

**IMPORTANT**

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

PHILIP GERMAN-RIBON INTERVIEWED BY CATHY COURTNEY

F6763 Side A

*Recording in London, January the 20<sup>th</sup> 1998.*

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

*With Philip German-Ribon, part of the de László series.*

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

*Could you please tell me your name, where we are and today's date.*

Well the name is Philip German-Ribon, and the address is 105 Cadogan Gardens, SW3, and today is the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 1999.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

*And just to begin at the beginning, could you tell me where and when you were born?*

Yes, I was born in London on the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1912.

*And it's a very interesting surname; where does that come from?*

Well it's a Spanish name, and of course German-Ribon is the English pronunciation; in France they call it German-Ribon [FRENCH PRONUNCIATION], and in Spain, German-Ribon [SPANISH PRONUNCIATION], and the family came from Seville.

*And is it a distinguished family? It sounds as though it should be.*

Yes, we still have a street in Seville with our name and a house there and that sort of thing. And then they went to Colombia in 17-something, and there they took part in the independence of South America with Simon Bolivar, who was the great chap, the Liberator they called him after. And in about 1816 I think it was, one of our ancestors was caught by the Spanish and shot in Cartagena out there, so they played quite a prominent part, both in Spain and in South America.

*And is there still a family connection there?*

Yes, a cousin, cousins, yes.

*And has that part of history felt as though it's part of your life, or is it a story that you happen to know?*

It's part of my life, although I have lived in England all my life, but we nevertheless have retained this sort of strong connection with South America. And my mother was from Bolivia and her family came from the Basque country in Spain, so, that goes back also sort to 16-something I think, we found an old baptism and birth certificates in Spain, in the village they came from.

*And did you know your grandparents on either side?*

I knew the grandparents on only one side, because on my father's side they married in Colombia and she, my grandmother was about fifteen when they married, and they were in France at the time of the Franco-Prussian war, in the siege of Paris, and they escaped, I suppose it must have been in 1871.

*Sorry, can I just move...*

Oh sorry.

*Thank you.*

And they got as far as Boulogne, and she died there giving birth to my father at the age of 21, having had four children.

*Gosh.*

Extraordinary story.

*Gosh. And do you know any stories about her? She must have been rather extraordinary.*

Well she was rather beautiful, you know, in a very South American way, but, otherwise not much.

*And, did any stories about the war come down to you, the Franco-Prussian war?*

I think they had a terrible time in Paris, and they sort of got out somehow, I can't remember exactly how, and got as far as Boulogne. And, that's about all I know I think.

*Right. So did you meet your father's father, was that the grandparent you knew?*

No, I never met...well, if I did I was about two years old, that sort of age, I don't remember.

*Right. And so it was your mother's parents that you met?*

Yes. Because they came over to Paris, and my grandfather was a Bolivian Minister and Ambassador over here, and in Paris, and they had a house in Cromwell Road where I was born, and then they moved to Paris and they had a great house in Paris and one down in Biarritz, in the south of France.

*And were those houses part of your childhood, did you go and stay there?*

Yes, oh, every summer.

*It sounds wonderful.*

Yes, it was very nice. A lovely house, a tennis court and all that sort of thing. That was, they were called Aramayo, they're a Bolivian family, sort of mining in South America, mining in Bolivia, and also very prominent politically in Bolivia.

*And did you go to Bolivia, was Bolivia...?*

I only went about twice in my life.

*As a child or...?*

No, after.

*Right. And what was the grandfather like?*

Rather Edwardian, rather strict, and I think the other one was too, they were both terribly sort of strict and Edwardian, rather tough. And the Bolivian one of course was very much a sort of self-made man; although the family had a long history of pioneering in Bolivia and building up railways and mines and things, in fact my great-grandfather died more or less broke owing a lot of money, and my grandfather took over and finally succeeded in forming a company here in England dealing with products from the mines in Bolivia.

*So he must have been extremely quick-witted.*

I in fact hardly speak Spanish, very bad, and I was entirely brought up here.

*And did he speak English to you?*

Yes, he spoke very good English, yes.

*So presumably he was quite formal with you; he wasn't the sort of grandfather who threw you on his shoulders?*

A little bit terrified of him, yes. He was, yes, he was very nice really, but, yes a little bit difficult.

