going to pursue having an exhibition. I had been invited to show in Blaenau by someone here, but we could go back to that, in the Blaenau library. So my first actual work, exhibited work, was in Blaenau, apart from the Serpentine show, I had a piece in that, in that very first Serpentine show. And so Gavin wrote to me and said, 'I hear you've got some work, can you send some slides?' So I sent some slides off and he said yes, he wrote back straight away and said, 'Yes, we would really like to do a show'. And I had enough of...I had the 'Table with the Cubes', I had also been making these split willow pieces where I was splitting the ends of lengths of willow and ramming them into each other as a way of joining wood in a non-carpentry way, using coils of rope to hold them together. Richard Hughes, the writer, who wrote 'High Wind to Jamaica' and 'A Fox in the Attic', he lived nearby and we got to know them in the early Seventies - well probably '69 I got to know them. Frances Hughes,

his wife, was always trying to get groups of young people down, because they both enjoyed young people very very much, so, I got invited down, Claire and I got invited down. And he taught me how to plait rope, how to take a piece of rope apart and then to re-plait it into one of these coils which, I was using those in these constructions, these...they were like quoits. So I had enough work to make a show out of these, the 'Nine Cracked Balls' and these other 'bonks', other little constructions I had made. There was even a charred piece in it. And the venue was in an old Elizabethan hall, and it was an absolutely perfect place, the work just ran in there really. It had never been shown before and it just looked great in there. And a photographer, Andy Sproxton, who lived there, told a friend of his, Clive Adams, who was just taking on the job at the Arnolfini of exhibitions officer about the work, and Clive was looking for unknown artists to show at the Arnolfini, so he came up to visit me the following year in '74. And I didn't want to show straight away, I went down and saw what the Arnolfini was like, and it was big, and I really felt I needed a couple of years to sort of prepare for this. I had enough teaching, I was confident there was enough teaching coming my way to be making an income. We had a very young child, William, 1973, I was having to develop a better accommodation for us all in the chapel. And I had the target for 1976 to have a big one-man show in the Arnolfini.

And meanwhile you showed at the Serpentine again, didn't you?

Yes, that also came up in 1976. Because of the teaching I was doing, and the lectures that I was giving to students, other artists who were doing part-time work, or one-day visits, were coming across my work as a result of this, and my work was beginning to be talked about by people who were on this network of teaching. And William Tucker then had been hired in by the Arts Council of Great Britain to curate a sculpture show, so, almost inevitably he chose work of his philosophy really, he was part of the Caro school really, and it was mostly welded metal, and the Arts Council said no, there are other people doing other things, and we can't...we are not prepared to fund a show when half of what's possible is being denied. So he reluctantly agreed to show some 'eccentrics' as he called them. And he had heard about my work, and so he decided he would try me out as one of the eccentrics. So he came to visit here, and he chose one of the split elm, split willow pieces, split and nailed across. So that was in the

Condition of Sculpture in the Hayward Gallery in 1975. And Nick Pope also had a rather unusual wood piece there, and he and I sort of stood out from everyone else as being something very, quite radically different. So there was some interest in our work as a result, and I was very interested to meet Nick Pope because he was somebody who I could really relate to. So Nick came up and we sort of became friends and colleagues, and I put some teaching his way, recommended him to teach at various places. He then got involved with the Garage Gallery, Tony Stokes, who later started an independent commercial gallery, so Nick and I became rivals unfortunately, it became, the relationship became quite difficult, and his agent, Tony Stokes, felt that he and I shouldn't really be related, we shouldn't hang out together, we shouldn't be seen as like a new school of sculpture or an alternative to the school of welding of St Martin's.

Why do you think that was? Wouldn't it have been a good thing?

Not a good thing for Nick in terms of selling the work and of pitching the work and of representation of Nick. I wasn't being represented then at that time, and I felt... Tony was really out to show that I was subservient to Nick; if anything I was imitating what Nick was doing, so there was a denial of there being some sort of possible impulse there. So that relationship became very strained unfortunately. Interestingly we both showed in the Guggenheim show in 1980.

But this Serpentine showing and the Arnolfini show were very important for you, weren't they? You've said they were cathartic.

Oh right, yes, yes. Yes, I had gone on to Nick Pope and just how that... Well that was... because we had both shown in the Hayward, and then we were both showing... Sue Grayson approached me and said, because she obviously knew of my work from 1970, from the Serpentine show, and she sort of apologised, saying, 'I'm sorry I haven't kept up with your work. I was very interested to see what you've done in the Hayward,' as part of the 'Condition of Sculpture'. And suggested I applied to the Serpentine, as one had to do, because I was still going on this thing of not seeking a show but to let it quite organically unfold and wait to see what sort of came towards

me. And I really felt this was somebody coming towards me, inviting me to apply, so I did, and I got a show there as part of, well you know, was one of the summer shows of young artists, and Nick, Paul Beauchamp, a couple of painters I think too, I can't remember who they were now, were also in that.

End of F4723 Side B

F4724 Side A

[Interview with David Nash at his home in Blaenau Ffestiniog on the 9th of June 1995. Interviewer Denise Hooker.]

David, you said that the Serpentine and Arnolfini show, the Loosely Held Grain one, were cathartic for you. I think you said that that was because you were prepared to admit primal work which you were ready to present in a raw, a less worked-on state.

Yes, I don't know where the word cathartic comes from, I never quite understood what that is, it sounds like some sort of crisis rather than a...

Well a turning point I meant.

Turning point, yes. I think, I'm trying to be quick about this, but it goes back to the 'Briefly Cooked Apples' show which was the title for the show at the York Festival, and it was called 'Briefly Cooked Apples', the title came from my misreading a sign on a van I think in Norfolk when I was walking in Norfolk, it said 'Bramley Cooking Apples', or it was a...yes, it was a sign on a farm, 'Bramley Cooking Apples', and I misread it as 'Briefly Cooked Apples', and then I saw that it was 'Bramley Cooking Apples', and I thought, I sort of mulled this word, a bit like Ted Harris used to do, I would get a phrase in my mind, 'Briefly Cooked Apples', and I thought, why was that, why did that work for me, what was happening? And so that's really what I was doing with the wood, I was briefly cooking it; like briefly cooked apples are much nicer than over-cooked apples and I felt that what I was doing with these very rough carved spherical forms was briefly cooking them, and hence the title for the show in the York Festival. And as I mentioned earlier, that I declined showing work I had made at Chelsea, feeling that perhaps this really wasn't what my voice really was, and I think it was the right decision because what I did at York Festival was the right start, I felt very confident at that show and I felt very good about how it looked. So the Arnolfini was really a magnification of that, and I think as I said, Clive Adams approached me in 1974 and came up here and we prepared well in advance. And he also wanted to make a catalogue, which is very interesting to me, the idea of doing

that, so it was an artist's book, and I worked with Sue Wells, who was a photographer who had moved to the area. I didn't have a camera then, and I didn't have any skills in developing and printing. Sue was very much a technician for me really in that I was lining the photographs up, you know, we would have a tripod and I would say, 'That's the picture that I want,' and then she would do all the technical aspects of it, of getting the correct light, she would develop the film and print the pictures, and then we would work at them. So it was a very very good collaboration. So I worked at that catalogue over a two-year period. I wanted it to be like a manual rather than the usual catalogue of finished works; I wanted to get a sense of where the work was made and how it was made and with what it was made, as well as the finished article. And this was my first book; I subsequently went on to make one called 'Fledged Over Ash', a little pamphlet called 'Wood Quarry', and then there was a gap until 'Wood Primer' in 1987. So, what more do we need to talk about the...?

Well I think it's interesting that you brought up 'Wood Primer' because that I thought was quite a good opening into talking in more detail about the work, because in 'Wood Primer' you put your work under, I think it's twelve thematic headings isn't it?

Yes.

So perhaps we could...

Yes, I originally wanted to call it 'Earth Ragas', which, but fortunately Steve Vincent, who was the editor of Bedford Press sort of persuaded me out of that, he felt it was very hippy or it was too New Age, and I came up with an alternative title, 'Wood Primer'. It was a title I had sort of been keeping back for something else really, but I thought I would spend it on this book, and I think it's the right one because it's a primer, it's like my Latin primer is an introduction to Latin, and this book is really an introduction to the creative possibilities of wood. And again instead of doing it sculpture by sculpture I tried to work at idea, to idea, so it's not necessarily in chronological order, although it starts with the pieces I've already talked about, which I gave the general term 'bonk', which was from Ted Harris's standing point on top of the cliff overlooking Blaenau. It's a rounded shape. I began to see them like islands,

and I began to see them all over the place, like the Manod and the Moelwyn mountains here, I found enormous 'bonks' coming down to ant hills, and then there was the rock by the Cynfal. And I made them in, as I've already said, in many shapes and forms. They were primal, they were also connected with the uncarved block that's mentioned in the 'Tao-te-Ching' of Lao-Tzu. And then the theme number two in the 'Wood Primer' book is Tripod. A designer got in between me and the actual printing stage; Ladder should be number two obviously because it's got two sides to it, Tripod should have been number three, and Table should have been number four, but for some reason I have never figured out, he re-arranged them. But going through in the order that they are in the book, the tripods are really how the 'bonk' shape, which is on the ground, it was a simple pod-like form, the tripod became the first construction for a standing object, a self-supporting and self-presenting object, because to stand an object only needs three legs, which, there were many versions. Somebody I met at the 'Briefly Cooked Apples' show in the York Festival was George Murphy, who's a writer and a young artist, he was just finishing at York University then, and we had a very creative friendship for four or five years, he introduced me to a book of shooting and hunting, it's a very...a 1920s book, and there were these very posed photographs of different stances of shooting at stags, and there was one called 'Over the Brow' when the hunter was kneeling and waiting for the stag to come up over the brow, so one was disguised by the actual brow of the hill. And then there was one called 'A Taint in the Wind' and there was like a hunter sniffing the wind. 'Over the Brow', 'Off the Knee', 'Taint in the Wind', and 'An Awkward Stalk', so that's where I got the titles for, from a series of tripod forms.

Did he show you the book before you did the 'Tripods', or had he see some connection with them?

No I think it was while I was making them, and I was looking for titles, and...I was trying to...the titling of my work, where they are somewhat obscure like these are, or they have a roundabout way into the work, and in a way the titles can bring a way of, or encourage a way of looking at the work. I've always avoided 'Untitled', I've always felt that, because that already is a title. Either there should be nothing at all,

no word, because 'Untitled' seems, you don't really know what it is yourself, or you can't make your mind up.

So are you pointing to interpretation with the title?

Yes, but also one can mystify it a little bit, or one can bring a slight sense of humour to it, and sometimes when one goes more into the work will find out why it's called that. Like there's a piece called 'The Capped Block', which has also got a subtitle, 'The Emperor of China', it comes in the section of Mantled and Dismantled, and it's a piece which can be compact, can be all of three elements, can be placed very close to each other, or they can be spread out, drawn out, and that title comes from a Kafka story about the Great Wall of China and in it one of the characters is imagining the Emperor of China who he will never see in his life, and sometimes he imagines the Emperor lying on a very long couch and sometimes he imagines him lying on a very short couch, and that was where that title came from, because in this sculpture one can move it backwards and forwards.

Do the titles always come after the work?

During the work sometimes a nickname will appear, like with the 'Ubus' which were made in Pierre de Bresse for the show in the Tournus Abbey in the late Eighties. Actually the form, or the possibility came out of my seeing some Rothko paintings again, but perhaps we can talk about that rather obscure connection a bit later on.

No, go on David, go on, it's interesting.

Right, well...

I mean while we're talking about it.

First of all I'll deal with the title.

All right.

The 'Ubus'. I had some French students helping me, and I think in conversation about these forms that I was making, they were just sort of elephantine and sort of, there is a main trunk which is tapered to where a limb comes out of the trunk and then it's tapered and follows up the trunk. They're quite elephant-like. And also a little reminiscent of the masks which were used in the 'Ubu' play, Alfred Jarry's play. So, I nicknamed it, or we nicknamed that piece 'Ubu', so, because they are the Mr or Mrs Ubu, it led me to make another one, one was in oak and one as in ash. And the form also was drawn out by the space of the refectory, which is high wall to ceiling which really called for these tall forms. Now, that nickname just stayed with them, it sort of animated them, it gave them a sense of humour, it related the two as a sort of a male and female, or as a couple. Now the Rothko connection is quite interesting, because I've mentioned before with Rod Harman introducing me to look at the Rothko paintings at age 21, and they were very atmospheric to me, and they were looking into this warm space. And then when the Liverpool Tate opening up at the Albert Dock one of the first pieces, or the groups of work that they had there for about a year or two years were these same Rothko paintings which Rothko had given to the Tate. And I saw them again aged 42, so this is exactly half my life again, and I was expecting the same experience again and I was looking forward to seeing these figures very much, this warm space, and I was quite astonished to find a completely different image, they were thresholds, they had...these very long ones seemed to have columns on either side, columns which were tapered in at the top and then became a horizontal and met in the middle, they were sort of like an archway. And it was a tree-like form, the column was like a trunk and the horizontal was like a branch, and I can remember begging one of the attendants for a scrap of paper and a pen so I could just make a note of this, because I realised, you know, I could actually, there's something I could make here. I was going to make them much more like the Rothko things but when I went to France of course, limbs don't grow out horizontally from trees, or quite rarely do they do that. So anyway I continued with the idea, and you know, they turned it into what was later known as the 'Ubus'. I think it's an interesting tale of where a form came from.

And do the titles always come from the form?

Yes. Often they are just...if there isn't...if a nickname hasn't appeared which is appropriate, it's not a casual thing, there's a sort of specific reasoning behind all these titles, but if one doesn't appear out of the actual working experience with it and out of my memory or association, then it's just a description, like 'A Cracking Box', that was made with fresh wood with the anticipation that after I had made it and as the water came out it would crack, so it was a cracking box. And then, I hadn't realised that that was a pun on a cracking, sort of a typical English phrase of a cracking good thing, a cracking box. So that sort of had a bit of another layer to the title.

Going back to the tripods, there is a great sense of movement and humour, well actually in all your work, but I was thinking of, is it 'Three Dandy Scuttlers', and that certainly adds to the humour. I wondered what you thought about humour in your work.

Well I've always had a keen feeling for the Dada and the Surrealists, I felt that there was a great sense of humour there, but dealing with something very serious, and it was doing something very serious but there was a great sense of humour to it, and that was part of what their seriousness was. And I've always thought that the comedians of the world, those stand-up comics, are the greatest artists. The courage just to actually present yourself, and you're right on the line, and that humour is very serious, and that life is very serious and the only possible way of coping with it is if you've got a sense of humour. Humour is like an oil, it's like an animator, it makes things possible which otherwise would just be unbearable.

You said in the John Christie film that it had started out as a defence mechanism for you.

Yes, that is a part...yes that got a bit laboured in the film, that point, because... It doesn't lighten the approach to a work, and what I found in Britain particularly is that, unfortunately, although we are, you know, we are famous for our humour here and how we take humour very seriously, it's a very important part of our culture, but a lot of people seeing my work tended to think that that was just it, that was it, there wasn't

anything further there, because really what was there, it was like welcoming the viewer with a smile to come into the work. I mean the 'Running Table' and calling it a 'Running Table', and the fact that it looks like an animal, I mean there's a lot more to that if one actually just waited a while and realised how it was made. There's a very interesting relationship of geometry and natural tree forms in the construction there, but very few people have got it. And with the 'Three Dandy Scuttlers' it was...formally I have sort of reversed the weight of the tree, in that I put the...the legs are simply holding up and are presenting at eye level three carved blocks, and the legs of it are holding them up, but it also animates them. And when I was carving the bark off the legs I left a little bit of bark at the bottom and somebody seeing them said they looked like a chorus line and their stockings had fallen down, so that was one of the other titles was, 'The Chorus Line'.

But those two elements animating the work and movement, they're common to a lot of work, aren't they.

Yes it goes back to what Richard Adams and I, after the Cornelius Cardew lecture, were doing in that studio in Kingston, we were going around making the appropriate noises, or we felt the noises, of the painting, and that was animating the painting, as we were trying to give it a, bring it into a being, bringing it into being. And so this sense of... A lot of my work moves. Some things, when I'm making a group of works for a show there are different movements happening there, but I always need some pieces which anchor work which don't move, you know, which are very solid and static.

But even in the way that the wood itself is going to change and crack, it's opening it up isn't it, it's not finite.

Yes, it's loosening it. I think the whole thing is trying to loosen the process of working, or the whole manner, because when I was a student there was always this big focus on the finish, when it was finished, and there was a lot of debate about, well, when was something finished and when wasn't it finished, and various artists, I think Gorky said, 'It's finished when I don't seem to be going on painting with it any more,'

so what he was saying is, it wasn't calling him to do anything to it any more, it had become complete. And if one looks at the Piero della Francesca Nativity painting, and one can say, well there are some parts of it that aren't finished, there's only the under-painting, but to me it's perfect in that state, and to have completed it wouldn't have made it a better painting in fact, completed it in what one might have thought normal, the normal way, I think it's in fact, it's enhanced by not being complete. I've also come to feel, and I've said it a lot, the word 'finish' is like it's dead, it's finished off. An art work I think only really works when you provide enough information for the beholder to add that up and to finish it, or to complete it within themselves, that's when you get a communication. And quite a lot of art works present too much information, there's nothing for me to do. And so, that's where a work can be challenging where at first sight, 'Oh, I don't get it, and I'll work at it, I'll try different approaches to it, I'll put my...' And the work is making me move my mind. I mean, it doesn't always work, because sometimes perhaps there isn't really anything there, it only looks like a work of art.

Can I pick up on something you said earlier. I wanted to ask you about the relationship between music and form, because it seems to have been a constant right up to the improvisations that were done on your work at the Aldeburgh Festival.

Well it relates to what we talked about with Phillip King and getting a taste in my mouth, listening to Indian classical music and particularly the voice of the Indian classical singer. I just see forms unfolding, moving forms, I can feel them, and how one form of art can provoke other sensations within my imagination. It calls form forward I think. And it was thrilling for me when Dian Booth and a colleague whose name, I can't remember it for the moment, John Sharpe, approached me, could they go and play my work. And you know, these are very experienced classical musicians of viola and cello. Again it was like the Cornelius Cardew idea of the musicians, because they had got fed up with playing from scores, Beethoven; although it was great music they felt themselves imprisoned in it and they wanted to work from another score, another sort of score, which was, they just happened to choose my sculpture, and they played four exhibitions. And they didn't rehearse or anything, it was just, they just went in there and did it.

The musical form called forth to them?

Yes. And for me it was a thrill to hear, not a verbal interpretation of my work, or somebody talking about me with words and trying to articulate what their feelings were about it, but hear these two in dialogue about a piece of my work. The piece they've done of the 'Ancient Table' is fantastic because it's a primeval object, it's like a cromlech, it's like 4,000 years ago, and they've really got this sort of sense of ancient power which I think I was trying to evoke in that piece. And the piece they did with 'Comet Ball' it was amazing, you can really hear it coming from a long way off and then it sort of roars into the space, which again was what I was trying to give the impression of, that this object had arrived through the ceiling.

How do you feel about the verbal interpretations there have been of your work, critical approaches?

It's been very consistent in people writing about the work. There's been a few dismissive ones, and, you know, I say, well, maybe they didn't get it, or...but then, I've often found at a group, a show of my work, and I'll meet somebody and they'll say, 'Oh I saw your show and I really liked so-and-so, but something I didn't really get on with was that table with the sort of packs on it, I didn't like that,' and I would always...and I tended to think, well, well I guess you're right. Because I have doubts about my work, and there are some good points about it and there are some things that I don't feel so comfortable about, the same thing. And then, nearly always, a couple of days later I'll meet somebody who says, 'I saw your show and I really liked that piece with the packs on it,' and I would feel, 'Oh yes, I think that's a really good piece too'. So, it's very open really, it's very...and I try to respect people's opinion, because in the cultural sphere one is working in freedom, and it's very important that people feel free and courageous enough to really say what their experience is, because there isn't any law, it isn't like...this isn't in the social sphere, there isn't a law. But all the time there are academics and intellectuals seemingly trying to create law around art, which is I guess a great debate, and artists feel imprisoned by it and push the boundaries down again; as these walls get built up, inevitably they get pushed down

again, and art moves on, it's all part of how it works. I think the whole impulse of art and artists finding themselves, or the human being finding themselves making art, and they are part of this whole activity of making art, is very like being part of the earth in terms of soil, and one can analyse the soil and find all of the different minerals that are in there and the different bacterias and the different fungi, and the earthworms and the bugs, and one tends to think of all these things as separate, but really it's one organism, just one living being, this mantle of topsoil around the planet Earth is like one being. And art is like that, and I'm just like a microbe among many others, and there's a symbiosis, you know, it all works, and we all have to be there, but in our isolation we can...and a focus on an isolation can be rather unpleasant, or one can be perhaps over-sympathetic towards one's sort of aspect. And the focus of art and the so-called centre of where it's at seems to move around over this great tableau, this great plateau of activity, and I wouldn't say that I am in the centre but I certainly don't feel I am on the periphery like I used to be, but I haven't really changed but the focus has changed, it's moved a little bit, so it encompasses my work at the moment a little bit, whereas before it wasn't, I was... Somebody called me an artist of the periphery, and I didn't realise this was actually a negative term, at the time I thought, yes, that's rather good, I live in Blaenau and I never really feel that I belong in the middle there, so I thought, yes, I thought that was a very accurate observation.

But you do have, I mean you have had quite a strong movement away from the art world, haven't you, in the sense of the sort of dealer system; when you first moved to Blaenau it was to get away from it, wasn't it?

Well to get away with it implies that I had something to do with it in the first place. I never had, I had only observed what Eddie had told me and various other experiences that people who I had known at art school were then experiencing or, you know, who in the third year when I was in the first year for example, and their difficulties of taking their work round, hawking it round galleries and everything, and I just didn't see how I...it seemed so competitive and I'm just not by nature competitive. I also felt there was this sense of, a lot of the artists were criticising people who are being shown, and names which had been banded around, trying to destroy them or put them down, and it felt like they were trying to make room for themselves, as if there's only

so much room at the front, that there's some sort of race, and part of getting to the front was to try to destroy who was at the front. It can be a very motivating force, competition can be a very strong motivation, but I think one has to be careful quite what you're doing with your will force in competition, how much you might be really interfering with someone else's free will, and I think free will is really what it's all about, and it really needs to be understood and needs to be respected. And, I mean I'm always, I feel pain when my free will is threatened.

Do you actually, when you say interfere with someone else's free will, who might that someone else be, or are you talking about yourself?

Well when you bad-mouth about another artist to someone who you know might be very interested in that artist, and you know, I have heard that, people I know, people, dealers and other artists have bad-mouthed about me to keep me out of an exhibition, and that's sort of interfering I think, but...but there again it's part of the soil, so, I've sort of contradicted myself there.

End of F4724 Side A

F4724 Side B

But nevertheless, have there been some key figures in the art world, gallery owners or curators that have been particularly significant for you?

Well, Ian Barker, who I first met I think in 1978, he had seen my show in the Serpentine Gallery, he was an exhibitions officer with the British Council, and had obviously liked it. I didn't meet him until '78 when I was asked by the British Council to represent Britain as a wood sculptor in a wood symposium, or sculpture symposium in Macedonia. So I met him then. And he subsequently arranged for Rudi Oxenhaar, who is the director of the Kröller-Müller Museum, who approached the British Council saying he wanted to come over to Britain, he hadn't been here for some time, just to have a look around, what young sculptors were doing. And as I am a good half a day away from London it's very unusual for anybody to come and visit me, because it's such an investment in time, but Ian had the courage to insist that he came up to visit me here, and that was a major breakthrough for me really in terms of getting my work recognised. Here was somebody extremely well versed in contemporary sculpture, Rudi Oxenhaar, bringing a European sensibility into my studio and that European eye of looking at my work which I had never experienced before, and on the spot he bought a piece called 'Elephant Passing a Window', and a drawing. This was in 1979. He also came and watched us pulling the 'Wooden Boulder' out of the first pool that it had been washed down into. And subsequently I had a big one-man show in this museum in 1982, and they have bought other works. Ian also arranged for Diane Waldman of the Guggenheim to come up and visit me, also in 1979. Diane had got lost in London and had been walking down Shaftesbury Avenue and had happened to glance through a window of what was Air Gallery, which was an alternative space in London, and saw that there was an exhibition that looked interesting and went in, and so she sort of discovered me. I've been discovered a few times, but this was a very important discovery. So when she was asked about 18 months later to curate a 'British Art Now' show, it was, Exxon were funding every other year a show of artists, young artists from different countries, and it was up to the Guggenheim to actually decide which artists. And from Diane's experience she was very determined that I would be in the exhibition, so Ian Barker

arranged for her to come up here. And what happened, if I was in London I would probably have had a half-hour visit, and the curator would probably see as many as twelve artists in one day, and it's not very good for the memory, and it's a pretty gruelling day, but if they come to see me they're going to have to stay overnight, at least, so really it is a two-day investment on their part. And it's a very nice part of the world, it's a long pilgrimage really to come up here, or a long journey, so they're already wanting to make the most of their time, which tends to put them in a very positive frame of mind towards the work, so I do contribute that fact towards their including me in their programmes.

And that was a particularly significant show for you, was it, in New York?

Yes, yes that was very very important for me, it was... It was a bit of an odd show.

Who else was in it?

Nick Pope, Simon Read, Tim Head, John Edwards, Alan Green I think, Hugh O'Donnell. There were six I think; there were going to be seven, Richard Long for some reason...because I mean he wasn't...he was in a league of his own really then, so he declined, and quite rightly so, it would have been very odd for him to have been in that group.

Why was it important for you?

It's the first time I had been to the United States, it was being included in a major show in a major art centre. Well I don't know, I wouldn't say a major show, a show which was going to get a lot of publicity, and the fact that it was in a major museum like the Guggenheim, and it toured around the States. A bit of an odd tour. The AFA who were touring it were a bit slow in getting their act together, so...

The AFA?

American Federation of the Arts. So it went to some rather obscure places like Savannah and Austin I think it went to, and San Diego perhaps, I can't really remember but... It was like a little one-man show for each person, so we each, like had a spiral each, or three-quarters of one of the spirals, and again the work looked very good. I had the 'Wooden Boulder' there, 'Documentation', 'Ash Dome', 'Documentation', the 'Tripods', I made some new 'Clams on Racks', big ones, 'Rough Cube', 'Cuddling Branches', that 'Over the Brow' tripod, a 'Ladder'. So it was quite a good range of the work, and I got very good press there. Robert Hughes wrote a very nice piece about the show, and about my work in particular, and there was a very good illustration of the 'Three Dandy Scuttlers' in 'Time', a colour shot, and it... I subsequently found seven years later when I showed again in a museum show in 'The Quiet Revolution', I was astonished at how many people remembered my show from 1980.

Where was 'The Quiet Revolution'?

That started in Chicago, it was curated by Marry Jane Jacob and Graham Peel. Graham was very determined that I would be in the show, he had been working at a sculpture show, a Land Art show when he was a curator at the Walker, which didn't come off, and then when he became chief curator in a San Francisco museum he started this idea again. He is English, so, kind of likes coming over to England, so I think some of these projects possibly are inspired by his wish to come over and see his folks, you know, it's a bit naughty to say that but I think there might be an element of truth there. And then the British Council steered him to Mary Jane Jacob, the curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, who was working at a similar show and recommended that they combined. Ian Barker by this time had actually left the British Council, so my main ally there wasn't there any more and I wasn't on the sort of list any more, if anything I was on a black list, and...

Why should that be?

I think every art world, in the world, has had people working in there trying to control, who have their own agendas. I think the Lisson Gallery was particularly

strong then and had the ear of some of the exhibitions officers then, and... Graham told me that he was astonished at the almost ferocity in their determination that I and some of the other artists who subsequently weren't in the show, it was going to be a bigger show, you know, they were saying that, 'We don't really think you should have that artist'. It really wasn't their part to do that, it was the curators who were deciding who was going to be in the show, not the British Council.

And what was the motivation then?

Sorry, in what...?

Well for them saying that they didn't think that you should be in the show.

Well they wanted what they thought was the best representation of British sculpture, so they must have had other artists in mind who were more deserving than I was, and I'm sure they had very worthy argument too, but actually it upset Graham very very much and just made him all the more determined that I should be in the show. And it was because I was in the show that 'Wood Primer' came into being in fact, but that's actually another story. And that show was very very important to me, it went to very good places. The MCA is a very good museum. It went to San Francisco, to the Hirshhorn in Washington, and to the Albright Knox in Buffalo. I mean all A1 museums, venues, and...

What is MCA?

Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago. I think it was the four, I don't think there was a fifth one. Yes there was, there was Newport Harbour in Los Angeles, near Los Angeles. And I actually managed to see all the venues and I was able to put, actually there was able to install the work. And that encouraged Peter Goulds in L.A. Louver to take me up as one of his artists, and who subsequently had, you know, has had...who has placed the work extremely well. But really all this started off from Ian Barker, you were asking about people who have had big influences, well there are others, but Ian left the British Council I think in '84 to join with the, well what was

called the Juda Rowan Gallery then, and it was through his continued interest in my work and his faith in my work that he introduced the other directors of the gallery to my work and got their agreement to take me on as one of their artists. He was also very instrumental in my being in the first British, 'Aspects of British Art' in Japan show at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum in 1982. One of my experiences at the Guggenheim show was that when I got there, all the packing cases, because the show was chosen from my studio, and it was taken down to London to the British Council warehouse and it was crated and shipped out with all the other works in these blue painted wooden crates of the British Council, and we opened them up. And of course it was incredibly exciting for me to be in New York, and in the Guggenheim, and it was just fantastic. But then when we opened up the crates it was the same old work, you know, it was just like, 'Oh, hello. You're my friends, but...!' And we put them up, and I spent a month out there in the States and then went down to Washington with a friend I could stay down there, and went up to West Virginia to Morgantown to a contact I had there and did some lecturing in the art department in the university there. I can't remember what else I did out there. But really I felt, God I wish I could have made some work here, and really you were figuring out that economically it would probably have been about the same amount, or perhaps less, if I had gone out and made the work instead. Because I felt that I wasn't really meeting America, I was meeting the art world, I was meeting curators and other artists, and New York, but I wasn't meeting America. Like when I went to Yugoslavia down to, into Macedonia and I worked down there, I met it, by the work, by the physical engagement with that place. And so I resolved that should I ever be asked again to show abroad I would make the request that I go to that country and make all the work out there and then... There was a big show at the Academy of Japanese art from the Edo period, Edo period, and there was a request by the Ambassador that we answer this by having a British show, which really he was thinking of antiquity, thinking more of Gainsborough and Constable I think really, but the British Council with Ian Barker there came up with the proposal that no, really what we want to do is a contemporary art show in Japan. And the curators, the Japanese curators coming over were shown the work, and I imagine through Ian's encouragement looked at my work very positively and wanted me in it, in fact they felt very strongly apparently that they wanted me in this show, they felt that the Japanese would be very interested in the

way that I was working with wood, which was similar yet very dissimilar. I think they felt there was a...I don't think consciously but probably felt the Buddhist qualities which I hope are there in the work.

Can you be more specific about that?

Well the Lao-Tzu, the space, the attitude. It's...although, I don't know whether we've said it on the tape, I feel my work is imbued with a...it's Christian work, it's basically a Christian work. It's in a way quite a radical thing to say, and I don't make a big deal about it because it's going to put people off it in droves, but it's an interesting question, well why is that, and I really would like to just leave it as sort of an open question. But there's a strong connection of Buddhism in Christianity, or the Christianity which I find myself drawn to.

And do you think that's what makes your work particularly appealing to them?

More esoteric Christianity. Well I think they were recognising something there in the work, but I thought, I think they're going to hate it out there because it's so rough, and I knew the way the Japanese work, which is really incredibly skilful but very tight. I later discovered, having been there quite a lot now, that it's like proscribed, the way to work wood there is like a law, a proscription. But they liked my freedom, they really, they seemed to be hungry for that freedom of working like that. However one of the museums, the director, Seiji Oshima, who has played a very important part in my career, was very keen on this idea of my coming out and making work in Japan, and he said his museum would take up responsibility for this. And Ian Barker, still with the British Council then, and David Brown of the Tate Gallery, who was a co-curator of this exhibition, went out and met with the museum and went to find a situation for me to work in. I had said what I wanted, I wanted a tree which had fallen over, I didn't want them to cut a tree down; I wanted it to be a metre in diameter at the base; I wanted to be living in not a smart hotel but a fairly basic accommodation, because of my experience of working is that I get absolutely filthy with chain-saw, you know, dust and oil and smoke and, it just doesn't work if I'm trying to stay in a hotel; I would need a space to make some drawings in; and I wanted that place to be within ten

minutes of where I was working, because I had been caught out with finding myself being accommodated an hour and maybe an hour-and-a-half away from where the actual work site is, that's an incredible amount of time wasted in going backwards and forwards. And so they fulfilled all these requirements to the letter; in fact I could have stayed nearer but I had said ten minutes...(laughing) But the only tree that they could find of this diameter which had fallen over was 4,000 feet up in the mountains, and the show was opening in March and I was going to make the work immediately before the show, so it was going to be February which is the coldest time in Japan, and the tree was sort of buried under six feet of snow, or there was six feet of snow around it, it wasn't completely buried but part of the work was actually digging it up. And I thought it would be a pine or something, a cedar, but it was an oak tree, a mizunara, a beautiful quality wood. And it was a real honeymoon experience for me with Japan, and I felt that all my work up to that date had been a preparation for this moment. The site where I was working was so beautiful. And the quality of the assistants that I had, and it was all so interesting and so, so very different culturally from any other experience that I had had until then.

How do you work with the assistants?

Well you have to get the whole project under way, and usually I made something which I've made before, or something which is quite obvious to me how to actually do it. Because it takes three days for the whole project to really have a life. So I've just sort of got to put it off balance to start with, you know, I've got to get it moving. And also the actual abilities of, you know, I have to see what the people who are coming to help me can and can't do, and what sort of equipment. And they had a, in this case they had a team of four woodmen, local men, who had...you know, I, like everyone else, or most other people, have a very romantic idea about Japan and about the nature, wisdom and their love of nature, respect of nature, but really I found it only really existed in people who actually worked in the woods, with wood, and these people were just, Mr Gomita who was the head of this wood team, because he was so skilful and intelligent in his way of handling wood, and I asked, can we be careful not to break any little trees when we were moving, because... When you get a big tree down, almost immediately you get lots of other trees growing up around it, so they

very carefully moved the wood so nothing got broken. The first time I had worked in snow, and it's very easy to work big pieces of wood in snow because it's so easy to move them about.

Was Mr Gomita like a forester?

Yes, yes.

Something like the Forestry Commission here?

Yes, but he wasn't one of the executives who wore a suit, he was a freelance woodman, so he cut trees down. You know, that was a very special, very special experience. I had done a rehearsal for this project in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in the autumn of 1981, I had a residency there for one year, and I was given an elm tree, and there was a gallery in Leeds that wanted me to do a show while I was there, the St Paul's Gallery, and I applied the form of the triangle, or the pyramid was the basic form which I found myself working with, because I started, before we cut the tree down I started excavating the roots around it and found these V shapes was what the predominant form was, and looking at the tree, and how the branches divide and divide and divide again was creating these V shapes. And I found it took me 22 days to make a group of work, so, I remember the Japanese asking, 'Well how long do you need to be there?' '22 days.' (laughs)

But how did you work with the assistants, or do you, on your various projects? We started to talk about that.

Yes, well I don't really know how you mean, how do you I work with them. You just work with them.

What do they do for you?

Oh right. (laughs) Well obviously I am the one who is deciding where to cut, what we're going to make, and in what order we're going to make them. And, I thought

there was going to be a problem with the Japanese because of the language, but they had an interpreter so that was all right, but really, Mr Gomita and I didn't need interpreters because we both spoke wood. This was when I really realised that there is a language of wood, and that if you work with wood you are working with a global language. So, if I didn't cut it myself, I would say, 'I want a cut here and here and here, and I want to get those moved down there, so put that on there, that on there, that on there.' So while they were doing that I would be doing something else. And then I would be preparing for what I wanted them to do next, and then I would go and start on one of these pieces of wood that they had taken down.

And are these usually wood people or art students?

If the tree has to be cut down at the beginning of the project, then I need a woodman who is a professional to do that. I usually try to relate in some way to a nearest art school if there is one, I usually give a talk there very early on in the project, almost the first day that I'm there, so that they are aware of the fact there is a project on, and usually I get two or three students who get very interested and become part of the team. And I have a very open attitude towards people coming. On some occasions I've had to say no, because they're a menace, you know, some people are just accident prone and you can usually see it quite quickly how clumsy they are and they're actually going to cause a problem, so we have to tactfully say...or give them something else to do, so they're not getting in the way. But a little community builds up around the project and which, that I've actually become to find one of the most interesting things about the projects is how this little group grows and the camaraderie which develops and the social dynamics of it, and how that actually lives into the work itself, and that in a way the work just makes itself, once you've got it going. Because it's...I don't know whether we've already talked about this on the tape, but on these projects, one of the most important aspects is the space where the work is going to go, because that's what I need to see first of all, because there are...every space is unique, different qualities of light, different architecture, different floor covering, whether it's carpet or stone or boards. Sometimes, like the Tournus space, that old abbey refectory, had such an incredible Christian warmth living in that space, and really of time. So that's the receptacle, and where the work's going to go, and then we

go and find the wood and when I look at the wood I realise, well yes, that form, I could make that, that space is calling for that form. Yes I have mentioned it before, like in the Tournus space with the 'Ubus' I made, I needed those waving forms going up into the space, and the bowls answering the curve of the roof, sort of holding a space.

You have worked in many parts of the world, David, and do you find that the different cultures and the different places are feeding, interchanging the work?

Well that's what I really hope for, and expect to happen. I didn't really realise it was happening at the beginning, but again it takes three days for it to begin to happen. But, I find if I go as a visitor somewhere and I'm not working, I'm not engaging with the place, I am only partly there, or, this place doesn't really, isn't really speaking to me as a whole being, and if I work I'm meeting people and I'm actually engaging with something which has grown there and is of that place, and it begins to engage with me the sort of living qualities of the culture, and of the nature and of the culture, and begin to engage with me, and inevitably come into the work. And I don't really have to do very much about that intellectually, it just happens quite naturally, if I allow it to happen, just being, particularly in this very loose way which I approach the way of working. Because if you're loose you can...you're opening up to something that can come in. If I work in a very tight way, you're actually excluding, so the way of working is very inclusive. But then I have to be specific, you know, then I have to hone it, I mean there's a point where I am honing it. And inevitably after I have made two or three pieces there are a lot of off-cuts, bits of tree which is the bit that I've cut away from what I am focusing on, and they are all potential shapes, and they are all unexpected shapes, and quite often they'll just wink at me, 'I can be this,' you know, and also thinking about the space where it's going to go, it can...there's a dialogue going, is going on.

This might be a good moment to ask you about your tools.

Ah right. I think we've sort of covered this at the beginning with the wood pieces, with the 'bonks', it was just an axe, and then with the tripods it was a wedge, wedges.

Then I got a saw, a big six-foot saw, a two-man saw which I found I could use on my own in fact with a sort of, an extended handle, a vertical handle and I could actually saw. And there's this line of cut which I so loved, it was like a thought into the wood, a line of cut. And it wasn't till '77 that I started to use a chain-saw, and really the chain-saw is an amalgam of all tools, it's like lots of chisels going round and round, it is a grinder, and is a saw, and it's also something, one can penetrate the wood, you can actually push the saw right the way through, one can cut a square or a form out of the middle of a piece of wood very quickly. And it's the rapidity of it which really suits my nature. But I was right to not use it to begin with, because there's an awful lot of awful wood sculpture made with a chain-saw where it's quite obvious that the sculptor has no interest in the wood at all, hasn't let the wood actually speak, that it's a complete imposition of the will. Because they are, a chain-saw is an expression of will, it's like a bulldozer, I mean it's like, you can just force. But if one has...it's always dependent on who is controlling the machine of course, and if so there's a sensitivity there, and already an awareness of the qualities of these woods, allowing yourself the space and the time to feel and to remind oneself that this is beech, and what is beech, you know what is it, and just sort of allow yourself to engage with those qualities.

People have been surprised that you use power tools.

Yes, well inevitably there's a sort of, a legend grows up about an artist or a lot of assumptions. Most people assume that I am a vegetarian, which in fact I'm not. Most people assume that I'm going to be about 6 foot 6 with a big beard and an axe stuck in my belt too, so, I've often been to places and they're waiting for David Nash and I'm still there and they're still waiting for David Nash to come, and I say, 'Well I am actually David'. 'Oh!' Because they weren't expecting this sort of rather small person. Often I've, in the early days of finding tools, because you know, of course poverty plays a big part in this, and I didn't have a chain-saw partly because I couldn't afford one. I was also very frightened of it, of using them, and I would actually sometimes ask someone to make a cut for me who had a chain-saw, or to cut a tree down, cut a limb off a tree with the chain-saw, I wouldn't use it myself. [BREAK IN RECORDING] In a hardware store in Dolgellau I found these big augers which

farmers use, this is a tool that you can drill a hole in a gatepost with, and they come in different sizes, and the biggest one is, you can make a two-inch hole with, which is a big hole, and it's not a power tool, you have to put a handle in it and twist and turn it. It's got a little spiral on the end like a screw thread which pulls the blades through and it sort of scrapes its way into the wood. And so, the pieces which are pegged, like 'The Cracking Box', came from that tool, from my finding a tool, being excited by it. They're incredibly expensive, they were...well now to buy one is about £80, a two-inch hand auger, so it was a big investment for me then, so having made such an investment I was going to make the most out of it, and I bought...the ones, the drills which are not two-inch cost a lot less, so I bought about five of them so I had different, I could make different size holes, and I made a lot of pegged sculptures. But it was because I had found an auger. I hadn't thought I.....

End of F4724 Side B

F4725 Side A

David, you mentioned Richard Long when we were talking about the Guggenheim show, and I wondered how you saw your work in relation to other Land artists like Richard Long and Hamish Fulton.

I'll start that with talking about my awareness of Richard Long's work and its effect on me. I first saw it in Anne Seymour's selection of 'New Art' the show was called in the Hayward Gallery, '71 or '72. 'The Ring of Stones', the quite large rounded river pebbles, and I didn't really get it at the time, I felt that it wasn't enough and that really all these stones they should be pointed in some direction, although in a ring. And I remember seeing Hamish Fulton's photographs, and there were two photographs, it was of a ridge, there were two views. There was Michael Craig-Martin's work there, but I think those were the only three artists that I can recall at the moment. But subsequently I began to hear more about Richard Long's work and see it, and there was a great debate about it of course about how 'Walk' being a sculpture. And I got to like it more and more. And Clive Adams of the Arnolfini showed Richard's work several times in the Arnolfini; Richard lives down there in Bristol, and I actually met him for the first time when I had my show at the Arnolfini, he came round to Clive Adams's house. Very tall, his legs seem to start at his chest, you know, big boots on, he's designed for walk, for walking. Tremendous will. He seemed a very shy person, he's very intelligent. And he's done an enormous amount for what's possible in art, and particularly in sculpture, and I think I equate it with what Henry Moore did at the Royal College when he threw out all those mechanical means of replicating a clay maquette into stone with all these devices, and sort of went for direct carving, and he sort of opened up a lot of possibilities. And I think the next person to do that in sculpture was Richard Long, and I think a lot of contemporary artists owe Richard a great debt, and he was determined that this was, a walk is a sculpture, and his texts are a sculpture, and thus by continually doing it in the way that Henry Moore kept on making forms with holes in them, just kept on doing it, he wasn't going to bat an eye. It's like the way that Duchamp presented his first ready-made, that bicycle wheel on a stool, he would have just not batted an eye about it, he wouldn't have been apologetic about it, that was his work and he was going to stick by it.

I wondered how you felt your work related to what we call Land Art?