*And did you meet the grandmother on that side, was she still alive?*

Yes, she was quite different. She was Peruvian of origin, and she was very gentle and soft and rather beautiful, and sparked us all as children in a terrific way.

*In what ways, what would she do?*

Oh well we used to stay with her down in Biarritz, and she always gave us presents and entertained us, and allowed us to run the house really, she had this great house there and we could entertain all our friends, and had a wonderful time.

*It sounds marvellous.*

She was sweet.

*And so, your mother presumably had had a rather blissful childhood, or not?*

Yes, my mother was born in Bolivia, and at the age of five the family left, came to France and then London, and my mother was at a convent here, the sort of Sacred Heart Covent it was called I think in Roehampton at that time. And so she was sort of brought up as a deb here, had rather a good time I think, she loved it here.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

*And how did they meet in Paris, your parents?*

Well, I think like all sort of Spanish-South American families, when they went to Paris or London they formed a very close circle of friends, and the two families had known each other for a very long time.

*And was it a very romantic courtship, do you know about it?*

No, not too much, because my father was quite old when he married, I think he was sort of getting on. But...

*What do you mean by that?*

He was about 36 I think...

*Oh right.*

When he married, which I think it was quite old.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

*And, now it's working perfectly, how annoying this all is. And so, you grew up entirely in London?*

Yes, I grew up in London. As I say, I was born in the Cromwell Road, and we had had a farmhouse in the country, during the First World War we spent most of our time down in the country.

*Whereabouts?*

Well, a place called Five Ashes in East Sussex, not far from Tunbridge Wells, Mayfield, that part of the world.

*And was that a blissful life?*

Yes, absolutely, yes, we adored it, because we all ran wild there, I had two brothers and two sisters.

*Where did you come?*

In the middle.

*And so, was that a comfy position? It probably might be, nor is that a position where you got overlooked?*

I was a little bit sort of in between the two, and I always preferred to go with the two elder brothers but I was usually pushed off with the younger sister.

*And who was there, was your father there? Presumably not, he would have been...*

My father was working in London, and he used to come down at weekends.

*What was he doing in London?*

Well he was also the manager of the Bolivian mining company, manager in London, of the offshoot in London of it, selling the metals and this sort of thing.

*Was he involved with the London Metal Exchange?*

Not too much. It was mainly rather minor metals, sort of rather lesser known metals, which were dealt with rather more privately, separately.

*And where was his office, was his office in the City?*

Yes, in Fenchurch Street.

*And did you go there as a child?*

Yes, we used to go there.

*And what do you remember of the offices, what were they like?*

Well I remember more the refinery which we had somewhere in the East End of London, and we used to be taken there, and I used to watch all the sort of work going on, great pots and things being stirred, and mostly dealing with a metal called bismuth.

*Which I've never even heard of. What is it?*

It has terrific uses.

*For what, what is it used for?*

Well, it's used as a pharmaceutical, tummy problems, metallurgical and electronic. A very wide range of uses.

*So that, the metal would come from South America into the Port of London, would it?*

That's right, yes.

*And then was warehoused?*

Refined over here in this refinery, where you would get rid of the impurities and the pure metal was then used in all these various uses.

*So the family company would be responsible for it coming over the water, and for the refining, and would sell it at that stage?*

Yes, I think that's right.

*Right. Gosh, it's interesting. And do you have any idea what sort of quantities would be coming, or...?*

No, the whole bismuth market was very small, and still is, and we still have the same business.

*And that was what your career was as well?*

Yes, to a great extent. I was Chairman of a company over here called Mining and Chemical Products Limited, which is a subsidiary of the Aramayo Mining Company. And the mines were in fact confiscated in one of the many *coups* in Bolivia, in 1952, and we were lucky to be able to retain the subsidiary over here, which we've gradually developed and it's now doing quite well. I can show you brochures on that if it would interest you.

*Can you tell me what you remember of the warehouse and where the refining was done? Do you remember exactly where it was?*

I remember going there, yes, it was in Millwall, just after, bordering on the Thames there, and all I remember is really at the age of about six sort of going there and being terribly impressed by all these people rushing around, but I don't remember much else. I wouldn't know the technical details.

*But presumably compared to today, it would have been very antiquated.*

Absolutely. A lot of the great pots and sort of men stirring away sort of with their hands.

*Do you remember roughly how many people would have been there, was it populous, or not?*

Not very many I think.