Well it became more and more a presence in my mind, I was very aware of him, and we were actually the same age but he started to show in commercial galleries and became a figure very early on, almost immediately he left art school in 1968/69 I think, and he had a show in the Guggenheim very very early on. Meanwhile I had gone to the hills to try to find some confidence. So, you know, I've been very aware of Richard, and with great respect, and I sort of continue to learn from him, and also seeing, when he's... He took a long time I think to feel confident of other people's confidence in his work, and the work didn't really seem to move on for quite a long time, and then I was thrilled when those first splash pieces appeared, and then those big wall images made in mud. He's a great artist. And Hamish Fulton very interestingly, he doesn't move anything, he just takes the photograph and makes the image of this place, and he sort of evokes the experience, where Richard is out there heaving these rocks around. I mean they're big efforts some of those things, and they're incredibly simple forms.

Do you think you've taken anything from him?

I think confidence, I think that's what, when somebody breaks out through the walls that have grown up around what sculpture can be, and one's also interested in getting out there, what he did all helps to build confidence in other artists too.

What about Andy Goldsworthy?

He's in another, other side really, interestingly. Andy's about ten years younger than me I think, and I first met him when I was doing the occasional visit up to Preston Polytechnic, they had a, they were based in Lancaster then, and Andy, right from when he started the course there wasn't interested in learning how to make plaster moulds; on his foundation course he had realised what he wanted to do, so he said well, OK, I'll see you in a month's time, and he came in and he showed sketches I think and photographs of what he was doing, and the staff didn't know what to do

with him because he just wasn't towing the line. Anyway he came, he heard that I was coming and he came in to see me, because he had heard about, he obviously knew about my work, this was '76 maybe, '75/76. And I was really excited about what he was doing and was full of encouragement for him, and a friendship grew up there. He came, visited us when we were in Grizedale and he actually baby-sat for our kids when we went out one evening, and coming back and he was I think exhausted from trying to get Jack back off to sleep with this bottle. So I felt very close with Andy. I hadn't had, ever had any lengthy conversation with Richard Long, I just always felt he didn't want to know really, he just was...whenever I've...I've often bumped into him in the Arnolfini, and I always get the distinct feeling he just wished he was somewhere else, and wished he had sort of, hadn't come round the corner quite at that moment.

I suppose your work is much more concentrated on producing a tangible object, isn't it.

Yes, thinking about his work, and it's very...the activity is very linear in these walks, and then he'll stop and he'll make a mark with the stones, or with walking, or however he does it. So he stays in a place for a few days I guess sometimes, will recall it and then he'll move on, and really he leaves it behind him, and in a way I sort of felt, well one was in a sense leaving a responsibility for what one has done behind you. So when I was approaching the time when I started the 'Ash Dome' it was...this was something which was in my mind about actually making a gesture outside which I would take responsibility for, so I was going to stay with it, I wasn't going to walk on, so it needed to be near where I lived, and we'll probably come to it later on how Cae'n-y-Coed came into my...I actually own those four-and-a-half acres.

In the early, I think it was 1981 you say that you travelled a figure-of-eight around Wales, England, Scotland, collecting stones and making drawings.

Yes.

Was that more related to...?

No, it was just by chance that we made a figure-of-eight; we were in a van and I was with Claire and I was with the kids and we just had a series, I would deliver some drawings to Southampton and then probably something in...no we went the other way, round through Somerset and then up to Newcastle and everything, so this was just...

Nothing to do with making roundabouts?

No it wasn't, no, no no.

It made me think of it when we were talking about Hamish Fulton, what you saw as the status of the photograph in relation to the rest of your work?

Yes, I think that's something I definitely picked up from Richard and Hamish, is the possibility of presenting a surrogate work.

What do you mean by that?

Well it's...it is representing something else which exists somewhere else.

As in the stoves maybe.

Yes, yes, but, though that does become the art work because the stoves don't exist, they only exist at a moment, and sometimes there are other people there and we experience it, it's only for a short space of time. Similarly with Andy's photographs. I think perhaps something hasn't gone quite right with Andy's photographs, it got bigger and bigger, and it began to feel that he was making the pieces to take a photograph of to exhibit and to sell, whereas I actually know the truth is that he is a compulsive worker outside, and he lets us in on what he's doing by these photographs, but I think they were...he was encouraged to market, or they weren't marketed in the right way, so... There was a moment with the 'Ash Dome' and the 'Wooden Boulder' when I saw, you know, I can work with this and show the photographs and everything, but I actually reduced that, I've sold very few photographs, and I use them

very much as a back-up and as a documentation. I would rather have a drawing of the 'Ash Dome' and sell the drawing and just have the photographs there as a back-up narrative about it, but they aren't actually for sale.

And you don't see those as works of art?

They can be, and there are some photographs I made as art work, works of art, which, when we come to focus on that with some exhibition or some catalogue, then there is a body of work there to be shown. But I was unsure I think; I also didn't have the money nor the facilities to actually produce them to exhibition standard, I think, sort of held me back on it, which is just as well because I developed the ability of the drawing, which I worked at.

Yes I'd like to go on to talk about that.

While we're on the subject of what is called Land art, John Beardsley, who curated a show at the Corcoran and he produced a beautiful book, a classic book about that, I think he called it 'Earth Art' I think, and I think I based, I've used that as a sort of a touchstone of how to produce a book, it has a sort of a classic sense about it, timeless, a lot of black and white photographs beautifully produced. And the way Richard Long has made books and Hamish Fulton, they are real art works, you know, they are...this is the way of having the work, you know, of actually having a very well, incredibly well designed book, and just, where you are not aware of the design. Excellent. Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, the Americans, American Land, and when I went to America and I went into the land, one realises that Michael Heizer didn't make this huge scar in the earth, it's just a little pin-prick, it's like putting a leaf in a pool really in terms of the scale of the Nevada Desert. I haven't seen the piece but having seen, you know, how big America is and the land, the quality of land and how it is there, it's very different from doing something like here in Britain. So the way that artists have engaged with the land. Oh yes, and how I figured it out is that nearly all of Britain has been touched, hand-touched, almost to an arm's depth, whereas in America it's like, even when it's been worked a lot you don't really feel that much penetration yet. Oh I've lost my thread. Oh yes, so the sort of English

tradition of land, and working with the land, the estates, the respect of...with Capability Brown, of actually creating in a way a three-dimensional Poussin or a Claude, a Claude painting. And there are great landscape painters, Constable and Turner, Turner getting out there, you know, and actually the rain on the paper, it didn't matter, he was out there in it. And I think there's been a very natural progression towards artists who don't want to make pictures of it, they want to actually make the landscape the material itself, and the work actually exists out there and is made of the place itself. Because painting a landscape is really like painting a portrait, and you are distanced from it. I think a lot of people wanted a re-engagement with the world. Tony Cragg very interestingly is in, like a defiance of Richard Long, 'New Stones'... 'Newton's Tones: New Stones' is a direct challenge to Richard Long when he's picked up all these bit of plastic, so they're not sort of beautiful nature objects. This is human garbage that he's picked up, but he has ordered them with this gradation of colour through the spectrum. But he's called them 'New Stones', which I think was a direct challenge to Richard Long. And that's where sort of challenge and competition can be very creative, I think. But curators and art commentators like to find groups trying to articulate about new impulses in art, so that they tend to string artists together possibly to satisfy their own agenda sometimes, so I don't think it's time yet, or, these artists are still in mid career, you know, to actually find out what's really going on, what the impulse really is. I guess there might even be people saying, 'Oh Land art has passed now, you know, it doesn't happen any more.' But the land is still out there, and the artist is still out there too.

I'm interested the way, in your drawings, you bring the natural materials back into the drawing, you know, using blueberries and...

Yes. There's a particular drawing that illustrates that of the Biesbos stove, which is, the stove was made of clay and sticks. All the stoves are made of the materials of that particular place, and when one is moving through the land one has to stop and rest, and it's this ancient tradition of making a stove. And I've noticed when they burn the bracken on the hills here, which is a tradition here in March that when you see the fire, you can see it maybe two miles away but that becomes a centre, that's, one is looking at that, and there's an acceleration going on there, there is something

happening there. So that's, a fire becomes a focus, and it's like a little...it's like when one makes a stove it's like a little building, like a little temple, and again it's very interesting for me to actually find, well what's this stove going to look like? I don't know until...because it's going to come out of the material, this particular place. So then I took a photograph of that when it was on fire and then also made a drawing of it using the clay and the charcoal, well the charred ends of sticks and some ash from the fire to make the drawing. So the drawing is in a way an actuality, it's using the materials of the object which I am drawing.

And do you see them as independent of the sculpture?

They are connected with that particular mode of working, or a way of expressing what is of that place. It's like making a picture.

But they're more than documentations of the sculpture?

Yes, they are art works particularly, more so than I think the photographs are. Because I think I've always been more interested in what comes from the artist's hand, or from the human hand, whereas I've avoided materials which have gone through a process, like steel and plaster and fibreglass, all of which I used when I was at art school but in a way found that I rejected them because they weren't directly from the earth, which is what wood and clay, rock, really is.

Perhaps we can try and go back to some of the themes, shall we, that we were talking about, a way of getting closer to particular works.

Will we go back to drawing?

If you want to, certainly, yes, do.

Because I would like to, while we're on the subject, and then we could deal with it.

Do, yes.

I drew quite a lot while I was at art school, and there was...when I was making these very...the first plateaux, looking through an archway onto a plateau, it's connected with a Giacometti sculpture of, like a plateau with these objects on it which actually described things, activities of the surface, like half a cup scooped out of a surface, and a zigzag object going across, and I think a ball and an obelisk stuck in which is at an angle but they all talk about the surface. So, there's sort of a lot that we haven't talked about and what those things were all about, but... I saw the 'Dambusters' film again and that bouncing bomb, that sphere in movement like that, and I made drawings of that which seemed to relate to, again to the 'Wooden Boulder' much later on, so I've still got that drawing from 1966.

So that, does it actually go back to the 'Dambusters' do you think, stayed with you obviously that image, didn't it?

Yes, not the...when you say about the 'Dambusters', when you think about that whole sort of, the music of it and all that, but it wasn't, it was just, it was an archive film of this very large metal object skimming across water, was just to me a thrilling moment. But I was talking about the drawing. And then really I made a lot of notes, and I wasn't really drawing other than painting; I suppose the paintings were like drawings, these sort of gouache, colour gouache, small paintings I was making through '67, '68, '69, and then I just sort of didn't really draw very much. I liked to get straight in to the material, so I wasn't trying to draw what I was going to do before because I didn't really know what it was going to look like, and to make a drawing seemed to be premature and wasn't necessary. Then I started to want to draw again, or I didn't quite know where the need came from. It might have been simply an economic need, people saying, 'Well have you got any drawings?' And, well I didn't. And I also found that my range of mark-making was very limited, so I set myself a project to learn to draw, to expand my capacities of drawing. And for about a year I, not every day by any means but I would walk without any drawing equipment with me at all, I would go for a walk and I would look for a drawing, look for something which I could see I could do something with, an image of the landscape, because I felt that the marks were all out there, I've got to find them. And when I found something, a view

or it might be a rock in relationship to some other rock, I would spend quite a long time just looking at it, figuring out...if I was going to draw it on paper, what sort of shaped paper does it need? Is it tall or is it longer? And I would actually figure out a shape of paper, and I would also decide on whether it would be a wax or pencil or charcoal or a mixture. And then I would go back and I would prepare ten sheets of paper, all the same size, decide on what...or I would take a range of stuff with me, because sometimes I would realise I needed some other sort of mark-making, and I would draw ten drawings of it. I made a special drawing board which I could slip the paper into and then I could pull the paper out and hold it with these elastic, these long elastic bands, and...knicker elastic I think I used. I made several of these boards of different sort of shapes and sizes, and then I would walk back to this place, maybe not the same day but maybe a day or a couple of days later, and then I would learn the marks, that was what I was there for; it wasn't really to make a drawing but I was going to try and find the equivalent marks of that place or that view or that image. And it was a very important experience for me in that I did greatly expand my mark-making ability and confidence, and it was from that time I have continually drawn. Part of the 'Ash Dome' project is, every two years I make an update of a drawing and a photograph, and part of what I thought would be interesting is, not only the drawings depicting various activities to create this dome form, but the drawing would obviously change; as I got better or got worse, or changed, that change would also be evident. And also with the photographs every two years, occasionally I will put myself into the photograph, so again I will be getting older as the piece is growing, so in the eventual documentation in another 20, 30 years' time there will be these other progressions evident. And I built a drawing studio in the chapel on the balcony in 1983; I had an earlier drawing studio in the old vestry part but I sacrificed that space to make two bedrooms for William and Jack, but I needed somewhere else to work so I made like a big greenhouse on top of one of the balconies, which was never very satisfactory. The first place was really very good atmosphere in it, and in 1980 I had bought what had been a local grocery store which had been very derelict, across the road, with the intention of one day making it into another smaller studio, maybe for other artists who were coming to stay etcetera, but eventually I decided in 1990 I would make that into my own drawing studio, and one of the things that I needed, well the problem with the one I had, it was so damp that the drawings were getting

damaged from this damp, and it was a very unpleasant atmosphere to be in. Winter is always cold so I needed to be warm, and light; I needed proper walls I could pin into. So it is a tool. It cost me about £40,000, I was amazed when I eventually figured out what it was actually going to cost. You know, it was a big investment and it was an investment into drawing, and I think with the amount of drawings which are being bought, you know, it's a worthwhile investment.

So there was the commercial aspect of doing the drawing, to have something to sell?

Yes, I'm very pragmatic, and people have more wall space than they have floor space, and it is an activity that, I see it as something in its own right, and that I will continue to develop more and more. And there are certain aspects of my work, like observations of space, like sheep spaces where the sheep get in out of the wind, they find places. They don't actually scrape the ground, or they don't burrow or tunnel, they just continually go to this place, and their continual presence there sort of wears the ground into a sort of oval space, and lanolin gets into the wood or into the wall, or the rock, and they become a very holy space. And there isn't really any way of making a sculpture about that, or, I found the photographs didn't really evoke the qualities that I was really observing, so it was drawing, it was...the only way to present this observation of space, nature space, or a natural occurrence of an animal's use, practical use, of the landscape was through the means of drawing.

And what about the small editions that you do of your work?

Are you talking about drawings or about sculptures?

Sculpture now. I was thinking of the more commercial aspect, following up on that.

Yes, well the first multiple was the 'wheelies', they were like sticks on wheels which, I made one which won a prize in the Welsh Eisteddfod in the craft section, there was an exhibition, a competition about toys, which was very encouraging, and that was probably '75, and in '76 there was the Arnolfini show, and I wanted to make something that people could take away with them, a little art work, so I made about

100 I think, and they were sold for £3 each, and each one was unique of course because each...no two sticks are alike, and I couple these wheels and drill the holes and use dowels to make the axles. So that was really a souvenir, you know, it was a way of participating in the exhibition and, you know, I made £300, which was worth having. Then there was the 'Running Table' multiple which I...and I made a group of those and a group of small ladders for the show at the Air Gallery in 1978, and again it was a way of just combining four pieces of wood, but they had to be quite carefully chosen because they had got to go in the right directions, they had got to be the right thickness, and in all different types of wood, and each one had a very different character to it, and I think we sold them for more like £25 I think.

How many would there have been of those?

I think the first edition was, I probably made 12 and they were all oak, and then I made a lot of ash ones, and then I sort of lost count really, and then there came a point where I wasn't making them any more. Ladders are still possibilities, and often in projects I've made some very small ones and given them to the people who've been helping me, so it's like a token, a gesture. And recently some...for the Refusalon Show in San Francisco, which is on right now, which is very much an alternative space, and there's quite a young audience for my work in San Francisco, and I suggested to Charles Linder whose place it is that, you know, we should try and make something accessible. So I made two multiples of drawings of the vine lines and of three hollow trees and they are 10 drawings each, and I made a template and drew out the general outline. But each one is a little bit different, but it's a way of lowering the price and making it more accessible. I've also when I've tried to do prints, lithographs and things, I've found that actually I can draw these things much quicker than it takes to print them, so...

Perhaps we can go back to some of the themes. You were talking about the tripods I think.

Yes, the tripods were...yes, this was a self-supporting structure, and they were different ways about how to actually connect three pieces of wood, like hazel, you can

plait hazel. The truck driver who I drove with bringing the work back from the Arnolfini exhibition was telling me about plaiting hazel, he used to work out in the woods and he was talking about, you know, this is how you...you get the hazel at the right time of year and you twist it, and you sort of hammer it slightly and then twist it, and they've got very long fibres, and you can use it like a rope. So that was a tip, and a lot of works have been stimulated by someone just giving me a tip like that. So the hazel-plaited tripod are three forked pieces of hazel, fresh hazel, and then the...because there are three pieces with a fork, that gives six upper branches, so I could make two plaits. 'Over the Brow' uses a piece of slate with three holes in it to hold three pieces of hazel together. The 'Elephant Passing a Window' is clamped together. The 'Rope Tripod' is obviously held by rope. The 'Woven Tripod' is like a.....

End of F4725 Side A

F4725 Side B

`Bonks'.

OK.

Since we're going to sort of like focus on the `Wood Primer' a bit, I think there are several things I can say about what I call the `bonks', that's these rounded shapes. `Three Clams on a Rack' was made with the anticipation of them cracking, and it really is to emphasise, or to work with the crack, which is like...because the light doesn't get in, it's dark, so in one's imagination you can penetrate into the material. And one of the reasons for me cutting these rough spheres when I made the very first ones was to have the mark of the tool on the finished object so that the mark of the process of making is there, so it takes away all the problems and anxiety of, how do I finish this? Do I surform it, do I polish it, do I...? And it just, it wasn't necessary, but I wanted the marks to be absolutely honest to the making. And my thought then was, so long as I kept my mind on the activity and kept that clean and pure, the object could look after itself, so what it looked like could look after itself. I sort of wanted to pull back from having control on what the object looked like; the concept was a concept, so whatever it looked like was whatever it looked like. The `Nine Cracking Balls' we've talked about. The `Pods in the Trough' were, I managed to get hold of some big chunks of walnut, they were split, and they were sort of suggesting the sort of pod-like shape, and I had a big piece of oak I was able to make a trough in. So how do I present these? So I made the trough. The `Pod Stack' relates to the Tutankhamun photograph we've already talked about. `Two Rough Balls' I think is interesting. When, 1984, in Japan, we were just finishing up, up in Kotoku in Tochigi up in the forest there, a big mizunara tree that I had made a big ladder and the nature frame from, but there was a lower part of the trunk which I hadn't used because it was hollow. And we were waiting for the truck and I suddenly realised I could make two sort of rough ball shapes using just what the woodmen were doing. What they were doing while we were waiting for the truck was cutting up all the scrap wood and splitting it, so they would use their chain-saw to cut across the grain and they would split it open into logs for the fire with an axe. So the process of the saw is to cut

across the grain and the axe is to cut down the grain. So the two rough balls are made in exactly that way, we cut all the way round with a chain-saw. But I realised that I wasn't going to have time to make both of them, so I asked one of the woodmen to copy me, because in Japan they are great at imitation, they will faithfully copy exactly, and I wanted to make a work which actually engaged that characteristic. So he just did what I did, and I still now can't tell which one I did and which one he did. But it was done because there was an opportunity and the truck was coming, I needed some...I couldn't make two, I needed someone to help me, this was a great situation because the Japanese could copy me exactly, and so that's how that came about, 'Two Rough Balls'. And of course the 'Wooden Boulder'. The 'Wooden Boulder' was put in the river in 1978, and the story of this is, the show that I did at Arnolfini and the Serpentine, the work was quite chunky and solid, and then the shows that I did later, the one that started in the art centre in Chester and went to Chapter in Cardiff, and the show in the Air Gallery, they were much more spindly, much more linear. And I really wanted to get back to volume, and in 1978 I had the opportunity of using a whole oak tree. So that piece simply started out as, I want to get into contact again with volume, so I decided to make another big, the biggest, roughest sphere 'bonk' that I could make out of the base of this oak tree. And I found that to cut underneath I had to roll it, and so, then I realised that a sphere obviously has got a sense of movement to it. So my intention was to get this object back into my studio and let it crack, but I got very involved with this idea of it in movement, so to keep it in perpetual movement I put it into the stream, and really it was only going to be there temporarily and I wanted to get a photograph of it in the stream, and then I would take it out and then I would exhibit it with the photograph of it splashing into this pool. But when I rolled it down the waterfall it got jammed halfway down, and it looked, it just looked like it was meant to be there, and I accepted that straightaway, that this...I'm going to leave it here in the stream. And I've followed it over 17 years now, as it has slowly worked its way down the stream, and it's been in places where I thought it would never move out of there. There have been times when I've...I've moved it. It was in the waterfall for about three or four months then got washed down into a big pool where one could only see the very sort of top of it. Anyway I wanted to keep this idea of it going in movement, so we netted it and winched it out and I rolled it down into the next pool where it stayed for 8 years, and I was quite content to

just leave it there, I didn't think it would move out of there. And then there was a change of ownership of the land at the stream where the boulder was on, and the people who had owned it before were quite happy with me going there and taking people there, and me to take photographs of it, but I couldn't trust of course that whoever was going to take on the place would allow me on to the land, and they would naturally feel that this lump of wood was theirs. So I moved it again, off their property, it was only a matter of 15 yards or so, on to Ivan Jones's land, he's a farmer who I have known since I was a kid and he was quite happy for it to be in his stream. And from then on it's just gone on its own, I mean we had exceptional rain storms and I went to photograph it after a great rain storm and I couldn't find it, and it had moved 150 yards. I had walked right past it, I was expecting it to be further up, and I was poking around in pools for it, thinking it must be so waterlogged that it had sunk. And then this last winter it was washed down again, and there again, where it had come to rest in 1990 the stream is very wide and I didn't think there would ever be enough water to get it moving again particularly as a lot of stones had built up in front of it, so you know, it was wedging it in place. Then it got jammed under the road bridge, and of course became quite dangerous because other bits of wood could get jammed in there and it would cause a flood, so I felt obliged to move it on. I had thought actually of moving it back, because there was a place in the stream I always loved, I longed for it to be in, but it had already passed it in 1990, and this seemed like an opportunity of putting it back but then it just seemed entirely wrong, and what I was doing was trying to hang onto it, and the whole point of this piece is, it's going; whereas the 'Ash Dome' is coming, the 'Wooden Boulder' is going. So we winched it out and rolled it over the road and through a gate and put it into the stream beyond the bridge, so the next time it moves it will go into the big Dwryd river, and then I'll have to get a boat to go and look for it.