*And would it presumably be sort of dark and...?*

Rather gloomy and dirty and messy. And I remember the Thames quite well, yes.

*And did you also go to your father's office where the administration...?*

Ah, here comes the coffee.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

One of their great products was tin, and of course that interested the Wolffs quite a lot.

*Well there was the big tin crisis wasn't there.*

Yes.

*Was your family involved with that?*

Not really. I think our mines had gone by then.

*It must have been quite a relief under the circumstances from what I remember.*

Yes.

*So, I just wanted to put on tape that you had known the Wolff family quite well, and I wondered if we could say for the tape, which were the Wolff members that you knew best?*

The ones I knew best were Gus and Jack, but I also knew Freddie, who was a bit older than me.

*What was Freddie like?*

A terrific chap. Of course he was a great athlete, and he got a, he was in the relay team at the Nuremberg, what do you call, the Olympics, which Hitler sort of presided over, you remember that, and they got a gold medal.

*And, could you have told that from being with him in his bearing and his physicality, did he look like an athlete?*

Yes, and at school he won every race.

*Oh yes, you were actually at school with which of them, those three?*

All three of them. Although Freddie was older than me, so the ones nearer my generation were Gus and Jack.

*And what were they like as school boys?*

Very good athletes, great fun.

*Were they clearly brothers, or were they very individual?*

I think they were very individual. They looked different funnily enough, although Freddie and Jack looked rather alike, but Gus looked a little bit different, he was darker.

*And did you...would you have stayed in touch with them socially, even if there hadn't been the work connection, or was the connection really maintained because of the metal?*

I think the only other connection was, we had a lot of mutual friends, and old boys' organisations and meetings and reunions and dinners, this sort of thing, and so we

used to meet at that. And then Gus sadly died rather young of cancer, which was rather sad.

*And, from the point of view of your firm, what was the role of the London Metal Exchange, and how did you feel about it?*

Well the London Metal Exchange, really I had much less to do with myself. There are more, other members of my family who dealt with that. I was really only concerned with this little company called Mining and Chemical Products Limited, which dealt really more or less a hundred per cent with minor metals like bismuth, thorium, indium, cadmium, selenium, the sort of by-product metals which really are an offshoot, they're sort of the sawdust from the base metals.

*But you said that you used to consult John Wolff's firm quite a lot; what would that have been about?*

Well, really quite often, for instance, say we needed a new managing director, or a new manager, I would very often go to Gus direct and say, 'Have you any ideas who might do this job?' that sort of thing, on an entirely personal friendly way. We remained friends.

*Right. And I haven't listened to John Wolff's recording for some while, because I must have made it probably in 1994 or something like that, but we did go into a lot of detail about the firm and how it was staffed and how it changed, and I wonder, I mean could you tell me a little about yours in terms of staff numbers and the reach of the firm as a whole? Was your part of the firm based in the same building as the other parts?*

No. Yes, well what we always had was an office, either in London or just outside London; at the moment it's in Hampshire. And then we had a refinery which up till quite recently was at Alperton, which is sort of part of Ealing, near that part, and now it's moved up to Wellingborough, Northants.

*What's provoked the moves?*

Oh I think really the question of pollution, we thought that we were too near London and polluting the air too much. And so... Also it was very old-fashioned. And so we now have a rather nice sort of modern factory up at Wellingborough.

*And does the modern factory involve computer technology, has that changed the business, or not?*

No, we do have a computer for our business but basically no, it hasn't changed much.

*So the actual processes of the metals aren't affected by computer chips?*

No, I don't think so.

*It's still a human control?*

Yes.

*Right. That's quite unusual now.*

Yes, I think so.

*And did you get the impression that the Wolff children went into the family firm willingly? Because I think some of them had reservations didn't they?*

Yes I don't really know too much about that. But, certainly when they sold out to Maranda[ph] I think that they all sort of parted company really; Freddie stayed on a bit I think and then Jack left and formed his own company as far as I remember, but I'm not really awfully conversant with that.

*But you don't remember as school boys whether they wanted to go into the family firm?*

No.

*Was there...*

And I don't think they even talked about it, not to me anyway.

*Right. And did you want to go into the family firm, was it an option, or not, for you?*

No, what happened really, I was in the R.A.F. during the war and when the war ended we had a Spanish chairman at the time, one of my uncles, and he got ill, and as I was one of the few members of the family living in the U.K. they said, 'Why don't you sort of take over?' And so I took over as Chairman, and I was Chairman for thirty years I think.

*So your first job was chairman?*

Just about. I was a director for a short time.

*But would you have wanted to go and explore other things, did you have your heart set somewhere else, or not?*

No, I was in fact a solicitor at the same time, I had trained as a solicitor and got admitted as a solicitor, and then the war came, I refused to go on with being a solicitor.

*Because you had disliked it?*

Yes.

*Oh right.*

It didn't suit me.

*Right. So, you...*

What happened then was that I formed a little company with John de László at that time, after the war.

*Right. So that leads us very neatly away from your company and into the de Lászlós. Where had you met John?*

Well I first met John, it must have been in 1919, and we were both about six years old, and we went to the same pre-prep school, it was called the Wagner School in 90, Queen's Gate, run by a charming couple, very erudite, a very cultured couple called Orlando Wagner and Monica Wagner. And John de László and I became great friends then.

*What was he like as a six-year-old then?*

He stammered a lot, was rather highly strung, full of charm, which he kept all his life. And, we had a dancing class at the school and he and my sister, who was about six I think, got off quite well together, they were great friends. And I used to go for walks with John in the parks. They had a house then in Palace Gate I think it was called, and I met his mother there for the first time, and they had a governess called Mademoiselle Bergère, I don't know why I remember the name. And we became great friends, we used to go for a walk and have tea together and all this sort of thing. I never met Philip de László, the painter, then, I think he was either still interned or just about to come out.

*And what is your first impression of the mother, Lucy?*

Terribly nice to me and very sweet, but perhaps being sort of rather Latin myself at the time I thought she was a little bit sort of cold. But absolutely charming, and the rest of my life I loved her dearly.

*And do you remember what she was like with John when he was small? Was she warm to him or do you feel that coldness was perhaps there as well?*

No, John was the youngest of the five, and so he was really rather spoilt. And I think that she certainly treated him rather as a baby for too long I think, in some ways.

*And apart from perhaps being coddled a bit, as you imply there, how else was he spoilt?*

I think his brothers also spoilt him a lot, or, and teased him at the same time a lot. But, well John was probably the one with the most charm, but perhaps the least dynamism of the lot, in a way. And the others, the elder brothers were all quite tough really, I mean they were go-getters.

*So it was a competitive family?*

Yes.

*And, what do you remember of that first house where they were living then?*

It was quite a large house, and all I remember was going up these stairs and into Mr de László's sort of study and saying hello, and then she said, 'We'll go off for a walk'.

*Do you remember at all what the house was like and what was hanging on the walls?*

No. I was only six.

*And do you have a sense of whether it was a light house or a dark house?*

No.

*And presumably you would have gone for the walk with the governess?*

Yes.

*And do you remember what she was like?*

Beyond the fact that she was called Mademoiselle Bergère and was French...

*You don't remember.*

No.

*So would it have been a Kensington Gardens walk?*

Yes absolutely.

*Right. And, did you do that often or was this just one or two occasions?*

No, quite often. And, we had a lot of mutual friends. I remember one special occasion Philip de László painted Sir Austen Chamberlain, and they were also friends with my family, the Chamberlains were, we were neighbours in the country, that sort of thing, and John and I both got invited to 11 Downing Street, which was then, Austen Chamberlain was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Of course we were terribly excited, we said, well this is fantastic, so we went off together to number 11 Downing Street, and we had a great party. And Lloyd George, who was Prime Minister, came in from next door. And I remember they had these sort of guinea pigs running around and Lloyd George had these guinea pigs sort of climbing all over him, and we had a roaring time. And that is something I remember very clearly with John, going to 11 Downing Street.

*What sort of age would you have been then?*

Seven I should think.

*And where had the guinea pigs come from, have you any idea?*

They were a sort of party thing. I don't know whether a conjuror brought them or, I can only imagine that something like that.

*So, you make Lloyd George sound as though he was rather an avuncular figure.*

He was terribly nice to us kids. I think he sort of played around with us like anything, you know, he was great fun.

*Were there other children, or was it really just...?*

Yes, a lot of other children, it was quite a big children's party.