This seems an important work for introducing time and the changing seasons, which then became very important to you, didn't they?

Yes it was also in response to the Caro school of welding, welded sculpture, that, when I was teaching in art schools a lot in the Seventies there was always somebody from St Martin's' persuasion of metal sculpture who was persuading everyone... They

were like missionaries, that, you know, there were laws of sculpture, and one had to be in metal, and that where it was didn't matter, you know, it had to work, it had to be strong enough to work within itself. And I took real exception to this, that it did matter where something was, how it...its context is very important. So the 'Wooden Boulder' was partly a response to that, it was like saying, 'Here is a piece which, the place is 90 per cent of it'. It's very like a ball in a football game, or any ball game, I mean a ball doesn't change but what happens around it is exciting.

And then of course you moved actually into the planting and growing, where the place became all-important.

Yes, that's a good point to come back to the 'Ash Dome'. Cae'n-y-Coed had been a very carefully husbanded wood over 100, 150 years, and a woodman persuaded the owner, who was my father, that there were some pieces, there were trees that should come out, that they were mature, and it was of my father's thinking too because he had bought 30 acres of land before he moved up here when the Russell estate was being broken up, with the idea of running some cattle like my grandfather had, but he gave up on that idea but he retained this 4½-acre woodland. And it was a very beautiful place to be in, and it had this quality of care about it. It had a part where there were young birch trees with the object of growing more oaks there, to encourage oaks. But this woodman cut it all down; instead of just taking a few select trees he virtually...and it was just a devastation of the place, it was absolutely appalling, and my father of course was obliged to replant it. So, this was 1972, and then when I started using fresh wood, suddenly there was an abundant pile of branches and big chunks of wood, so in exchange for my being able just to work through it slowly instead of trying to clear it all up in one go, I would replant it. So I started planting trees there and inevitably it began to...my question was, well how do I plant them in relationship to each other? Because when I worked for the Economic Forestry Group planting fir trees in straight lines, it was ghastly, and so, to have them more random. And then I sort of realised, well actually I could grow a form. And this began to answer my question also from, I had made these big epic sculptures before, these towers and the archway and these two big pieces, one which had the two drop-tanks in it, aircraft drop-tanks in these epic works, and I felt there was a much lighter way

to work, to make a large work. And also, how do you make a wood sculpture outside that doesn't rot or that maintains itself? And also something that had sustained spontaneity, that was always different, always changing, and really was part of the place. On this piece of land at Cae'n-y-Coed there was just one sort of flat roundish ledge, and all around were the Manod mountain and the Moelwyns and the foothills of the Moelwyns, and there were these just sort of rounded shapes, 'bonk-like' shapes. I also made my hut up there, which was really just lifting the earth up, because I didn't want to get planning permission. I needed somewhere to keep my tools, to get in out of the rain; I needed a base there. So really what this hut was, was simply just lifting up the turf and putting in a space underneath, and it had a fireplace in it and a chimney which was really the first stove. And the 'Ash Dome', imagining this dome, it was really like a magnification of that, and a reflection of these dome shapes in the hills around that place. So I worked out how large a piece this could be with the object of growing a sculpture, so it was really engaging with the elements of that place. And it was...I was going to be there, and I was going to make the commitment to stay with this piece. What I have learned from it I have used in other planting pieces; the main thing I've learned is that it actually requires far more manipulation than I really feel comfortable with. What it's about is about the space, I'm wrapping the trees around the space in the way that the Chinese potters would hold a space in their minds, like the emptiness, a shape of the emptiness, and would wrap the clay around that sense of form which they were holding within themselves. So in a way they were letting the aesthetic take care of itself depending on this invisible form, this...and they were actually bringing that form into the physical world by wrapping the clay up around it.

And you were using very traditional methods of hedging weren't you?

Yes, well I just felt that...yes well that's one of the Zen tenets, or Buddhist tenets, Tao tenet, that man gets along better by collaborating with nature rather than dominating it, and I felt that the hedgerow was a perfect example of this collaboration because it divides your animals from your arable. It is a living hedge. And there was also in the papers that had come out around that time that the Government who had been giving grants in the Sixties to farmers to pull out hedges to make bigger fields so that it was

more economical to plough them and harvest them, was an ecological disaster because all the spiders and birds that eat the aphids which attack the crops lived in these hedges, and their habitats were gone so they weren't there, so, it wasn't economical, in fact one needed to have these hedges, these habitats there to help the growing crops. So the grants started to come out then to plant hedges. I'm also very interested in hedging, just the forms that the...there is a will of the tree to grow, it just needs, it needs enough mineral in the earth, it needs water, it needs light, and it can sustain...it can cope with quite a lot of damage, of animals eating it, somebody cutting off a branch, and I was really interested in the forms of trees, and particularly in hedges when you can see what somebody has done to it, or how an animal has eaten the lead growth off when it was very small and a branch has taken up the growth, so consequently it had curved up, and then a squirrel perhaps had eaten the lead growth out and then another branch had taken up the lead growth, so the tree was sort of zigzagging up as a result of that. I felt it was like a monument to hedge-making. An ash could lean a long way from its roots, and also was very a very resilient tree, and it had a great capacity for healing itself, so when one cuts a branch off it can very quickly grow bark and new wood over the cut.

Can you tell me about your methods and techniques?

I was very naive when I started. I planted the 22 trees, chose the number 22 because it was a non-mystic number and I knew numbers were powerful but I didn't know anything, I didn't know enough about them, and it's dangerous to play with these things pretentiously, so it was a non-mystic number. And there was a lightness. Rod had said something about the difference between Beethoven and Bach, that Beethoven seemed to be struggling up out of a pit, a deep pit of gloom, and would struggle up out of it, and Bach just seemed to be dancing around the edge of it. And I just felt far more, that I needed to work more like Bach, and I had been trying to work like Beethoven. And so there was a certainly lightness of touch about the idea of the 'Ash Dome'. It was very much an idea then, it was a concept, but it was going to be like a work that actually existed in potential, and there wasn't any point of finish to it, this was completely abandoning any idea of finishing it, that it was starting, starting it. It always to seemed for me it's important how you start, and what you get at the

end is very much in how you start. If you got the wrong things in there at the beginning, it's very difficult to get rid of them. So there were 22 trees evenly spaced, and it was just a question of letting them grow, and the first thing that happened was some sheep got into the land and ate them, so I had to re-plant them and I put a fence round them. And then rabbits started nibbling the bark at the bottom, so I had to put rabbit guards on them, and they were staked to hold them in place while their roots had got established. It took a long time to get going; transplanted trees do take, you know, ones which are two or three feet high do focus their energies into getting their root system sorted before they really put on growth. Then when they were big enough I grafted on a branch if there wasn't already one, anticipating when I bent them over, that branch would take up the lead growth. So in 1982 and '83 I started to actually bend them over so I had to cut a wedge shaped section out. I had to cut right through to the bark, it was virtually...I only lost one tree. But it was terrifying to do. I had someone who had to be very steady to hold it while I cut it, and then one...

This is fletching?

Yes. And then I bent it over. Well it's very careful; how a farmer does it, he cuts it in a diagonal stroke downwards and bends the tree over, because he's got to do it fast. But I was doing it very carefully with a Japanese saw which has a very fine cut and you have a lot of control over it. And then we would bend the tree over and close the space, so the cambium layer met and where it would heal, and it healed very very rapidly. And I wrapped it in plastic to keep the moisture there, and then...then it was very carefully tied to one or two stakes to keep it very rigid, because if there was any movement the cambium layer couldn't bend, couldn't heal. Say like a cut in one's skin, it sort of heals in a very similar way. So I could only do two or three at a time, it needed such a lot of concentration and focus. And I didn't lean them in, I leaned them going around the perimeter, because if I had leant them directly in towards the centre the piece would become like a ziggurat rather than a dome, and I thought I would get the trees to sort of spiral in towards the centre. And then I imagined I would have to keep on bending them like that, but I subsequently found that all I needed to do was prune off the lead growth and let a branch which was growing in towards the centre take up the lead growth. So it's just a question of looking after them. A tree naturally

tries to start again from its roots, so whatever young suckers start to come up, I've had to cut them off to convince the tree that it's going to have to know, this is your form. And I'm articulating the dome form by the trunks of the tree. I obviously have to allow branches to grow out to get leaf area. But it's learning on the job.

And this was the beginning of all your other planting and growing projects, wasn't it?

Yes, there are about twelve pieces. There's the 'Celtic Wall', it was a hedge but I realise it's going to be a wall. The group of larch trees. Larch trees seem to love to bend and curve, and the foresters work very hard to make them grow straight. Realising that the problem with the 'Ash Dome' is trying to get all these trees to grow in, so there's tremendous competition for the same light, and so this is where I feel the manipulation isn't quite right with the 'Ash Dome', but I feel I must go on with that piece. But in response to that, I'm growing a bowl form with twelve oak trees which are planted in a ring, but growing out from the centre so they will curve away from the middle and create like a bowl sort of form shape. And I planted a lot of birch and rowan inside that circle which will overtake the oak trees. And there are a lot of birches, quite big birches now, growing around in that area, so I cut branches off birch trees to make holes of light so that the oak trees will head towards that light, so it's more forming the trees out of their seeking for light rather than a more physical, more sort of wilful approach with the 'Ash Dome'.

And, I was interested to know whether you are anticipating, say with the 'Ash Dome', that people will come and see it, or that they will have access to it through your drawings and documentations of it.

People have often asked me, why do you show your work in galleries, because it's obviously to do with outside, but they're made to be inside; 90 per cent of what I do is made with the intention of showing them inside, and they stay inside. I see museum spaces, gallery spaces, particularly museum spaces, like temples, and I can bring in a particular mood or a sort of, an offering as a temple experience inside; because to experience sculpture, well art, inside a space, it's very different from outside, they are two distinctly different realities. And there's this mysterious phenomenon that if you

make something inside which will work and feels right inside, you take it outside it diminishes in scale because it just can't cope with that very different scale. Because inside we have neutralised space; outside space is active, the elements are very active outside, whereas...part of why we make buildings is to neutralise the vagaries of nature, the vagaries of the elements. So, part of what I'm talking about with these works outside is about, I am engaging with the realities of the elements outside; I'm not trying to resist them or compete with them, I'm trying to engage them. Because most outdoor sculptures resist the elements and actually are quite aggressive, consequently are quite aggressive.

But to go back to my question...

Yes, about the drawings.

Well access to them really.

Access. Well one of those is on private land, they're very vulnerable to vandalism, so I don't advertise the place, if anything I camouflage it. But I take people there who are interested. But to talk about the idea in a show of my work, and people have asked for exhibitions of my current work, the 'Ash Dome' is part of it, so I present the idea to people through drawing and photographs. And what became very interesting to me was the fact that I can't sell the 'Ash Dome' without selling the land, but I can sell drawings, and the drawings are like fruits, picking fruits and selling them, and I've sold dozens of drawings of the 'Ash Dome'. There are also, with the 'Ash Dome', on a practical sense I've made five initial documentations of which four have now been purchased, and with that purchase goes the agreement that I will provide every two years an update drawing and photograph which I have already mentioned. So, for an index-linked amount, it's the same as three weeks foresters' basic pay, so it's very cheap really, or very inexpensive. But that I think, those four people contributing that, then they are not obliged to continue, and one has dropped out and one hasn't always taken them up, but I keep offering them. But that provides the income to pay for me to be there all...you know, because there is actually quite a lot of maintenance

on that piece of land now that I can't do myself, I have to hire in people to cut the bracken and...

And you do travel continuously, don't you, looking after the other planting projects?

Well I realised that I've been...had several approaches to me to make planting pieces abroad, but of course this is quite risky, or some distance from here. Southampton I did one which has really been a disaster because I didn't...there wasn't anything built in about my going back, I just sort of assumed that I would go back, but I just find myself very busy. So what I've done when the next one, which wasn't on my own piece of land... Well I found it in Grizedale too, I did two planting works, a ladder and a sweeping arch enclosure, but there wasn't the interest to bring me back, or, it was absolutely up to me, which it should have been, but I didn't build in a carrot somehow for me to go back. So when the Krölller-Müller asked me to do some planting works there I decided to build my own carrot into it, and so they paid me half the fee when I did it, and then I contracted for five years to come back, and they would pay my expenses but also give me one fifth of the remaining fee on each time I came back. So it was actually like a job, it was an earning, and I needed that, I was going to be earning something if I went there. There's another one in Vermont with a private client, which I need to go back and see, and there's another possible one in Japan but I don't think they can handle the idea of the impermanency of it all, the risk of it, that one tree might die, or, you know, they can't...they sort of like the idea but they feel they will be vulnerable to criticism if it isn't what...if it doesn't come out exactly as we think it is. Also with these, if a client approaches me they have to enter into the fact that we might have to actually change the way that it's going, because we have to go with the plants, we can't...we musn't force the plants into something that they can't actually do.

Can we talk about that Grizedale residency?

Yes that was a very very important experience for me, and that was, Alistair Warman, who used to teach up at Newcastle, I met him up there, and his family have long had a holiday house in Harlech, and I just bumped into him here once. And he had got a job

with the Arts Council and there was, you know, always a lot of debate of, how do we help artists, and one of them was residences, but most of these residences were being set up in urban situations. And Alistair Warman had the question, well how do we encourage an artist like, or support an artist like David Nash, who doesn't really want to go and work in a factory or in a university, he's not studio-based, he wants a rural situation. So he had...well with that question, the response that came back towards that question was from Northern Arts, and they had Grizedale forest with the Theatre in the Forest, and here was already a cultural impulse in the Forestry Commission which could be a possible host. So they took a chance on it and set up an artist-in-residency, and it was almost tailor-made for me. I heard, I was informed about it through the usual way of it being advertised, and I applied for it along with a lot of other pieces, and I got onto the short-list, and Richard Harris and I were both given one, and the idea was that I went first being a more experienced artist. But I was very...this would have been in 1977, I think the interviews were in the winter of '76 and '77, Paul Neagu was invited to be one of the interviewers for it, but I really wanted to be in a forest coming out of the winter through the spring and into the summer, I didn't want to go in the summer and go into the autumn, because one's going into a dying situation. So Richard Harris went there first in the summer of '77 and he met all the difficulties there, there wasn't any proper accommodation, he was in a terrible little caravan. There was quite a hostility from the work-force towards this suspicion of the artist. He wasn't long out of college. And I went to visit him there and it was like visiting Robinson Crusoe, and he seemed to have lost the habit of speech. He was having a pretty miserable time and hadn't been able to start, he had sort of put bits of wood in possible places but just hadn't been able to get a grip on it. So he left without having done anything, so the residency got off to a terrible start.

End of F4725 Side B

F4726 Side A

Yes, the residency was worth £1,000, so, it was between three and six months so if you think about what that really means now, it was very little money, but it was still an opportunity for me to not have to teach and to be actually in a forest, because, as you can see, Blaenau Ffestiniog is certainly not in a forest. And we decided we would just do a three-months, Claire and I decided we would do it for three months, that's what we could afford, and if possible try to save some of the money. The accommodation was a big problem, because the caravan wasn't going to be suitable for a family. Most of these residences that were offered artists don't accommodate the family situation at all, it's just the assumption that the artist is on their own. But fortunately there was a chief forester's house, a house that had been built in Grizedale village for the forester, the chief forester, was then empty, and it was very damp and was pretty dilapidated, but it was offered to us instead of the caravan. And so we took...it was unfurnished so we had to take all that we needed up with us. William, who was 5 years old then, he went to the local school with Miss Taylor, a brilliant little village school, incredible. Jack learned to walk there. Claire had a pretty tough time, she was very much tied to looking after the kids while I was working, but she did manage to do quite a lot of her own work, she did her 'Crackaway Jack' relief carving, and she made a very nice deer relief which was put into the yard where the workers met. But when I arrived there I met this terrible atmosphere towards the residency, not just among the work-force but from the executives, from the actual foresters themselves, because nothing had happened. Bill Grant was heroically enthusiastic about it still.

He was...?

He was the chief forester, with that hat on, and he had another hat to be the director of the Theatre in the Forest, so he was... As a forester he was tolerating the residency, and as the director of the Theatre in the Forest he was actively encouraging it, but there wasn't as much cooperation from the actual forestry as one was led to believe about the Grizedale project. It was also just meant to be an opportunity for an artist to work and make their own work, and they would take that work away with them, there

wasn't any expectation to actually leave anything there, so really the fact that Richard hadn't made anything, he actually hadn't made anything, so there was no activity to actually watch; whether it was going to stay there or not was quite irrelevant. But part of the brief was that we should work on the Silurian Way, which is a pathway, so people could see us working and would engage us in conversation, was part of the brief, which is a very naive brief in fact, as I...well as I discovered later on. So my first job was pure PR, you know, so I parked my car where the foresters congregated in the morning to get into their transports to go to the various parts of the forest, and I would be loading my tools when they were getting into the vans, and I made a point of socialising and making sure they could see me starting when they started, and I worked much longer hours than they were working and they could still hear my chain-saw going when they came back, and it was every day. So that actually worked, that made an impression that, you know, something was going to happen. And also whatever I did really needed to be very accessible, and I had already made a very small 'Running Table' which is actually a geometric, a geometry piece, but the only objects, man-made objects around the forestry then were picnic tables, and so, making a table, and I had already made a lot of tables, to make a 'Large Running Table'. And when one is in the forest one is always looking out for deer, and a lot of people going there are hoping to see deer, they have very large deer there. So the 'Running Table' was placed where people would come round a corner and just for a fraction of a second it would appear like a deer, they were seeing a deer. And it was very accessible. So it was a PR piece, and if that situation wasn't there I probably wouldn't have started with that, I would have made a tripod and been much more experimental, I expect. Anyway I socialised with the foresters, and William was in the school, and we went to church sometimes, and just tried to really be there as part of the community as much as was reasonably real. And some of those foresters were really helpful, they were great. There was one particular, on the work-force there was this guy called Fletcher, Bob Fletcher, who is actually now, makes a living from drawing animals.

Was it a fruitful time for your work?

Very, mainly because it was the first time since I had been in Chelsea that I could work every day without having to go teaching or having students, or, you know, it was just fantastic for me every day, and I could use whatever fallen wood there was. And they assigned a crew of work experience youngsters to me, so whenever I needed to pull something out I would get this motley gang of pirates, that's what they were like...(laughs)...to come and help me. They called me Michelangelo.

Thinking of the deer, you do often introduce that animal personality into a lot of your work, don't you?

Well I wouldn't like to say a lot of the work. It might have been a...you know, on one level of my peer group it's been a mistake to bring this anthropomorphic quality to it. But it does exist in the forms of trees, and where...it's a little risky to do, but I've...

It's part of the humour isn't it?

Yes, but it's always when there is another issue there, it's not just about it being looking like an animal, like this 'Running Table', if one looks into it you see what the geometry is about. Also with the 'Running Table', as with a lot, with the tripods, is that, with this idea of letting the process look after itself, or let what it looks like look after itself, so long as I keep my mind on the way of working. With the 'Running Table' it had to be made upside-down, because to get a flat top I needed to put it onto a flat base, and to drill through and to put the bolts in. So I didn't see what it looked like until the very last moment when it comes up, and there it is and that's what it looks like.

Why do you think, from the point of view of your peer group it was a mistake to have this anthropomorphic animal?

Because they don't see beyond it. It was like making animals. Whereas a lot of Minimalism and engaging with Minimalist ideas were actually in there. Maybe I just disguised it too much, but I think it's probably put quite a few people off. But you can't win them all, so it's not...but I just wanted to correct the impression that I do it a

lot, I don't do it a lot, it's just on the occasion. There's 'Mount and Foal', there's a 'Sheep and Lamb' which is actually about emptying the volume to emphasise the form.

There's a wonderful pig, isn't there.

Yes, 'Useful Pig'. Well that came about from, at the Kröller-Müller in 1982 when I was asked to make a one-man show there, and in the way that I had worked in Japan was to...and in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, that they would give me two beech trees and I would make an exhibition, and they gave me the space and they gave me every possible help I could possibly imagine, it was an incredibly supportive museum. And when we cut the trees down (I went twice), these were two trees that had to come down, I was shown places where the pigs, there's a lot of wild boar, or pigs in the park there, and they come by the roadside at night and grub up worms, and so there's a lot of activity there, but one never saw them. And where they put my tree to work was one of the places where these pigs came, so every morning I went there there was more evidence of all this ground being churned up. And while I was working through the tree there was one part of the trunk which had four little branches coming out of it which were like quite piggy-like legs, so I squared up that top but left these four branches and stood it up as a, I called it, you know, it was like a pig, and I left it there and they knocked it over. I mean these pigs were really big, when I actually saw one I was astonished, it was like a rhinoceros. And they would knock it over and this thing would sort of churn, would be churned around during the winter before I came back in the spring, the following spring to actually work it. And it became a very useful object as a table to put tools on, to rest things on, to...so that's why it's called a 'Useful Pig' because it became a very useful item.

And you increasingly seem to be working with the elements which make up the wood now.

Well...

When I say that, I mean fire, earth...

Yes, yes just...gradually work more and more into the reality of what wood is. So at first I thought I was working with wood, and at first it was unrecognisable, they were planks and old bits of demolition wood, beams, that had been squared up. And then working with fresh wood, and the fact of it cracking and bending and warping, there was a behaviour. And then when meeting anthroposophy of Rudolph Steiner there was quite a comprehension of the elements and of the temperaments. And realising that of course wood is a weave of earth and light. If you look at an acorn the whole tree is in there, the whole potential, but it needs a whole activity and environment and a drawing-in of these elements for it to actually fulfil the potential which is in that contracted seed. An acorn is a contracted oak tree. And it became quite obvious that really what I was working with isn't really wood, or tree, it's the elements, and I usually correct people when they say I work with wood, I work with the elements.

And it's led you to charring.

Yes, emphasising the various elements. The 'Wooden Waterway' in Grizedale and the 'Wooden Boulder' emphasise water, the presence of water. The 'Wooden Waterway' in Grizedale, to go back to Grizedale for a moment, Blaenau Ffestiniog has 120 inches of rain per annum, and one of the things that we were really looking forward to, going to Grizedale, getting out of Blaenau was to getting out of this rain, and then we discovered Grizedale is the second wettest place in Britain, and all through February it rained, and then to March, six weeks it was raining. And then, it continued to rain but the ground was drying out, but I realised it was all going up the trees; as the spring began to unfold the trees demanded the water, and although it was still raining it was drying under foot. And I was aware then, physically aware, of the incredible tonnage of water which is involved in the process of trees growing, and I wanted to make a piece...this was at the end when I had actually sort of established the fact of this residency sort of happening, and I felt I could be much more experimental and I wanted to make something which said something about water and wood, and about the flow of water in wood, and I found two trees which had fallen down and were lying downhill and they were near a stream and I was able to divert through troughs. And I imagined it would only last a few weeks, it was purely an

experimental piece, but it was astonishing, now we are seventeen years on from there and it's still running, and people have looked after it, other resident artists have done things to do it, and people walking by and people who actually spot it, and they go and they understand what was meant, you know, there are bits fallen off, or the trough isn't aligned right and they will straighten it up or take stones out of it, leaves out of it. So water and wood, 'Wooden Boulder', 'Wooden Waterway'.

And fire?

Fire, I burned two 'bonks' very early on, 1970, '71, on Christmas Day, it was my Christmas Day piece, and they were like two little Christmas puddings and I put them into a box, and I showed them in the Arnolfini in '76 and Peter Blake bought them. They were the first burnt works, charred works. And then when I began to realise about the fire, and the warmth element, the light element and to emphasise the fire. And also that one, you're changing the experience from a vegetable experience, wood is vegetable, to a mineral experience, because you're actually coating, you're creating a layer of carbon. And that one saw the form before wood. Because one of the problems with wood sculpture, that you see that it's wood before you see what the form is, with these black objects. And they change their sense of time, and there's a certain sort of awesomeness. One is sort awesomeness a feeling level one is pushed away, repulsed by the carbon, the black, but there's a sort of, a spirit quality which is very interested, that wants to go into the carbon. So there's this dual experience with these burnt works. And also on a practical level, that, when I make a wood sculpture outside for a client, and it's made there on the spot, it's this beautiful golden colour, fresh wood colour, but in six months it will go grey. So if you burn it black, it's black at the beginning and it stays black, so you don't get this client disappointment. Because they look great, wood looks fantastic when you cut it open for the first time, it's a brightness and a life there. So while I'm making a group of work out of a fallen tree, there's a great atmosphere, visually it's absolutely fantastic, but it won't stay like that, it's only there... So that's part of the moment of the making of the sculpture is actually this sort of wood quarry that I create, and then these individual items are made, and then are moved.

You've described your drawings of those quarries as sort of butcher's drawings, haven't you?

Yes, I was giving a lecture when I showed a drawing of a wood quarry and realised how I had shown where the different sculptures had come in. It was a bit like a drawing which is hanging in, or was hanging, in one of our butcher's shops of this cow with the various parts, brisket and rump and ankle, neck and tail. Yes.

But, apart from dealing with each of the elements, you also seem increasingly to be working with elemental forms, the sphere, the cube.

Mm.

And the pyramid form.

Yes, this is from the Cézanne and the drawing of Gordon Taylor, and, also they are the basic symbols. The cube is very earth-bound, it's a very material form, and the pyramid obviously has direction and it has a lifting, it has a base that it...there is a sense of the spire, the rising in it, so it's rising out of the earth. And the sphere obviously relates to the planets, to the cycle and to movement, so the three forms have very different qualities to them.

I wonder if this is a good moment to talk about the symbolism in your work. Well there are all sorts of different kinds of symbolisms, religious, sexual, mythological.

Yes they're largely brought to the work by the beholders. With these vessel forms, I remember Seiji Oshima was one of the first ones to sort of actually come out with this, he said, 'It's very sexy, it's very sexy.' And from the front they're very female I guess, and then from the side they're very phallic, very male, not intended.

Symbolism, I've tried not to make philosophical diagrams, I always felt that they had to work in their own physical right, in their own terms, but there are layers there that one can work to. And it's people's observations and what they've brought to the work which has helped me move on.

Well perhaps it's more resonances than than a conscious symbolism.

Yes, I'm not trying to make a symbol. Although I think the practice of art in itself is a symbolic gesture of how one acts in the world, how does one behave in the world, and I'm trying to work, not a question of politically correctly but sort of environmentally correctly, or ecologically correctly. Also work in a way that I...it's a symbol for how, of a human being engaging with nature, because we have to engage with it, which is another aspect of what I find the 'Ash Dome' is really about, it's a hands-on with nature; it's not a speculation about nature, it's not an idea about nature, it is actually how a farmer works with natural phenomena to produce what we need to live. It's how people grow cotton which we wear, which all these things which we need are made for us by somebody who is engaging directly with nature. And the people who are usually most sanctimonious about how incorrect it is to manipulate a tree have probably never touched nature in their lives, they're usually urban, an urban concept. I would like to stop for a moment because I want to come.....

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

David, that leads me on to asking you about your attitudes to ecology, the Green Movement, conservation.

In the mid-Seventies and early Seventies there was the beginnings of a real consciousness about what we were doing to our environment through the industrial activity, lifting all this carbon up, all the coal we'd been hewing up out of the ground, all the oil we had been lifting up, all these sort of dormant reservoirs of carbon, putting them up into the atmosphere. And it seemed to be fundamentally the most important issue of our times, and it was a global issue, you know, it wasn't just for one country, or one area, it was something which affected everybody, a global problem. I became, I felt that was, you know, the issue that needed to be addressed, and that, it was a large part in the direction that my work was taking. I don't think it was in terms of thinking, this is going to be fashionable or something, but it was...simply I was very aware of this being a major issue, and I could in my small way make some

contribution towards it. It was around in the early Seventies, in the time of the early Seventies that I was given the book about the man who planted trees.

What was that?

Bouffier. Well, you know, I think anyone listening to the tape can simply refer to it. It's in the south of France, a very desolate area. The writer of this book whose name I can't remember, say it was a young man, he was walking, and he came across a shepherd, and he was lost and it was getting late so the shepherd put him up, and through the evening the shepherd was going through all these acorns and throwing away anything that was cracked or didn't look quite right, and putting the rest into a bucket of water, he put 100 into a bag and into a bucket of water. And then in the morning he took him out to show him his way, and the shepherd had a staff which had a metal end on it and when they got to a certain point he started to make a hole with his staff and put the acorns in. And, this was just before the Second World War, which the writer got involved in, and he didn't think much more about this incident, and went back there after the war in about 1920] or so and found that there was this...there was a forest beginning to grow, and the shepherd had stopped having sheep because they were eating the trees, and he had bees. Government officials were coming to him and telling him not to light fires because there was this extraordinary phenomenon of a natural forest, and there's something like 20 kilometres long and 4 kilometres wide.

Was this a factual account?

Well somebody just recently told me this wasn't true, but it's so much in the consciousness of people, and I can't believe that it's not true. It's changed the ecology of the area. There are streams running where there weren't before. And there used to be...he said, this chap said that there used to be streams here, you could see where the streams had been, but because there weren't any trees there was no water, it wasn't lifting the...you know, it was dry, such a dry wind there sucking up the water. So, you know, that story was presented to me then, and I thought, this is somebody who had really done something. And the personality of the person seemed to, I seemed to

connect with, very quiet, doing something on his own, not sort of connecting with a big political movement, or getting frustrated by it. It seemed to me any group work, you inevitably get frustrated by people falling out.

Are you involved at all with the Greens in a political sense?

No, I've never campaigned for anything, or joined anything like that. Though I feel I'm doing it, you know, I'm doing what I can, and maybe they can connect with what I'm doing as much as the other way around. But of course I support Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth in what they're doing, it's vitally important, but I have my work cut out doing what I am doing, I feel, from a similar stand-point, impulse, of what they're doing, but they are not artists necessarily, but they can work in that way and I'm working in my way, but it's connected.

So, do you feel politically involved?

I get the paper every day, and I follow the politics. I feel much more inclined towards the Left, I loathe this assumption that economic market forces will work in every sphere of life. But the Labour Party did just the same, they assumed that social equality works in every sphere of life, so they made education, they tried to standardise it. Whereas now the Conservatives have tried to make it into some sort of business or an economy. I think both are wrong, that working in a human social sphere of nursing and teaching...well teaching is really in the cultural sphere, nursing is much more in the social sphere, where, you know, we are all equal there.

Of course you've become very involved in teaching through the Steiner school.

Well I'm involved in supporting a teaching situation, and I subscribe to the curriculum, I believe in the curriculum.

Yes. Actually, just before we go on to talk more about that, I would like to ask you about Common Ground.

Interestingly, Common Ground was just getting going when 'Sod Swap', I did the 'Sod Swap' for the 'British Sculpture Show', and I don't know whether we've talked about this on the tape, have we?

I don't think you have actually, nor about Common Ground. Perhaps you could tell me more about it.

Oh right, well we can do both, 'Sod Swap' and Common Ground, because they played a, they were key players in this. We've mentioned the tower I showed at the Serpentine Gallery in 1970, and this was a big red wood tower, we had four legs going into the ground which met the green grass. It wasn't flat, so I was imagining I had to dig holes and put paving stones underneath this foundation and level it up so the green and the red met. I know you think, what on earth has this got to do with 'Sod Swap' but it has, it's all right, it has. I started digging, and Sue Grayson came running out and said, 'You can't do that, it belongs to the Queen, you can't dig the turf, you can't change anything.' I said, 'Well, you know, I want the red and the green to actually connect.' And she said, 'Well no, you're going to have to build it up with paving stones on top of the grass.' Which I found infuriating, because aesthetically it changed what the piece looked like. There was one paving stone in one corner and five paving stones in another corner, and it made the whole thing look very amateur. However, this was Sue Grayson's first show, anyway, her last show was the 'British Sculpture Show' which was also in the Hayward Gallery and at the Serpentine.

Sue Grayson was...?

Grayson was a director of the Serpentine Gallery, a very good director too I think. When I was invited to take part I said that I would like to have some recent large wood sculptures that I had made; I wanted to show them inside but they told me no, we've got enough artists, we want one outside and you're an outside artist, this is why we're asking you. So I knew what they were expecting, they wanted a wood construction, some object, wood object outside. And I don't like outdoor sculpture shows, I don't think I've ever enjoyed a group show; it's all right if it's a one-person show but a group show, they all look like UFOs that have suddenly arrived in this

alien and uncomfortable environment and without, you don't know where they've come from, or often, you know, what they're really about, and suddenly they're gone. And I wanted to do something which one, if it was outside it had to do with the realities of outside, as I have already described about 'Ash Dome'. And it didn't have to be of high visibility; I'm much more interested in art which is much more subtle outside, it doesn't sort of shout at you, it's very low in visibility. And it had to be something living and organic. And it was a temporary exhibition, and I wanted a strong component in it which said where it came from. So adding all these needs of mine up together, and the realities of such an exhibition, is that a truck would come to me here and pick up whatever I was going to...what my art work was, take it to London and then they would truck it back again after the show. So what I wanted to do was to swap a ring of my land here at Cae'n-y-Coed with a ring of this Serpentine Land, so it was organic, it was living, would have low visibility because it was just down right there in the ground, and was very much about where it came from. Sue Grayson was incredibly reluctant to do this, because, I think she was very worried about the press getting on to her, this waste of tax-payers' money, which I sympathise with, but nonetheless it was my solution to a problem. She kept hesitating on even...because it wasn't the Queen's any more, it was the Department of the Environment who were in charge. Anyway once she eventually did get in touch with them they were very keen on the idea, they recognised what it was all about, so there wasn't a problem. So when it came to the time, the truck was arranged and I prepared 83 strips of turf going, Welsh turf, from just by the gate here at Cae'n-y-Coed so it would be easy to actually, to transport, and I made little carriers for them, little plastic sheets for them to go on. The truck driver, Paul Swales, who was an arts administrator but temporarily he was running an art transport business, when he stopped to fill up with diesel he watered the turf, he sort of really got, he entered into the spirit of the thing. And then we drove down, or I and two people helping me drove down, and we dug out the Serpentine turf and swapped them over. And so, and there it was, very low visibility, and Sue Grayson didn't need to worry about the Press because they never saw it, they couldn't see where it was, there was just this hairy ring. And then when it came to the idea of swapping them back again towards the end of the show, the Arts Council didn't want to spend the money on it, they said, 'Well you just keep the London turf and we'll dig out the Welsh turf and throw it

away and we'll just put regular green sward down. And Common Ground had met me then and they were interested in my work, and Sue King and.....

End of F4726 Side A

F4726 Side B

No, I met with Sue King and Angela Clifford of Common Ground around then, they were interested in my work, just in the sort of, the whole impulse of what I was doing, and they wanted to connect with it, and as I was in London on a preparatory visit when I met them about the 'Sod Swap' I told them about it so they were very interested in it. I was very pleased that that piece got written up on the environmental page in 'The Guardian', it didn't get written up in the arts page but in the environmental page. And I told them about the problem of, they didn't want to swap it back, and they said, 'Well we'll find somewhere for it.' And this was in the dying days of the GLC, and they approached the GLC, was there a park somewhere where they could put it? The GLC were responsible for the grounds of Kenwood House, so they suggested to put it in the middle of the kitchen lawn, because they had a butterfly flower bed there, all the species which would attract butterflies, and they had other little projects going on there in this part of the grounds, so they liked the idea of having the 'Sod Swap' there. And they got a botanist in, and the botanist identified 26 different species in the Welsh sods and only 5 species in the London turf. So it was agreed it would go to Kenwood House, which, I went down again and I helped with the move. So, the idea was that the gardener, who seemed to welcome the idea, he sort of entered into the spirit of it, that he wouldn't mow the Welsh turf, he would mow all the lawn around it as normal. Interestingly, I hadn't anticipated how much it would shrink in the move, and there was a gap just the width of his lawn-mower where the sods didn't meet, and he was very pleased to be able to drive his mower in, because he saw that was a problem, having to lift the mower over in to mow the middle of it. So I kept the London turf, which I have faithfully mown as if it was in London, and obviously other species have come into it. There is a ring of daisies there now, and there was a mole got into it, and for a couple of years this mole only seemed to live where the 'Sod Swap' was, so there was always mole-hills around, but it's gone now.

And what is Common Ground?

Common Ground, they like to be called an arts environmental group, and they were a spin-off from Friends of the Earth, who they felt were too specialising in threatened species, too involved in...that was rarified. Not that that didn't need to be done, but they felt, Sue and Angela felt that a lot of what was common was really threatened, so Common Ground, parish maps that they did involving people to really be clear, become conscious about what they valued in their own areas to make sure that they could hang on to it, because so much has been destroyed now by urban spread.

And did you stay involved with them?

Yes I have ever since, yes, I feel very close with them. Actually we've nearly done some projects, but they've...there are always other things which I seem to be more involved in. It was always a problem for them raising the money to actually pay for it.

So what form has your involvement taken?

Support, you know, I'm still very close with them.

We began to talk about your involvement with the Steiner school, and perhaps, might we...? I mean I know that Rudolph Steiner's teachings have been very important for you, so perhaps we could begin to talk about when you first came across them, and how they are important for you.

Yes. Our two sons, William was born in 1973 and Jack was born in 1977, and our attitude, Claire and I felt that what's nearest is best, so they went to the local school which is a Welsh medium school and everything is taught in the medium of Welsh, which we were very pleased with, because you know, they were both Welsh speaking, Jack not so much but William entered into it very wholeheartedly. And he had a brilliant teacher in his first years and then he went up, and as he progressed through the school the quality of teaching got worse and worse, and he was more and more bored, well they both were. And we were in Ireland in 1982 with an exhibition, we stayed with Barry and Sonya Cooke, and their son Onya happened to be home, and

she was at Wynstones which is a Rudolph Steiner school, and we had never heard of Rudolph Steiner schools. She was a lovely girl and very socially capable, she wasn't shy, and just seemed fine, and we commented on this, and they talked about the school which she was at, Wynstones, which she boarded at. Onya was about 16. Later it was discovered that Sonya is what could be called anthroposite, a friend of anthroposophy. So they told us about Steiner schools, so we, you know, we were very interested and we wrote to the Steiner Fellowship and we got a list of the schools which were in the country, and Elmfield, Stourbridge was the closest one to us which was 100 miles away, so we were seriously thinking of going to have a look in view of actually moving away from Blaenau for the period of time that our children were in education. I had always had that idea, that we would not keep the kids here in Blaenau through their adolescence, it is a dreadful area, they're so dead here, and the morale of the youngsters here is very low because there's so little for them. And while we were engaged in these early thoughts about what we were going to do, a little envelope appeared in the window of the local bookshop saying, 'Anyone interested in starting a Steiner school, phone so-and-so.' It was an extraordinary coincidence. So we phoned, and met up with a group of people, some of whom we already vaguely knew, and others that we hadn't met before, and we just found ourselves working with the group of people towards the possibility of starting an alternative school. Only one of us had been to a Steiner school, and she was the most sanguine of us all, and she had a little girl and she really wanted this education for her kid, she really found it was wonderful, all the Steiner schools which she had been in. So we invited, or wrote to the Steiner Schools Fellowship and asked if somebody could come up and talk to us about the schools. There had been an attempt to start a school in Bangor seven years before which hadn't come to anything, and those people involved in that had gone to help start the York Steiner school. So Brian Masters of the Fellowship came up and gave a talk, and the room was packed, there were about 80 people there, which was far more than we expected, and it seemed like, well there's a real need here. And there was a group of 12 of us, and there was never a boss, it was...we were always working as a group, and we were advised that there was somebody here, a woman called Cynthia Chance, who was in her seventies, and who had been involved in the founding of the Stourbridge Elmfield school who was living in this area and that we should go and talk to her, and perhaps start a study group with

her to find out what the philosophy was behind the education. And we went also to visit Elmfield School to see what the education was like, and we met Cynthia Chance. She was about to move away because there wasn't anyone here she could talk to; some of her family were in the area but she had thought of moving to the Midlands, back to near Stourbridge in fact, but we suddenly appeared on her doorstep and so she stayed. And she led a study group about the education and about the philosophy and introduction. Some people dropped off immediately, they didn't warm to it at all, but for me personally it was like having articulated what was in the back of my mind about what I was working out of, what I had experienced, it's like my own thoughts, my own deeper thoughts which hadn't...which were motivating my activities, but the forms of my thoughts were being built on other influences. And, well I just warmed to it, and I warmed to Cynthia Chance very much, so I became a...I started reading. The first book she recommended, or gave me, was the lectures on the Gospel of St Mark, and the first lecture was about Hamlet. Difficult to read, and we all found it very difficult, and we were complaining about the translations from the German, and why was it like this, and Cynthia just always stuck up for it, and I've since discovered that it is deliberately hard. It's like Jacob Boehme, it's like that because it's a spiritual activity in itself just to comprehend it, just to clear your mind to be able to formulate the right mood and feeling connected with what is in the written word there. And a lot of it I couldn't cope with at all, but I kept on, and there were bits which were wonderful and there were bits I just thought were ridiculous. But, as many people have found, that you find that they're not so ridiculous later on, when you've lived with some of these ideas. I always felt that the way that the Western philosophy had gone and the Western world was going was, it was upside-down, and that anyone who was the right way up seemed mad, but actually it was everyone else who was the wrong way up, and there was a bit of that to it. I felt incredibly reassured and supported by what I was reading. So, how did I come to it? My children led me to it, and this is often the case.

What were the sort of key ideas that you responded to?

I don't really want to do that on this tape, because it's enormous, and we could have 24 hours of me going on about anthroposophy, and I think anyone studying this, it's up to them to find their way into it.

Yes, no I didn't mean a sort of history of his ideas, I meant, was there any particular elements that you were responding to, I suppose.

It was a clear comprehension of there being an invisible, non-molecular, spiritual reality which lay behind everything that was physical, and I had always felt that to be the case, but here was somebody articulating about it, and, wonderful. There was a Carlos William...William Carlos Williams poem that had a line in it, 'The other side of the morning,' which is something I worked out of and with when I was at Kingston, and I was looking through an archway into another space which was like what was going on in the world at the same time as what was going on immediately in the physical world around it; there was another existence carrying on in parallel, very like the Malcolm Lowry quote I gave, I was trying to describe, about 'The Peaceful Village'. Yes, that's it in a nutshell, and about how the education is based on art, is that the means of education is art, the sciences are approached in an artistic way; they're not denied but they're embraced in a very creative and artistic way, and in a way that the children can really enter into. Instead of it being given dry and cold there's a tremendous warmth in this education.

And these ideas chimed with what you were already feeling about Christianity and Buddhism?