*And do you remember why they were holding a children's party?*

Yes, because Chamberlain's daughter, Diana, or Diane[ph]... [MIC NOISE] [Oops, this has come off.]

*Oh, sorry. It's misbehaving this morning.*

Who was really, Diane[ph] who was really our friend, it was for her. It must have been a birthday party, something of this kind, I don't really remember.

*And what do you remember about Downing Street, the inside of it?*

Well number 11, all I remember is this rather large room, and conjurors and things, but otherwise, not much.

*And many little boys wouldn't really have understood what Downing Street was, and what the Chancellor of the Exchequer was. Were you quite politically aware even as children, or not?*

Not terribly, excepting that we were told about Sir Austen Chamberlain and the various jobs he had and how important he was and this sort of thing. But we were quite impressed. But beyond that, no, didn't mean much to me. And we treated them all like any other sort of friends; I mean Lloyd George we sort of kicked around and played around with, he didn't sort of mean anything.

*Did you ever meet him again?*

No, never.

*And what did you feel about his politics, in retrospect?*

Gosh, that's a difficult one. I mean he was Prime Minister during the First World War of course, which was a terrific time, and, he was very dynamic, there's no doubt about that, he was a terrific orator. But I don't think I would trust him an inch.

*Except with a guinea pig.*

Yes.

*And, what about the Chamberlains then, I mean you knew them as a child in a quite intimate way.*

Yes, absolutely, we were great friends. Diane[ph] especially, the daughter, remains, still is a friend.

*I don't know anything about her, what has her life been?*

Well, during the war they had this rather attractive little house in Sussex called Twitzgill[ph], and as I say we were neighbours and we sort of played together as children, and then finally she came to London and was a sort of great deb and so on, and went out, we used to go out together. And finally she married someone called Terence Maxell, and she now lives in the country, and he died not very long ago. So,

Diane was slightly older than me, she was more a friend of my two elder brothers. But I had a letter from her only the other day, she has a house or a flat in Onslow Gardens, and so she sort of contacted us, and come and see us.

*And she had children, or not?*

Yes, she had, I think there was two boys and a girl.

*So they were really her life, she didn't have a political life or anything?*

I don't think so, no.

*And was she close to her father? It sounds as if she would have been if he had the parties for her.*

Yes, tremendously, yes, absolutely, mm. And I think Terence Maxell wrote a book on the father, on Sir Austen.

*And what are your memories of Austen Chamberlain?*

Terribly charming, and a great monocle, and we used to sort of dress up and pretend to be Austen Chamberlain with a monocle on. And he was mad on his garden, and we were next door, we used to wander round and see him gardening, and he was terribly gallant and a wonderful chap, he always cut a wonderful rose and gave it to my mother. And we liked him enormously, and we remained sort of, my parents and them remained great friends until he died, just before the war.

*And, we've sort of touched on the shadow of the First World War; do you feel that played a very huge part in your growing up, or were you shielded from it as a small child?*

No, I think a great part. And although we were in the country we used to come to London from time to time and I remember on one occasion there was, I think it was

an airship raid on London, and I remember being terrified at the time. Otherwise, I used to try and sort of follow the war as a child, you know, we had a paper there and the Kaiser and all this, was the great villain, and on our bread we used to sort of do pictures of the Kaiser with bits of jam, two eyes and a nose and you eat the Kaiser. Ridiculous things. But, and of course when the Armistice came of course I was by then, I was sort of about six, and so then I did follow it a bit more closely but terribly excited, and came to London for the peace procession, whatever they called it, in 1919.

*What do you remember of that?*

Oh, very well. Some friends had a house in Hyde Park, just near Apsley House which is no longer existing, one of those great enormous houses, and they invited us to the balcony, and as I say I was six years old, and I sort of watched the whole procession, including Foch, and all the great British generals, Hague and the lot, and, a wonderful procession. I was dressed up in a sailor suit I think at the time.

*Do you remember actually the morning that peace was declared, do you remember that moment?*

I remember the Armistice. We were down in the country, and suddenly all the flags started going up everywhere, and, of course there was no radio or television then, and the news got around very quickly that the Armistice had gone on, and we all got hold of our flags and put them out. There was a house in a place called Frant which was between us and Tunbridge Wells, it had a reputation of harbouring Germans, and they said, 'Oh they're German spies there,' and they put out a German flag, which rather made us all absolutely livid. And funnily enough in the papers not very long ago I read in fact there were German spies in Frant, so you know, this sort of rumour which we thought was a joke in fact turned out to be probably true.