Yes, I found, and it was a surprise to me when I realised that this is a Christian-based philosophy but not in any way connected to the Church, I mean it's like a real heresy really, but...but it was a Christianity that I could relate to, it's an esoteric Christianity. And a lot of the wisdoms which have been held secret in the mystery schools, Rudolph Steiner felt that it was his destiny, and it was the right time for the evolution of consciousness for these to become available to anyone, you know, not to be kept, because they were being corrupted because they were being kept to be used as a power for the people who knew what these secrets were for, for their own ends, it was

becoming black, whereas in fact used in the right way, it's like what Christ did, he didn't do anything for his own ends, it was all out, it was white, you know, it was a giving out, it wasn't a controlling for his own power and manipulation. So he was deeply hated, Rudolph Steiner, by these people who were aware of this esoteric knowledge, and felt that he was letting the cat out of the bag, but it is a path of initiation, and I had already been introduced to this by my little contact with Jacob Boehme, so it was... I also liked, when I went to Japan I felt all my artistic work and work in sculpture had been a preparation for this project in Japan, it was like everything else in my researches into philosophy and my observations of the reality of life had been a preparation to meet Rudolph Steiner. It was very very important that I did not meet Rudolph Steiner until 1983/84 where I was 38, because I was already, like I had found my voice as an artist, because there is an anthroposophical art. Because Steiner avoided giving examples, because he knew that becomes the dogma, but when it came to actually artistic work he did do a lot of work, and spoke a lot about it, and inevitably they were examples which have become fixed. And at the time it was very avant-garde, he was relating to Kandinsky and a lot of the most contemporary artists of that time, but it has become like stuck in a time warp. So, interesting, and it was very thrilling to me and very interesting when I discovered that Joseph Beuys was a member of the Anthroposophical Society, and I read that a lot of what his social impulse was is based on what Rudolph Steiner was giving. There are two streams in anthroposophy, probably three streams, but there are two opposites. There's one who want to work out of a cloister, they want to keep the knowledge, they want to keep it pure, and there are those who are very strident and want to take it out into the world. These two streams have got to work together. There are those who are by their very nature, like Beuys and Cynthia Chance, who are bold with it, but they need the support of those who want to work more in a cloister, researching, scientific research with biodynamic agriculture, with medicines, with social projects in the schools. It's an enormous sphere of knowledge, and it's not something that Rudolph Steiner invented, his karma was to reveal what is there. And it doesn't work for everybody, it's not their karma, it's not their destiny to work with it.

Is this what you were talking much earlier, about recognition, that you had this feeling of recognition from something that was already in you to develop?

Yes, yes, and the education is based on that, that the young human being is, through a series of lives in the material sense of on earth, reincarnated between birth and death, that one dies into the spiritual world where one works with the experience that you have had, because you can only really progress your consciousness in one's physical incarnation, the physical body draws together the etheric, astral and spirit, the ego. And there's more to come yet, more to evolve. The physical body is complete but there are other, the etheric is pretty complete but the astral and the ego and the other aspects of the human being are yet to develop, they're in their embryo. Consciousness is in its embryo. The work of Christ, the Christ impulse before the advent of Christ having a physical incarnation from the Baptism to the Crucifixion, he reveals the history of the Church and how down the years it has been gradually eroded and eroded into a very material form. Like how there was always a trilogy of body, soul and spirit, and it was made into a duality of body and soul, and the spirit was made like an appendix of the soul, whereas he is very articulate about, there is a very clear distinction between soul and spirit, they are two separate entities, working together but they're certainly not one just like a little appendix. And we tend to think of soul and spirit as being the same thing. And there's an understanding of when one is born you have had...you've been in the spiritual world, you've come for your next instalment, you've come to what you need to develop, and how that incarnation comes about, there is something which you require to experience, and it's not all pleasant either. So the teachers in the Steiner school understand that these children have come from the spiritual world, they're not empty vessels to stuff things in. There is a lot there but they need experiences outside of them to reflect what's within them back to them for this cognition, and for the healthy adult to be a free individual who can recognise what is required in the world of them, they do need this experience of... Like the main...no I don't want to go into it, I mean, someone researching this can do all this themselves, but, obviously they can pick up that I'm... What's also wonderful about anthroposophy is that it's very important that you're not a believer, and he said this, it's not a belief system. There is this fear of knowledge, and you can find your way with this but you must try it out. To just believe it on face value is very dangerous because you then become...it's dogmatic, and romantic, and he said this is

practical, this is...you're dealing with reality here. I don't think we should...I probably will, might touch on it later on, but...

And you're not involved in any church-based Christianity at all?

There's an echo there of what was...I think Christianity is in its infancy. I agree with what Nietzsche says, the church has been crucifying Christ for 2,000 years.

Did coming across Steiner's work, did it affect your own work in any way directly - or indirectly?

Yes, I read some heavy duty anthroposophies who had some pretty dogmatic ideas about what art should be, but I realise they had just picked up some recipes and they weren't talking out of real experience, which was a little limiting at first, I felt a little maybe... It made me look at my work and question it, and I guess...it dealt with a certain cynicism which I had, I had a cynical streak to my humour I think, and I think that got fixed by my contact with anthroposophy. So, it doesn't work to be cynical, although I always felt that cynicism was a sort of an illness and it was a negativity.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

It's been a long time since we've mentioned Claire, David, and...

Yes, it was...well we've talked about Claire and how I met, and she just sort of was there in my house, and we became buddies, friends, and so we saw each other a bit when I was at...as friends, it was a very platonic relationship. When I came back to Wales I think she probably came on a couple of visits with other students from Kingston, hitching, I remember her coming up with Alan Greenwood. Then she finished at Kingston, and she thought she had a job in a preparatory school down in Surrey, but they hadn't told her that they had decided that she was too young, and suddenly she, when she wrote, when the beginning of term was coming up in September of '71, 'We ought to be talking about materials,' they said, 'Oh didn't we tell you, we've given the job to someone else'. So, she told me this, and I decided I

didn't want to go on with the evening classes and I didn't want to actually do this job which had been offered to me in Dolgellau which I had agreed to do, it's like a one day a week teaching art to people who are on other courses, hairdressing and catering courses in a further education college there. And I said, 'Well there are actually, there are jobs, there is this...you can take on the evening classes and I could persuade these people at Dolgellau to take you on, I'll tell them I don't want to do it.' Because I actually didn't want to do it, I had enough teaching coming up with Newcastle, Norwich, Maidstone. So she came up and she took those on, and she moved back into the little cottage which she had been in when she had been up here in summer of 1969. And we used to go to an evening class together once a week to work with clay and Ted Harris used to come, I think Falcon Hildred used to come too. So, you know, we were part of a group of people. Dai Hughes used to go to that. And we saw a lot of each other in each other's houses. Then there was a...I went off to France, as I've described before, and then I had this idea of going on a trip up to the Orkney Islands, Bill and Vicky had often talked about the Orkneys and I asked Claire if she would like to join me on this trip. So we got a boat from Llandudno and went to the Isle of Man and we camped and we got a boat from there, from the Isle of Man up to Glasgow, and a train up to Orkney. And we had a fantastic, it was an amazing area, it's like, instead of going south I decided I wanted to go north, I had a great attraction towards going north rather than going south. And that sort of sowed the seeds for a deeper relationship I think, and so when we came back I actually quite formally asked her to consider moving with me, for us to join forces, and how should we do this, you know, and... So we used to talk. It was very odd, it certainly wasn't very romantic, but she wanted to, and I was very...but we talked about marriage or not marriage, and she really felt she wanted to be married, the relationship to be one of a marriage. So we got married, and nine months later we had William. And in that time we were living in this little sort of garret in this little cottage at the Lindale Hotel which in the meantime Claire's parents had bought as a holiday house, so we had a little tiny part of that, and while Claire was pregnant I was coming up to the chapel every day to make my little monk-like accommodation ready for her and the child.

And what was the wedding like this time?

Well this time it was in the Registry Office in Blaenau Ffestiniog, and my parents came, her parents came, and Dai and Erien were the witnesses. There was a fiery little woman who was the Registrar who told my parents to behave themselves because they were sort of tending to be a bit bossy, it was very funny.

Did they feel good about the marriage?

I think they were...my mother did particularly, I think she wanted to see me with somebody; how my father felt about it I don't really know. I think Claire felt a bit disapproved of.

Why?

Because she has a disposition to feel disapproved of I think. The Registry Office was underneath the Coal Office, and it was the curious part of Blaenau Ffestiniog, you could go into the Coal Office off one level of the street and then you went down and dog-legged back and you could go in through the basement of this, and that was the Registry Office. And I remember there being a line of coal around the edge of the lino and the wall which had come down from the Coal Office. So we were married there, and we went down to my parents' house and we had a lunch, and we had a walk around Llyn Mair and then we came back to the chapel, and in the vestry room, which we hadn't made into any accommodation then, it only had a quarter of the floor left, I had used all the rest of the floorboards and beams to make the new accommodation and to make sculpture with, so it was just a dirt floor, and I put a big fireplace in at one end and there was a big roaring fire in there and we had got a lot of food in, I had made a lot of beer, and we had a big party in there that went on for a very long time, and it was fantastic, and it was an interesting reversal of having the party in the church and the wedding, the actual marriage service in a secular space.

And where had Claire been brought up?

In West Molesley, which is...East Molesley, which is very near where I lived when I was a child. She went to Kingston Art School. So we came up from the same,

brought up in the same sort of area, but we didn't know each other, we actually met here. Her father was in the Civil Service, working in aviation, he had been an apprentice working on aeroplanes and through the war he was a fitter, or repaired damaged Spitfires, and was in Iraq and in the East I think too. Claire's mother had been in the WRAF, she had been one of these people you see in the 'Dambusters' pushing the...where the aeroplanes are on that big map, and had worked at that. Her father had been born in Australia and then the family had moved back when he was six or seven years old. His father had been a watch-maker, and a great independent person, he was growing all his own vegetables, doing everything himself.

And her mother?

Her mother had had a very difficult childhood in that her father had left them when she was two, or even younger and had just disappeared, and they had no idea what happened to him. And her mother brought her up but it was a tremendous strain, and actually became incapable of coping and eventually was institutionalised, so she was brought up by an aunt in Didcot and then met Walt, who has been her security. So, it was a bit of...well, you can imagine from that sort of upbringing, quite an insecurity there. A very bright woman, and if she had had better circumstances could have done very interesting things in the world, but nonetheless she was Jim and Claire's mother, Claire being the younger of two. Claire had a very difficult time at school, she had gone to a very ambitious elementary school which had an expectation that all their children would go to grammar school, but...so she did, she passed her 11-plus, but she was not intellectually geared for the rigours of grammar school and felt she was failing and was made to feel that she was failing, so she escaped from there as soon as she could, but certainly didn't have much confidence in her intellectual abilities, but going to art school was her salvation.

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F4727 Side A

And at the time when you met her - well not at the time you met her, the time you were married - was she more focused on teaching or was that a sort of adjunct to being a practising artist?

No she didn't like the evening class teaching very much, she was really too young for it, and at Dolgellau it was very difficult, and when we were together by that time she actually dropped that. And I was still going off, well it was in the early days of my teaching so I was going off to Newcastle quite regularly, still down to Maidstone, and then Wolverhampton started, and then having students over here more often, so there were quite long periods when I was away, I mean a couple of weeks at a time, because I would do a ring, I go down to Maidstone, up to London, up to Newcastle via Norwich, and then back. But I was also doing some building work here, I was working with an Irishman called George McDonald who was a hell of a character, and he had all the skills but very little organisational ability, and so I sort of handled the money aspect of these various building projects. And we were building on bathroom extensions, there was money being offered by the Council for bathroom extensions, so we did two of those, and then a whole house, we renovated it over a period of 18 months. So that was one of my incomes, but very time-consuming, but I still managed to keep my hand in with my work. But I was earning an income, you know, I've always been self-employed from when I left Kingston and I've made my way. I've always felt it's my choice to be an artist, so I'm not expecting grants, I'm not expecting somebody to hand out patronage to me, it's up to me. And we slowly developed our house. It's amazing what Claire put up with in this dingy hole in the north corner of this huge draughty building.

In terms of the kind of traditional roles that you were talking about in your own parents' marriage, do you think it's different in yours?

Well I would like to think that. It's a bit difficult to talk about that just off the cuff. I've tended to be the active one, I'm the more celeric and active; Claire tends by nature, and I don't think by circumstances, to be more passive. But I have noticed that

women tend to get stronger, and they tend to develop more. Men seem to get to a certain point and then sort of stay like that but women tend to keep on evolving their strength and their assertiveness. But it was tough, because the money was short and I didn't want to get a mortgage. We did think about buying a house which would have cost £3,000 and I could have got a mortgage on it, but I've always had an anathema about owing money and so we stuck it out. When William was born was a very important experience. Claire had him in St David's Hospital up in Bangor, and...

You were there?

I missed it because it was a very long labour, and the nurses said, 'Go out and get a drink,' and I was just out, and I had actually come back and I was reading a paper in the waiting-room when they came out looking for me. So I actually missed the birth with him. I didn't miss the birth with Jack. So when I went into the room there was William wrapped up in this white towel in this perspex, clear perspex cot, looking at me, like looking... 'And where were you then? So that's what you look like'. He was a little toughie right from when he was born, a tremendous will, wilful, and so of course we didn't realise it, we called him William, which is Will I Am. But my priority to change, I could just feel my cogs changing, and my sort of whole priorities, and I guess a lot of parents feel this, that you become the parents of all children, all women become mothers, you know, potential mothers, and one respects the human being in a deeper way I think. And also when he was growing up and we were playing on the floor, I found that a lot of what I was making was on the floor, my sort of level, eye level, went right down. Then we had Jack in '77, and in preparation for him our little two-room space wasn't going to be big enough so I started quite an ambitious project in the main vestry hall and built, inside the vestry, the old school room, I built a house, which we have since been sort of working on, and since I've been able, I've been earning quite a bit more money then I've been able to employ people, so quite a lot of the pretty ghastly bits of carpentry which I did have been taken out and been replaced by something that is a lot more substantial and not so rough. I also realised that, and I had been warned by people in London, 'Be careful of that big building you've got because it could swallow you up in...' Because a lot of people teaching in art schools can afford a mortgage and they're very skilful with their hands being

sculptors, they buy big houses and they spend all their time doing them up, but because they've got a mortgage it's got to be done up to a certain standard to maintain the value, or increase the value of the house. So in many art schools I went to they would all build a little studio either in the basement or down the garden, and I would go and have a look through the window of a shed down the garden and it would always be full of prams, lawn-mowers and bicycles, there was no art going on then, and they were all building their houses.

How do you think you and Claire complement each other?

Well, I'm not really big on astrology but apparently Cancers and Scorpios are a good combination. I suppose I'm a sort of, I'm an organiser, a sort of, I get things going, and I've always been very active; she has been more sort of passive, as I've already mentioned before. But I've always felt that it's worked very well, I mean we are, we enjoy each other's company very much, and fortunately she was able to come in with this forming the Steiner school, because if it's only one parent doing it and the other one is suspicious of it or can't get on with it, it's inevitable that either you drop it or the marriage is going to break. So that was a very binding experience for us both to actually get involved with this. We were very alone here, although when we got married, we got married by the town in a way, it was really why we got married, was because of, this is 1972, we felt it was going to be more difficult for us socially here if we were just living together. Interestingly Bill and Vicky, our friends, got married in London but they didn't tell anyone, because it was more in the way of things there to just live together, but they had come under enormous parent pressure and just to get the parents off their backs they just went to a Registry Office and got married and didn't tell anyone because they didn't want to change people's attitude towards them. But my feeling towards, when I got married the second time, was that what it's really about is that you make a statement to other people that you and this person are in a relationship and you'd like people to respect it, and to support it, because it's difficult. And I think that's basically what it's all about. Well the people we knew, the milkman, the people in the bakery, all the people who we sort of, the people in the Post Office, the postmen, they all shook our hands; throughout the next month, anyone we hadn't seen, come across the road, shake our hands, 'Congratulations'.

And it was like being married by the...you know, they were doing this, they were respecting what we had decided on. That was great, I really liked that. And the people who came to the wedding, it was fantastic, the actual party which we had afterwards was great, and it was such a motley bunch of people. Richard Hughes and his wife came, and Jerry Jones and his wife, they were like aristocracy in a way.

I wanted to ask you about Richard Hughes and what he was like.

Yes, well this is something I meant to mention when we were talking about children and getting married. One time I was down at Richard Hughes's place which is on an estuary, and his daughter and his grandchild were there, I saw Richard Hughes standing, and I think he was in his place where he wrote, and I could see him through the window, and he was watching his daughter, who was on the lawn, who was unaware of him looking at her, and she was looking at her son playing on the beach, so they were in three different spaces. And I could feel Richard being, he was really woven into life by his longevity, and he was in his seventies then, or early seventies, about 70 years old, and there was his daughter who was probably 35. And she was active, she was a headmistress in Canada, and there was her son who was very young, and he seemed like a strand of rope, a strand of a rope which hadn't been woven in yet, he was like at the front. And I really saw the point of it all, I saw three generations, and that was an inspiration for me to actually seek a permanent marriage relationship with children. So it was a very, on my part it was a very conscious wish and decision to seek that, having denied it.

Yes. You said when you first met Claire you felt it was all or nothing.

Well she was just such a nice person, yes, and it was like, I couldn't handle that sort of...I was denying that sort of relationship. So I was incredibly fortunate that she sort of didn't get together with somebody else.

So it didn't...it took quite a few years.

Yes, between, I met her in Easter of '69 and we got married in December, well we made the decision in September of '72, so however, '70, '71, '72, so it's 3½ years.

And it's difficult to get at what I'm really trying to ask you, but I suppose it's something like the relationship between the marriage and your work.

I think from what will have been, what can be picked up from what I've been talking about of my early work, I've had a long view with the work, with the chapel and how I'm trying to build up a group of work in there; the 'Ash Dome', 'Wooden Boulder', and how the works connect with each other, it's a whole opus, it is a work, and working at a marriage like that. It's not just in the moment that I'm in now, it is a long-term endeavour. I wouldn't like to say commitment because it seems too dry that way, but I honour Claire and I honour our relationship, and I feel that we're both working at it. We've had a few difficult patches but I think nothing compared to other people. It's growing, you know. She's very realistic, Claire, she is not...she hasn't got romance. I remember buying her an engagement ring in about 1988, so we've sort of been going backwards, it's got more romantic I think, the relationship.

And what do you hope to pass on to your children?

Well we like, both Claire and I like 'The Prophet', Gibran's image of your children are the arrows, you are the bow, and you have to let go of them. And, they're there, they're obviously important to us and we're obviously very concerned about their education, because we've made this huge commitment to start that school. Four years of my life I was working double time, I was teaching and I was being an artist and I was helping a group start a school, with endless meetings, buying a house, actually working, converting the stable block into classrooms. It was a massive effort. Finding money, earning money and giving it to a fund. It was a very very big commitment, and it was exhausting, and after four years, so it was two years' work before we opened and two years' work, very very involved, even doing a little bit of teaching there too, but I was down there every day nearly for four years, down at the Tremadog house, and I began to step back because I was neglecting my progress of my work. I was making the work still but I wasn't properly engaged with it.

What years are we talking about?

September of 1983 till '87, but I was still very involved after that, but it wasn't like I was doing two full-time jobs, I was doing a full-time job and a part-time job, and since I've been drawing back from it, I'm not on the finance group any more, I don't do any building work down there any more, but I do do extra projects every year to raise money for a bursary fund, so I'm quite a significant sponsor, financial sponsor for the school.

What kind of projects?

Oh, earning money, you know, my art projects. So I'll do, I work probably much harder than I need do, but I do...I mean really what I can earn from two good projects is what the school desperately needs, and probably couldn't function without that. We never, the school can never have enough money, but it does bridge a gap. It's very hard for the school to actually exist here, we're on stony ground. It's very difficult for indigenous Welsh people to send their children to us because they all went to the local schools themselves, and to take their children out of the schools that they went to, and out of the schools which all their friends' children go to, is a social gesture, and it would be, you know, it would make it hard for them, socially very hard for them, so most of our parents are incomers.

What are your aspirations for your children? I mean they're hardly children are they?  
I mean your oldest one is 21 and, what's the other one?

17. No, he's 18, Jack is 18. I don't know how to answer. I haven't got an image for them. I've worked very hard, and having experienced a difficult relationship with my father it's made it difficult for us to actually talk at any depth with each other. He was always winding me up, my dad. (laughs) So I've worked hard at creating, or keeping a link with them, you know, and I think we've been successful. It's been difficult with Jack at times, but I think we've sort of got through that one now, and they come with me on projects, they're both very involved with the art. William is very bright,

probably not as talented as Jack. Jack's still a bit of dark horse. It just depends how well motivated he gets, but he's a great minimalist, he will...in terms of minimal effort.

There were a few people that have come up that I would like to just ask you about. I mean we were talking about Claire, you've talked about, refer back to that visit to France and I remember that you talked about Annie Ardennes and Catherine, and Michael Armitage. Was Michael Armitage related to Annie Ardennes?

No, only that for some reason they were friends. I don't know, they were a bit older than Mike.

But those group of people seemed to be important to you and I don't really have a sense of them.

I think they were just...I included them as people who were influential on me at the time when I was at Chelsea and around that time, and I think if you look back in the tape their contribution is already articulated. I don't...I see Mike Armitage very seldom now, he's still great friends with Bill and Vickey, and Annie I haven't seen since that 1973 when Claire and I went to stay with her in France.

And Catherine?

I've no...I did see her again after my...

Was she a girlfriend?

No, it wasn't a relationship, I think there could have been. She was beautiful, but again it was like, well she was too much. She was a tough cookie too, I felt...I couldn't have handled her. (laughs)

And what about Richard Hughes, what was he like?

He was so supportive, he was fascinated with what I was doing in the chapel.

Was he still writing?

Yes, he was writing 'The Wooden Shepherdess' then, and he would very proudly announce that he had written 'minus 500 words'. But that book was so stilted, I mean it looked like it had been stripped down and stripped down and stripped down, whereas 'The Fox in the Attic' was a much more fluid book.

Have there been...I know that in one of the exhibition catalogues you mentioned a lot a Michel Tournier book.

'The Erl-King'.

Yes.

Or 'Friday and the Other Island'.

Yes, and funnily enough you mention 'Robinson Crusoe' every now and then.

Oh, 'Robinson Crusoe' is, I think Rudolph Steiner mentioned, or somebody told me, that he felt that...is it Daniel Defoe wrote 'Robinson Crusoe'? Who wrote 'Robinson Crusoe'?

I think so.

It should never have been written. This is a hero of the independent, whereas really our mission in life is to find each other and work in groups and be interdependent. And that is really a religious experience, working with other people, not just studying with other people or going to, having, you know, religious festivals or something, it's actually working with somebody. Being in the presence of another person is a religious experience. But Rod told me about Michel Tournier, and I think I had probably read 'The Erl-King' before 'Friday and the Other Island', but, there are some

beautiful bits in. Like Robinson Crusoe and Friday have a race along the beach and Crusoe runs as fast as he possibly can, and looks back and there's Crusoe, who could easily outstrip him but just sort of, running very slowly with long, sort of slow elegant strides, and when Friday eventually catches up with him he says, 'Well I beat you'. And Friday says, 'Yes, but how ugly.'

Have there been any other works of fiction that have...that we haven't already...?

Well, we've talked about...well what's in 'The Erl-King', and 'The Erl-King' is this extraordinary thesis on how certain dispositions of somebody will repeat, or what happens to you because of how you are, or certain events in your life will repeat but in another form, in a metamorphose. For example, when he's in the war he's in charge of the pigeons that carry messages, and there's a pair of pigeons, they're like twins, and he sort of, you know, these are important to him, and then later on in the war they are actual twins, these two children are twins, and they are really the doves, they are these pigeons again. And the whole book is a weave of this. And also his perception of how national characteristics manifest themselves in opposites to what the true nature of the nation is, like the Germans appear to be very organised when in fact it's really chaotic, and they have all this strict discipline because they are so chaotic. The English seem so nice but in reality they are really spiteful people, full of hate. And the French are incredibly casual and seem to be very laid-back and very disorganised when in fact they are very, very well organised, just by... And I found those sort of observations, I found them very interesting and very helpful, and matched with my experience.

That throws me back to what you touched on about the difference between the English and the Celtic, when you were talking about being in Wales, do you remember?

Yes, yes.

You wanted to say more about that I think.

Yes, sort of, in a way, somebody said about the French, they're more interested in 'to be', the English are interested in 'to have'. The Celts have a much broader sense of life, how things relate to each other, and in the Celtic art there's always this weaving, a sense of weaving, things interconnecting and breathing in, contracting and expanding. The English way, the Anglo-Saxon, English language by the English, where Anglo-Saxon is used, and the Americans use it in the same way, is very focused, it's very material, it's very direct. And for the Welsh it's quite painful, they need to create a mood of conversation before they get to something. If somebody actually wants to borrow something or needs something, they won't go straight in with it. I always use this example, if I went to my neighbour and ask to borrow a ladder, he would assume I was implying something else, that it wasn't really about the ladder, what is it? And he would engage me in conversation just to find out what I really wanted. Whereas if he wanted to borrow a ladder he would talk to me about the weather to start with, to create the fact that we were both in the same space, then he would imply something about roofs and wind, coming[??] from the weather, wind, and difficulty with the roof, and slates coming off. And then it would be for me to realise what he needed, to offer my ladder, so he didn't have to have the impertinence of asking me. I mean I'm exaggerating this a little bit, but it is like that, and I love that. But I'm not just Anglo-Saxon, but celtic, sort of, always want to go straight in. Interestingly the Japanese are very like that too, they will never go direct, say directly, it's impolite, very impolite. The Welsh language is very old, it's pre-Roman, it hasn't got Roman syntax, and this is something that Rudolph Steiner observed, that most European languages are stuck in Roman syntax, in Roman law, in the material approach, whereas the older languages like Welsh, it mutates tremendously, because depending on what the situation is a word is different, and who you are talking to, and it's important how what you're saying sounds in the other person. You know, you will mutate it to sound well how it... But the Anglo-Saxon doesn't do that. But I do find myself, because I was largely, I connected with the nature here, I do feel a nature connection with the Celtic spirit. I don't think it only lives in the language, I think the language is an expression of it, but deeper than that it lives in the way that the nature is. And having had the fortunate opportunities to work in many different countries I've been able to observe how the elements and how weather manifests itself very differently in different places, and how in the way that water flows, say, example, in

America and in Japan and here in north Wales is actually different, the quality of the water is very very different, consequently it flows differently, but there's probably other factors which contribute to that. Fire, because I often make a stove, or I'm burning, using fire in the making of work, like in Japan the fire is ferocious in a way, it's full of imps in the way that it wants to jump off, and people quite rightly are absolutely terrified of fire. In Japan if you allow a fire to happen, if your house catches fire, not...from some electrical fault perhaps, you are ostracised, you have to leave, you have to move to another town.

So David, despite all your years here, do you still feel English rather than Celtic?

I can't, I'm not a blood Celt, but I relate strongly to the Celtic stream, as to do many artists I think, and people live in many parts of the world, they have in what they brought with them from the spiritual world they have a natural connection with a Celtic impulse, and with, dare I say it, a Celtic Christianity which is a Christianity which is pre-Christian.

What do you think the locals' attitude to you is, living in the chapel, being here?

I've often been asked this, and my answer has always been, it's very hard to tell, and I can only give the example of... You know one of the things that freed me here was hearing two neighbours talking about me, they didn't realise I was just in the garden, and this was while I was sharing a house with Will Seymour. And they were talking about me saying, 'Oh he's a son of a millionaire, and he's on opium.' I had red cheeks and very cheerful so I must have been on opium. And Ted Harris put the story around that I dragged naked women over canvases to make paintings, just to sort of wind people up, and people will love that story. So, when these came back to me, of course none of these things were true, and of course people carry images of each other which aren't actually accurate. So, why should I worry about what they think about me? But as John Berger pointed out, that if you are an outsider a part of your job as an outsider is for the people who are indigenous it makes them feel they belong more, and one has a role as an outsider. I made an attempt to learn Welsh, but to go to evening classes here you learn a Welsh which people don't speak, you learn an

official Welsh which doesn't really exist, and the only way to learn it, to learn the local Welsh is to talk Welsh with local people, but for ease of communication they will always talk back in English.

I was wondering about other important people, and Richard Demarco's name seems to come up, I know he introduced you to Paul Neagu didn't he, and the gallery dealer in Italy, the Galeria Cardazzo.

Yes.

And one in New York.

Yes, there was, before I met Rickie there was rumour of him, that I had a group of Irish students from Dublin Art School, one of these groups of students who came to stay, they drank 100 gallons of beer, all my stocks in a week were gone. They were a great group, and I think Rickie had given them a lecture there so they were very fired up about Rickie. This was 1977. And after the Arnolfini show, Andrew Knight was exhibitions officer, and asked me to take part in a 'From Wales' exhibition in Edinburgh, and Rickie came to that show and saw my work and we met there, and then on one of his great journeys he and his group came to Blaenau and they stayed in the chapel and they met Fredwyn, and it was very exciting. And later Dai Hughes, Fred and I joined them up at the L.Y.C. museum, and we waited for them at Castlerigg Stone Circle and they didn't show up so we went to L.Y.C. And we need at some time to talk about Li Yuan Chia, that was a big influence on me, but as we are focusing on...

Have we talked about that?

No. That's a little sub-chapter. the L.Y.C. But Ricky Demarco, I joined Ricky Demarco on one of these group tours in Venice, the Venice Biennale, on my way to Macedonia, and one of the students, Alistair Johnson, was accompanying me on that; Claire and the kids joined me later in Yugoslavia, which was again a big experience for us all.

And what is Ricky like?

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You were telling me what Ricky is like.

He always bites off more than he can chew, every project grows and grows and grows, and there's never enough money, and he was engaged with a huge battle with the Scottish Arts Council, and he always wanted his people he met to write to the Scottish Arts Council to praise the project that they were on. And I soon found that I was being drawn into Ricky's agenda, and that it was all about the life and the success of his project. [BREAK IN RECORDING] And he is a catalyst, and he has initiated amazing things, but as all catalysts are, they're like dynamite, it's good and awful, and I found I had to put some distance, because he was like taking me over, sort of...

And what were the good things he did for you?

Took me on the journeys. Well, brought his group here. Enabled me to go to the Venice Biennale. Introduced me to Panza and visited his collection with that group.

Did he influence you?

He introduced me to Paul Neagu which, that was a big influence actually, a very big influence. But he made me wary of getting involved in...for artists to get involved in a group project. I met him again, it must have been 1980 when he had chartered the Marquis, it's a boat, a sailing boat, to do a journey around Britain, and that was great, and we sailed, I met him in Aberystwyth, went on the boat and we sailed up to Holyhead, past Bardsey Island and over to Dublin. And, so that really acquainted me with the Irish contacts that I had, Nigel, Nigel Rolf was teaching over there and I met some of the students again over there.

Was that the only journey you went on with him, apart from to the Biennale?

Well I joined...well how these journeys work, very few people actually go on the whole thing, it's sort of, it's a band of people who are always changing. Even Ricky

wasn't always there, I think he couldn't bear to be kept cooped up on that boat all the time, he had to get out. (laughs) Tremendous energy and verve and fight, but he had a feisty, so there was a...yes, something that one wanted to support but one wanted to support out of one's own energies and not be told how to support. So I withdrew my energies from it because I just felt they were always being diverted from, or manipulated. He is a very important figure in art, but I think it's a pity he stayed in Edinburgh, I think it was too small a place, he needed a bigger canvas.

And what about Paul Neagu? What's he like?

He's like an emperor, he's another Roman. (laughs)

Another one?

No, no. (laughing) No I don't think Ricky...Ricky is more a Greek, possibly Paul's a Greek, very artistic and very tough. I really like the early work when it was very tactile; the later work, which he enjoyed, he liked me calling it philosophical diagrams, but he always resented the success of other people who he felt were lesser artists than he was, he always felt that the English art establishment never embraced him, that he was excluded from things because he wasn't English, or wasn't British. He did this brilliant thing of the Generative Art Group, where he went to the Arts Council to get some, hoping to get some money to fund a studio, but said there had to be a group, you know, their policy was to give money to groups. So he came back and said, 'Well I've got a group, we are the Generative Art Group,' and there were five of them, and he showed them their work, and fine, so he got Arts Council money to support a studio. I think it was above the Air Gallery, I think. And then it turned out that he was the group, he was all these five artists, and I loved that.

But you worked with him, didn't you?

We did a collaborative show for L.Y.C.

So what is L.Y.C.?

L.Y.C. are the initials of Li Yuan Chia, who is Chinese.

Now please do tell me about that.

I first heard about it from Joss Mahon who was a student in Newcastle University when I used to teach up in Newcastle, I met her, and she sent me a little catalogue with, a funny little catalogue with, all the pictures were out of focus, and there was some of her work in it, and it was the L.Y.C. Museum, and I wondered what this was. And she told me it was this Chinese guy who had made a little museum, and where I met...I think Ricky introduced...I have to be grateful to Ricky, he introduced me to all sorts of things, he introduced me to the phenomena of L.Y.C. who is this little Chinese. He died very recently, just a few months ago. He had actually stayed with Nicholas Logsdail in London I think in the late Sixties, he was a painter, I think he showed with the Marlborough briefly, and his guru, his teacher told him he should stop painting and do something else for ten years. And he went up to stay with Winifred Nicholson who had property near Carlisle, I can't remember the name of the village now, but, it will come back to me. And she, after Li had been with her a few months, said that there were these derelict cottages which she owned that he could make into somewhere for him to live, and these cottages actually were made out of the stones of Hadrian's Wall, they had just been moved over, Hadrian's Wall had been used as a sort of, a quarry for building stone. And he found a lot of little Roman artifacts while he was renovating the first space, so he made a little room which had these in it as a museum, so walkers along Hadrian's Wall would go in there and look at these. And he also, from his artist days, had some of Takis' works, he was a Greek artist using magnets and things, and he had some of those, and he had some other works, so he made another little room with these in it, so there was the Roman artifacts and there were these bits of contemporary art. And then he built another space which he had exhibitions in, and at first they were quite difficult, abstract works, some of his friends from London I think; local people didn't get it and he wasn't getting their support. He was Chinese after all [INAUDIBLE]. So anyway, he won their support, he started doing landscape shows, and anyway he gradually built these cottages up. He built a children's room with these gyroscope things which

children could make their own gyroscope images on, and lots of paper and tables with chinks and pastels and pencils. A little kitchen where people could make themselves coffee, tea. Became a very social place. And he kept developing it and developing it, and eventually he was running four one-man shows a month concurrently, and would make a catalogue for each artist himself, actually print it physically himself. And the pictures were often upside-down, and an American artist, Bill Fitzgibbons, it was his first catalogue, and he got the wrong...instead of Bill Fitzgibbons, he was Bill Gitzfibbon, so back in America, because all these were mailed off to his friends in America, it was his first show abroad and he wanted to show off a bit, so when he went back to America he was known as Gitz. But there was an incredible warmth there, and how Li did things, how he built things was very sympathetic, or I felt very sympathetic for it; it was built up in the cheapest possible way and as quick as possible, and it just had this wonderful human warmth, so it was quite an influence on how I was building our house. And Claire showed there three times I think, and I showed with Paul, Paul Neagu, we had a session of collaborative works. Paul was very keen to have a group, but in fact he was always very...he's so dominant in personality he was impossible to work with, because he would always dominate the work, and really he came here, and I was really his technician, he just made his 'hyphens' out of my materials. And sometimes, I was really hoping that something quite different for us both would come out of this collaboration, and I would go and answer the phone and I would come back and he had turned it into a Paul Neagu. Anyway we had the show. And Paul was very serious, and deeply into philosophy, and I adored him, and he was a very important, very important influence. But this...

How?

Well it's in the work, I guess, some of the tripod pieces came out of, it's like 'Elephant Passing the Window', you could see it was like a 'hyphen', one of his 'hyphens'. He introduced me to what was going on in Rumania. He was someone I could talk with, you know, he was an artist, a practising artist in London, and we both showed with Elise Meyer in New York in 1980 and '82. So he was quite good in strategy, he was hot on strategy and how to work the art scene. But it was difficult for us. I think he felt my work was too romantic and possibly derivative, I'm not sure. But he got very

very ill, his kidneys were failing, and he would have died unless his sister had come over and given him a kidney, and it was all at the time when there was a big scandal about, in India people, doctors getting kidneys and selling them, and so it was a long wait, but he nearly died. And he had packed everything up like he was going to die, and he made an archive of everything, and I bought one of his pieces to support him. Anyway he survived, and he is OK. I thought it would actually sort of change him a bit but it hasn't changed him at all. (laughing) In fact he's rougher and tougher if anything, and more dismissive. I feel, unfortunately it's difficult, he is difficult to continue to have a relationship with, it can only really be on his terms.

Was going to Macedonia important for you?

Yes, it was the first time I had been out of the country to actually work, so I felt honoured to be asked to go on this wood symposium, but it was like hot weather Irish, it was so chaotic out there. It was mainly a stone carving symposium and they had this white marble there that they're very proud of, but it's like granite, and these marble stone sculptors from all over the world would be invited and they would go to the quarry and they would pick their stone and it would be weeks before it arrived, they were just waiting and waiting and waiting. Then it was dumped and they had hardly any time left, and they would do what they could in blazing sunshine, and bright light coming, reflecting off this marble. And then the results were put in the town of Prilep, and Prilep looks as if it's been bombed with marble, because there must be about 4 or 500 pieces of marble sculpture now. But they also started a wood symposium, a sculpture symposium, but that was in a different studio, and I made a table piece and a chair piece. But it was being in another culture, and they are tough people there, these square, these Slavs, Serbs, this square face. Incredibly robust people, and incredibly independent, fiercely independent. And they had been dominated by the Turks and by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and through the war and through Tito they had thrown off this yoke and they were building their country. Tremendous pride, and incredibly social people. Claire came out and we started to go home, we were camping, and we were in camp sites, and it always seemed that everybody knew each other, well, but these were always total strangers to each other but the way that they interrelated and communicated was a real joy. I would like to

think that, I was thinking, if I could speak this language I would stay, I like it here. But it was brewing then, Tito was on his...he hadn't died, '78, I don't think, but they were all very scared of what was going to happen. And it has happened.

You've mentioned a couple of exhibitions that were important to you that I wanted to ask you about. I don't think we've talked very much about that Inuit Eskimo show, have we?

No, I can't remember when that was. Claire might.

Was it '75?

'75 was it? Claire opened my eyes to that, to what was going on there. She observed that the best ones were when they had just got the image inside the original stone that they started with, you could still feel the original stone, whereas the ones which weren't so interesting were where somebody had given an Inuit carver a chunk of stone, a quarry piece, probably square, and he had carved a figure out of it. But the best ones were the older pieces which had been lovingly brought into being through the winter months, but honouring the stone that they had started with.

Some of this related to your own work?

Well it was a clue for me to work, to try to get a sense of...it's a bit like what Bill Woodrow was doing when he was cutting a beaver out of a, or a guitar out of a washing machine, sort of cutting the pieces and folding them, so you had the beaver and you also had the washing machine, so there's the object and this is where it came from, so that there was a relationship between the two objects.

Was that a bit like your negative and positive sculptures, your 'Mount and Foal', am I thinking of?

Yes, well that was...yes I should think...I guess I...I hadn't considered that relationship with Bill's work before but yes, there is that connection, you can see where it came

from. But in most of the work, like the 'Cracking Boxes', they are the largest squared pieces that I can get out of that piece of wood. And I try to keep a sense of the original piece of wood if I can, if it's appropriate, so one can feel one's way back into the tree and into the ground I think. So the piece, the sculpture is out of a continuum, it's not just out of, like the welded steel sculptures, bronze sculptures, plaster sculptures made into bronze, they're completely controlled, you know, there isn't some... I've always needed some other aesthetic to bounce off.

And you've mentioned HC Westerman.

Yes, Peter Blake introduced me to him in '76, he lent me some catalogues, and he actually owns a few pieces, and Waddingtons, I saw down some stairs in Waddingtons that there were some HC Westermans and I asked if I could go down; the guy who was looking after the desk was a bit reluctant. I just loved the originality of that work, and how HC Westerman was working out of his life experience, that was something very important. And the Serpentine did a show, '77 or '78, just a one-man show, fantastic, I went there, I made a drawing of every single piece. And it was...yes, it was for me, here is someone working out of their life experience, not out of art history.

Talking about a little bit of art history, I think seeing the Gislebertus sculpture at Autun was important for you.

Yes that was particularly important for Claire, she... Yes we ought to say that Claire was a practising artist, is a practising artist, and when we got together and while the children were very young she managed to continue working, and through the rhythm of the needs of the children she actually had a rhythm, a daily rhythm, which actually gave her an hour or two hours a day, and I would also try to take the children to give her space regularly so she could work with these little relief carvings. One of the first ones, she carved a paper parcel, so that the string and the paper is all carved, quite rough, and then she carved a little paper bag. And relief carving, she really got into that, and had several exhibitions, up at L.Y.C., she had a show at Riverside, she had a show at the Brillig Arts Centre in Bath, and she sold a lot of work. She had two

shows up at Bangor, Oriel, she did[??] like an artist-in-residence with all her work around the walls, and she was there working. She got knocked off course by, well this is my take on it, I don't think she will necessarily agree, she became to love the Romanesque carving, church carving, and Gislebertus in particular, and through the Welsh Crafts Council, for some reason she was on their books, she was recommended as an artist to do the 'Stations of the Cross' in an Anglican church in Pontypridd, and we went down to see it. They had a small sum of money which the Crafts Council would match if they had an artist who they recommended. So they recommended Claire, but Claire had to go through this adjudication, and the Crafts Council hired three people in to agree that Claire would have this money, and they didn't agree, they rejected. And Claire had worked six months on this proposal, and they felt that her other relief work was much better, so they didn't think this was good enough. Well the Crafts Council was really embarrassed. Claire was absolutely devastated, that she had been invited to do this in the first place, so, they said, 'Apply again, apply again, sorry, something went wrong'. So she did, and they rejected it again. And working it out, they would have paid those people to adjudicate, it would have...it was more than the money that was on offer to her, and I think out of frustration, and partly from my advice, 'Don't do it, it's not enough money'. The Welsh Arts Council had put money available for artists, of which Claire got one, to put work into public places, and she has a beautiful relief, a big relief carving of 20 odd panels, each one a foot square, making up images of a child's life, and it's in one of the primary schools here. So that was made through 1977, so this was '79/80 probably, this catastrophe, and it really...I felt she lost touch with the stream of her own, of her other work, and it's taken her...and then we got involved with the school, and our kids were of an age where they were much more demanding, and she lost a sense of rhythm I think. But now she's got a proper studio and through the teaching of painting at the Steiner school she has found colour, and a way of working which she can find her way with, and so she's starting again in a way.

And you respond very much to colour don't you. I've heard you admiring Matisse.

Yes I started as a painter and then as a sculptor I was putting colour into space, I was trying to find, I was trying to make forms where there was the feeling that the colour

which I had applied went right through it, this was a blue form. And then I dropped colour because I didn't know what I was doing, I didn't have a teacher. But Rudolph Steiner is very interesting about colour, like for example colour, what we call colour blue is not really a colour, it's space, it's a phenomena which is very representative of space. And black, about what black is, carbon, and how we relate to carbon.

You're going back to colour in your work, aren't you?

Yes, I mean I've had a teacher, I've had somebody I can respond to what he's talking about, about colour. The 'Blue Ring' interestingly was made a little bit before I became aware of his perception, or his articulation about colour, and down at Cae'n-y-Coed, because it was a wood it's covered in bluebells, so for a week in May, or ten days in May the whole of Cae'n-y-Coed is covered in blue. Then the bracken grows and it obscures the flowers, and then flowers become seed pods and the colour goes. And I love this fact, it was just blue for just a short period of time, this is blue, there is something about blue. And I've noticed how in household paints, blue, it bleaches out, you know, it's a fugitive colour. And also how it's very hard to get blue to be a form, it doesn't really want to be a form, and there's a circle or space, and a circles, or a sphere seems to be really the only form which is applicable to blue. So a blue circle out of bluebells which will only be there for a week at a time seemed to be very appropriate to...and it would be a growing piece, it would come and go. So I made a concentration of blue in 100 foot diameter ring on a slope, so one could see it as one was driving along the road, you could just make out a concentration of blue, but it grew out, I mean it was only there for three or four years, I got some people to help me move thousands of bluebell bulbs into this ring.

And red and black's been another theme with you, hasn't it.

Yes, red and black, and listening to Robert Bly and Joseph Campbell about myths, and how red and black and white feature in these fairy stories and in many cultures. The red, the passion of youth, giving way to the nobility of the white, the white knight, and giving way to the wisdom of the black, the crone. There's an image in one of the Arthur legends of the crow, the black bird which had been wounded and there

were drops of blood in the snow, you know, it was a very powerful image of those three phenomena of red, black and white. On my preliminary visit to see about a project in Poland, the forest where I was shown where I could work there were a lot of big alders growing there, and I knew that if you cut alder it goes red, amazing red colour; it's white at first but within half an hour it's gone like a blood, blood red. So I was thinking about that, and burnt wood, which I had already been burning, and white bark of birch, I could make a combination of red, white and black. And so some of these alders were being cut down because they grow them commercially in this forest, and the birches I eventually didn't use because the white walls of the gallery space were quite sufficient to have the whiteness present. I was burning some bits, some forms, so there were a lot of, I was using my off-cuts so there were a lot of shapes, when we put the fires out there were a lot of burnt shapes that I could use, and we cut the alders. And the alders were growing out of these hollows like craters in the forest, and they went on and on and on into the forest, and it was a perfect environment for these alders to grow, and as they were being grown commercially I asked the foresters, did they make the holes to grow them, and they said no, laughing, as if the Poles would do that. These were craters from the First World War, so you know, there was a very long, very bloody battle just where I was working, and suddenly I was made aware of this and I was already well into this piece of 'Red and Black', and suddenly the sort of, the death of black and the blood of the red had another pertinence, it was like an echo of something which had actually happened there. And quite often I find there are echoes like that in my work, quite unconscious.

You've used red and black in work you've done in Japan as well, haven't you?

Yes, since then I was shown the various woods that I could use up in the northern part of, in this forest in Otoineppu in Hokkaido, that there were some alders, and I wanted to further this, I wanted to explore a bit further with red and black, and there was an opportunity to make another version of it, where there was a ring of vertical and horizontal black and a ring of vertical and horizontal red pieces next to each other. Well I subsequently furthered the theme of the red and black in drawing, in works on paper, so there's an example of following up a perception or an understanding on works on paper out of a sculpture rather than the other way round.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

David I think you would like to return to 'Wood Primer'.

Well if we're going to go through the sections it would be quite good to illustrate some of the things that we have been talking about in their essence, their actual manifestations of it. We had got up to number three, there are actually twelve sections. Number three is Ladder, this is the way that the tree grows and spreads with its branches, the way that it spreads is natural to, when it's cut down you can turn it up the other way so the branches actually act as surrogate roots and hold up the trunk. It's very simple just to cut that down the centre in the half, they have two separate parts, and then to join those parts again with rungs which produces a very simple self-supporting structure which also has a figurative connotation in that it's a ladder, like the spires, the way it spreads and grips the earth, stands on the earth, and rises upwards towards the heavens. So I found that I have to create a, always have to create a false perspective with the rungs, I have to put them slightly closer together as they go up. It was a growing ladder I attempted at Grizedale which was willow; if you put a fresh piece of willow into the ground just like a stake or a stick it will root itself and start again and become a tree, and it doesn't matter which way up it is either, so having heard this I tried to grow a willow ladder planting two upside-down fresh willow branches and trying to graft rungs across. It probably would not have worked, but I never found out because it got eaten by deer. Through the trunk and up the branch, I think we might have already touched on this in the wood quarry project in Tipperary with Bill and Joan Roth, they approached me after a show, they saw a show in Ireland. Have we talked about this? They saw a touring show in Ireland in 1982 and their beloved elm at the entrance to their property had recently died of Dutch elm disease, so they had the idea of asking me to come and make something with that tree, so I got the woodman who they hired in, a wonderful Irish woodman, to cut the tree just above the first big limb, and then I made a lot of work from that, from what was above that cut, and then what was left standing in the ground I made a stairway up through the trunk and then up the branch. The local farmer came round to have a look and he said, 'Ah, I'm going to go up there and have a Guinness with God,' he said.

And number four, the Slice, Warp, Crack and Bend, I think we've touched on this and the fact that wood behaves as the water dries out of it. This will only really happen in an indoor situation where the air, the drier air naturally draws out the moisture from the wood. And the piece 'Skirted Beech', I got a tip for this from reading 'The Wheelwright Shop' by William Sturt, and he described the sawyers cutting up a tree trunk with the underdog who was in the saw-pit underneath, and the top dog who worked the saw from on top. And when they cut nearly the whole length of the trunk, they didn't cut the plank off, they left it still attached, because they wanted to keep the weight in the mass, otherwise they would constantly be having to be readjusting the clamping.

End of F4727 Side B

F4728 Side A

So it was only at the very end when they had cut all the planks, which would be then quite loose and probably flapping about, that they cut the end off and all the planks were then separated. It was another way of creating a self-supporting structure, and what wasn't cut was what held it all together. Similarly with the crack and warp stacks, instead of cutting along the grain I've cut across the grain, but not all the way through, all the way round but not all the way through, so there's still an original core of wood in the centre which is holding the whole structure together. When I stopped working on these, all the cuts are quite level and straight and it's only as the water comes out that they crack, bend and warp, and the piece begins to express its own nature. Similarly with the 'Cracking Box' as I've already mentioned in relationship to the auger tool, that again it was an anticipation of fresh wood splitting and cracking, so I made as square an object as I could, leaving the pegs long, because it holds the object off the ground and the air can flow underneath it, sort of animate it slightly too. And then as time goes by and the air pulls the water out, it cracks, and answers my geometric imposition back, answers it back.

David, does the fact that the wood is untreated affect its life as it were?

Not indoors, if it's kept indoors it gets to a certain moisture content and it just stays like that. One would have to watch out for termites, if they become evident. It's only outside that wood...wood is designed to rot down, so, but through the effects of the active elements, but inside one has neutralised the elements, like wood getting wet and dry, wet and dry, wet and dry tends to expand, contract and expand.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Right, still with the warping and bending. We've got the 'Elm Spring Arch' here which was made in Japan, and it's a very delicate and fragile operation, and also it's very difficult to actually install and maintain, and one can only do this with elm, most other woods, well I think all other woods just couldn't handle it and it would split or crack, but elm has got a curious weave in its grain. And again, working in Japan with people who take such care of objects, and feel very responsible for them, it was a situation that I could make it in. And section five, Table, we've already mentioned

'Ancient Table', this was made from wood from a mediaeval barn here in north Wales which a farmer had allowed, or even encouraged to fall down, because I think it probably had a preservation order on it, because he wanted to build a big aluminium one, and these beams were probably the original beams from that barn, could be anything up to 4 or 500 years old. And they were just six pieces stacked on top of each other originally, which were shown in the Serpentine Gallery as 'Big Stack' and then they came back to the studio and I realised that they were a potential table, an 'Ancient Table', it looks like a Cromlech. And then there's a series of tables, 'Tables with Cubes' we've talked about. 'Branch Table' was a way of trying to occupy the space above the table surface, but without putting an object on the table; it also really emphasised where the materials for the object comes from. And on the top of page 29 there's a 'Table and Chairs', this was made in Japan and was inspired by the cleaner in Wataru's café where I was staying at Kotoku, and she used to continually stack, stacking the tables, chairs up on the tables when she was cleaning the floor. And I saw an opportunity of creating like the chairs which I've always seen as children around the table, the children around the mother. 'Corner Table' came from the idea of the corner block, the 'Corner Block' was an oak root from Cae'n-y-Coed, and I cut with my six-foot hand-saw three planes of three-dimensions to create a single corner, and in the case of the 'Corner Block' the off-cuts were put under the root to hold it up so that the top was flat. So 'Corner Table' made of apple was made in a similar way, where each piece is just cut on three planes so that there is the man-made cut and the uncut on the other side, like the uncarved block. 'Mantle-dis-mantle', this is simply taking a piece of wood apart and just putting it back together again, it's like looking into the mantle. And 'Extended Cube' I have included in this series, this is a single cube, in this case beech, with a chain-saw I've cut nearly all the way down on one side and then on the next side I've cut all the way to that first cut, and then I've taken that L-shape off, it's like an off-cut, and then done the same cut on the remaining block and just continued till I just had a small piece left, and it works like a sort of telescope but it displaces space in that one can pull it out and it sort of draws space inside it. The planting and growing we've talked about at some length. 'Lump and Length', this is many sculptures just using the fact of the trunk being a lump, or thick, a thick piece of wood, and the branch being a line, a length, coming off it, and with the lump I've been able to, in 'Standing Frame' I've again squared the larger piece, the lump, and

then with those square pieces, which is what we do in wood mills, we square up wood for ease of construction, and then a square out of it so the branches like come up to the square and hold it in place. 'Running Table' we've talked about, and the 'Waterway', this was the second version of the 'Waterway' which is a temporary installation in Tochigi. I noticed at the museum that they had a trough, or a ditch, like a marble waterway coming from a trough where water poured out of the trough and the water ran across the courtyard, and I realised that I could interrupt the flow of that water from that trough and divert the water along a series of canals. What was nice about this piece, well there are several bits, but I thought I had taken 50 per cent more wood than I would need, and I very very loosely designed it, but it was just what was left over from the mizunara tree, and the woodmen helped me and they pulled the wood on sledges across the valley floor, put it onto trucks, took it down to Utsunomiya where the museum was. And then there was only just enough wood, there was just...I think there was one piece left over, and they were just amazed that I was able to design this in my head, which I hadn't done really, I'd only very loosely done it, and it all worked. It's all based on the fact that water flows down a hill, it won't flow uphill, so we just had to make, orientate the pieces of wood according to that fact. When the 'Aspects of British Sculpture', which started in the Metropolitan Museum, this piece obviously didn't go there, had to stay in Utsunomiya and wait for the show to come to it, the show started in March in Tokyo then in April, in the spring, in Tochigi in Utsunomiya, and around the opening time, because this was fresh wood lots of little twigs and branches grew from the bark all the way along the length of the wooden waterway which was, they thought this was a magic surprise which I had kept up my sleeve, and I had no anticipation of doing it at all. Then there is what I call here a 'Falling Boat', but since then I've called them 'Descending Vessels', and this was actually the first one, which was inspired by seeing a scar on a eucalyptus tree in Tasmania that looked like a boat, it's a boat-like scar, and it had the impression of a boat descending, or an idea incarnating, and this was my first version of it. I later found that in fact what I was seeing on this eucalyptus tree was in fact a boat; it was from a scar from an Aborigine who had cut the bark off in one piece and stitched up a boat. 'A Useful Pig' we've already talked about. 'Stoves and Hearths' we've already talked about, bringing together the material of that particular place. It was actually inspired by an Irish student when I gave a lecture in Dublin on my work,

this was about 1977/78, and he said, 'Mr Nash, you've made wooden tables and you've made wooden ladders, and, have you ever thought of making a wooden hearth?' It seemed like a good idea. And the 'Inside-Outside', which were 'Mount and Foal', this was from a sycamore tree which had fallen down at my grandfather's house at Pen-y-Mount, 1982. And there was one piece of the tree which had...the way that the tree had fallen, it was a very horse-like, or mare-like form, and I realised actually to emphasise that form I could extract the middle out of that piece of wood and then it subsequently became an indoor work and they both lent against the wall; the interior piece was positioned so it was like looking the other way from the...or going in the other direction from the parent. And not long after I had made this I was reading in one of Steiner's lectures talking about the zodiac sign I think of Cancer, that before it was seen as the crab image it was actually seen as a foal leaping away from a stallion, which made my hair stand on end. And the 'Inside-Outside' piece in Australia, which I had made several versions of this, extracting the interior of a tripod, so it's like it's stepping out of itself. And 'Upper Cut' in lime was to, again it's a lump, and I carved this as thin as I dared. And 'Wooden Fish' is, again I've made a similar version of this, the original one was in the Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 1981 called 'Ram', which is a carving of a trunk of a tree with a top, with a sort of a ridge, and diagonal slopes on either side, and then cutting with the saw the interior out, and then line the outside bit back on the inside bit, as if the inside bit is coming out of it, and it sort of had a fish-like appearance so I called it 'Wooden Fish', and the Japanese I was working with said, 'This looks very like a musical instrument that the Buddhist priests use in the temple which they had actually called 'Wooden Fish', or maybe they said this looks like 'Wooden Fish' and so that's why I called it 'Wooden Fish'.

Was your experience working in Japan would you say the most positive of all your experiences abroad?

Working in Japan, I've tended to take ideas with me there; not so much has come from the actual culture itself, which is interesting, because there's an assumption that I've been very inspired by Japan. But I've been very inspired by Asian art, Indian and Chinese in particular, and Korean, and a little bit by Japanese art with the haiku poems. The most recent show from 'Otoineppu, Spirit of Three Seasons', I think

nearly everything there is based on an idea which I had had before going there, and not so much, I haven't been so much inspired by the actual place at all. Obviously these ideas take on a Japanese flavour to them. Going on to the section eleven, which is to do with the charring, I've already talked about the experience of carbon, and the piece illustrated here, 'Seven Charred Rings', was made from a dead and hollow oak tree in a private garden in south Wales, and the tree was cut down and as it was hollow I decided to cut the seven rings round the edges, and then to burn each one singly, and I set the fire on top of the roots, so I burnt the root out at the same time as charring the piece. Then we filled in the space with gravel so we could get the water to run off, and then stacked them up. And then the following spring when the...oh interestingly, when I was making like this carbon core, it was the same time as Chernobyl was happening, and I remember having the radio on in my car where I was keeping my tools, as what was happening was gradually being understood, and it was very interesting that I was actually sort of making a core of carbon, because they actually use that material in their radioactive cores. But, I was going to say, in the following spring the jackdaws or rooks who nest, rooks who are nesting in the old oak tree came back, they found no tree, so they nested down the hole in the middle, because you know they often nest down chimneys.

Had the fact of having the nuclear power station, I think it's just five miles a way isn't it?

Yes.

Has that...?

Nothing conscious, but I don't know really what you're leading to, if you are implying about what effect it's had on us here, it was...

Yes, and you were talking about Chernobyl.

Yes. The nuclear power station here, the Trawsfynedd, is about five miles down wind, or up wind, the wind blows, the prevailing wind blows towards Blaenau

Ffestiniog. And I can remember aged 12, 11, 12, 13, when they were building it, the great excitement about this great new discovery and the cheap power and clean power, but it was known then that, because one of the excuses they had to build it was saying, well it will only be here for 20 years and then it will have burnt itself out and we'll take it down. People were saying, well how are you going to do that? And they said, 'Well we will have figured it out by then,' and that became acceptable, and people accepted that, but of course, they don't know what to do with it. It is closed now. But it's been a reality to us, it's been, you know, a 20th century reality.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

I think that's one of the reasons why I feel Blaenau is part of the reality of the late 20th century; it's high unemployment, it's a run-down industrial town, it's got the threat of a nuclear power station very close by. The railway which runs just behind us carries the, or was carrying the nuclear, the uranium rods in and was taking nuclear waste out. Anyway to get back to 'Wood Primer', we seem to keep on going off on tangents from it. 'River Tunnel', this was made at the first wood quarry in Japan with the mizunara tree. I'm going to get rid of that cat.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Right we're looking at 'River Tunnel', and I want to tell the story of this one. I've already told, given the image of the big mizunara tree which had fallen down, and at the base of the main trunk, because there were actually two parts to this mizunara tree, it was a little bit rotten, so I kept that for a bit, I thought, well I don't know what I'll do with that, and I cut it a bit further up, and it wasn't rotten there, so, it was very clean wood. I soon realised that my interpreter, who was a political science student, he wasn't an artist and he wasn't very good with his hands, was freezing to death. I was all right because I was busy and active and he was just sort of hanging about, and I realised we needed a fire, and he needed to be busy. So this long auger which I had taken with me, we drilled right through, right along a length of this, it was about 7 feet long I guess, and hollowed the rotten part out, and lit a fire in it, pointed it into the wind, and over two weeks I was there it was his job to burn out the middle. So he had to control it and he had to roll it so that it kept him very active. So that was the stimulation to make this piece, was to keep the interpreter warm. And then we launched it into the stream, so it's like a sister piece to the 'Wooden Boulder'. Then in the twelfth section we refer to the pyramid, cube and sphere, which I continually use,

and these are very basic geometric forms which Cézanne observed seemed to be lying within nature, and I felt there was an echo to the feeling, or the idea for the ancient Indians and the Egyptians, Persians, you know, civilisations, that geometry was something alive; it was only really with the Greeks and then the Romans and the European epoch that geometry became static and not alive, because the earlier perception was of the geometric movements and the forms which were in the cosmos, as something really living and potent, had a power to them. And now we have sort of a parody of them in geometry, and they are rendered two-dimensional and very abstract, and I think partly what I'm trying to do here in a very naive way is to try to put them back into nature, or back into the cosmos, trying to loosen them, free them. So there's, the 'Wooden Boulder' is part of that, and I also made a piece in Japan, I made a sphere cube and a pyramid and put them into a stream which would flood in the rainy season and they would be swept away, so they really have been thrown back into nature, and I've no idea where they are now. The villagers of that particular place I was working wanted to concrete them in so they wouldn't go, but I said that's not the point. 'Ash Stick Cube' I think speaks for itself, it's like the frame, like the 'Running Table', it's still...and like the 'Corner Block' and the 'Corner Table' where I've just cut on two of the planes in this case to create a geometric form and then the branches are simply wherever the branches were, and they hold it up. 'Pyramid in the Sticks' was made in Ireland in Phoenix Park, the show which I mentioned before travelling in Ireland in 1982, went to the Douglas Hyde Gallery, which is much larger than all the other places where the show had been, and my show wasn't large enough to hold the space so I suggested I went over and made more work. And I was given a very dead elm in Phoenix Park, and the woodman there argued all afternoon about how they would cut it down, and meanwhile I was making all these drawings of what I could make out of this tree, and then when it actually hit the ground it just burst into...because it had been dead for so long it smashed into pieces. So I got these students who were helping me, and we picked all the broken pieces up and we made a pile, and then I made a drawing on a one-to-one scale of that pile and emphasised the pyramid of darkness which was inside the pile, it was imagining a form within there where the light doesn't reach, so the drawing is an emphasis on that. And I have made quite a few works now, particularly with the pyramid, sphere and cube, with a drawing of them on the wall hung very low so one can experience the object in three

dimensions which one reads with one's physical being, one understands the scale and understands it, because it's standing in the same space as you are. But one has a very different way of perceiving a two-dimensional image, but if you get them at the same time, of the same image, of the same sort of form, those two different types of perception are happening simultaneously and they sort of bleed into each other and they enrich each other, is what I have experienced. And then at the very end we've got a drawing of the first wood quarry at Maentwrog, which yielded the 'Wooden Boulder', the 'Prime Block', which is my very first piece to go to the United States and it was sent, I was representing a foundation block for all the other work which I was hoping I would do there. And the first 'Cracking Box', the first 'Cube', a larger version of 'Three Clams on a Rack' which was for the Guggenheim show, and the first 'Wood Stoves', so it yielded a lot of first-time pieces.

And what do you see as the relationship between your chapter headings in the book and the photographs? Because I call them chapter headings, they are photographs of objects in the world, like before the wood cracking, the pile of popadams.

Ah right, yes, the...

Are you suggesting, well...

Yes what I tried to emphasise with these introductory photographs is that there's something in the world that I am working from, you know, it is a reference which is, that's what I have seen which has encouraged me, or inspired me, encouraged me.

Did a plate of popadams inspire you?

Yes.

It did?

Yes, I enjoy Indian restaurants very much and I always enjoy a pile of popadams, and when I first had the idea, the concept of the crack and warp columns I didn't know

what they would look like, and when I made one and when it did eventually warp, it warped like crazy, it did look like a pile of popadams, so that was...

You weren't aiming at that, it was fortuitous?

No it was just fortuitous, but I sort of made that reference back into the world with it. And then a stool which I had made...

I notice that's got a little model elephant in it too.

Yes.

Was that deliberate with 'Elephant Passing a Window'?

Yes, well...yes I...it does echo to that. Again it's trying to get several layers happening at the same time, trying to make a richer experience. The one for the ladder is actually a metal ladder that some kids have got off the railway line, it probably went up to a signal at some point, and it was over in the playing fields nearby, and I looked how it followed the angle of a tree which was growing on the wall. And there's a pile of popadams. The introduction of 'Table' and the sort of, there were two feeding troughs which were in a field at Grizedale which were partly the inspiration for the 'Running Tables'. The 'Mantle-dis-mantle' is from that mizunara tree in Kotoku in Japan where, when we had cut through the end, to cut that piece free, it just wedged in there but it seemed to symbolise what I was...you know, this taking a tree apart. 'Planting Growing' is something which is growing near Bangor which I happened upon by chance. It's a big ash tree, so the circumference at the base is probably four or five feet. The tree had rotted out and what was left, there was a little bit left that wasn't rotten which had just fallen over and there was a limb which is now dead which is holding that remaining bit of tree up, but there's enough bark and there's enough root for the tree to be having another go and starting again. 'Lump and Length' is actually a photograph from the Kröller-Müller project in 1982 which was a very good illustration of what I mean by a lump and a length. 'Stoves and Hearths' really started in my hut down at Cae'n-y-Coed. 'Inside-Outside' is a

photograph of a window in the castle I mentioned earlier in Toulouse where it opened twice, which was...it had this feeling of being an opening and then opening again. And 'The Charring' is a detail of a charred surface. And for the Pyramid Sphere and Cube is a photograph of a beach at Llantwit Major in south Wales, and if you look carefully you can see that there is a natural breaking up of the stone on the beach into squares, and then the bits which have come loose have been rounded by the movement of the waves. Well I think that's it.

What about your current projects?

Well aged 50, 49, it's a time of reviewing, and this is why I agreed to do this interview, because it's very appropriate because we're making a catalogue raisonné at the moment that Julian Andrews is working on, and there's a very large retrospective being worked on at the Muhka Museum in Antwerp, I've got a retrospective show travelling in the United States at the moment, 'Voyages and Vessels', and it seems a good time to be reviewing and looking at what I've done to date, and to try to be clear about what the impulses were and really where, how to.....

End of F4728 Side A

F4728 Side B

It seems a good point to make a review and to begin to get some feeling of how I should proceed into the second half of my creative life.

Well I think we've certainly covered a lot of ground David. Do you think we've left out anything important?

Well we don't know, because we've been at this for so long it's difficult to remember what we have covered, but we must have covered a lot, and I'm sure it's going to satisfy anyone who wants to research the work and the life up to date.

Well it's been very enlightening and inspiring conversations, and thank you very much.

End of F4728 Side B

End of Interview