*Gracious.*

Extraordinary. The memories one has as a child are quite extraordinary.

*But do you think the values that came out of the First World War have been with you all your life? Do you think quite a lot of you was formed by that experience?*

Yes. It made a tremendous impression. And of course my father was brought up in France, and so he was sort of very French in his sort of outlook really, and he spoke French, better than Spanish funnily enough. And of course they all had friends who had been killed and all of us. Yes, it was a great... He had one friend who lost her three brothers in the war who... It was pretty dramatic. Yes.

*And if you had to try and put into words the values that came for that generation, what would you say about them?*

Gosh. I don't know really how you can put that. I think the only thing one felt then was, never again. It was so absolutely ghastly, so appalling, the massacre was so absolutely grim, which one read about and heard about even as children, that the thing was, let this not ever happen again. And then we had this Versailles Treaty, which I remember, the English paper said the French were being much too tough, were insisting on reparations and going into Germany and occupying the Rhine and all this sort of thing, and I remember then a lot of people saying this will lead to another world war, another war with Germany, because you are treating them too roughly. And funnily enough that was the view of Philip de László, I used to talk to him about this when we were in 1936 and '37, when Hitler started to re-occupy the Rhineland and rebuild his army, and Philip de László thought, well this was the result of the Versailles Treaty, it was too tough on the Germans, and why shouldn't the Germans... He was very, I wouldn't say he was pro-German, but he was very much brought up in central Europe. And you know, he had honours from, he painted the Kaiser, and he had had honours from Franz-Joseph and this sort of thing. And so his sympathies were a little bit with Germany then. And I had great arguments with him.

*That was very brave of you, because he was quite a formidable arguer, was he not?*

Yes, he was terribly nice to me, but he lost his temper quite easily on those sort of subjects.

*And was it possible to carry on discussing once he lost his temper?*

Yes, a little bit, yes. I was sort of, by then I was seventeen, eighteen. Because what really happened was, with... Did you want me to go back to sort of John de László?

*Before you do that, while we're on this subject, I mean do you think that Philip de László's feelings about Germany, they must have become more acute because of the way he had been treated in England in the First World War; do you think that was an element in it?*

I very much doubt that. But I think that he had been brought up, you know, he was Hungarian, he had been brought up there, and he kept a foreign, German accent, and he had all the family still in Hungary. And I think that his sympathies were still with that part of the world.

*And did he talk to you about being interned, and...?*

No. The sons did of course but he never did, no.

*And what did the sons tell you?*

Well, I mean, what they virtually said was that Philip, their father, was very naïve and simple in that sense, and didn't sort of really understand what was going on, and was just being rather human and natural when he tried to help his Hungarian relations and sent money to his old nanny in Hungary and this sort of thing, and it was very naïve really was the word the kept using about him, that he didn't really know what he was doing.

*And were they bitter about what had happened to him?*

Oh I think a certain amount, yes. They adored their father, they were frightened of him in some ways but they had a terrific respect for him, and they realised that he was a great painter and a genius and... Yes.

*And, I mean it was clearly a very wounding experience for him. Did you get the impression from him that it had altered, from the children, that it had altered their father, did they talk about the damage it did?*

Yes, in the sense that once he started painting again, that he was quite determined to show that he could get back into the swing and be a great painter, the greatest portrait painter, and would sort of show them. And as the result I think they felt was, that he a little bit over-did it, that he tried to paint too many pictures, too much. And of course he earned quite a lot of money then doing that, and very much enjoyed being a great social painter.

*So, the implication is that he really did, the output increased hugely to cover that, and that prior to it he had painted at a much more relaxed rate?*

I think so, and as they pointed out, some of his earlier paintings, especially of his own mother in Hungary and this sort of thing were beautiful. And after that, maybe a little bit too sort of picture-boxy, whatever the word is. He made them all beautiful, the girls, the ladies, the women.

*So, from that point of view, it could be seen as a loss of nerve really, to be making everything look rather perfect and not daring to paint perhaps with more of himself in it. Do you think that's unreasonable?*

Mm, I'm not quite sure about that. But, I really only met him, can I sort of go back a bit?

*Absolutely.*

Because what happened after Wagner School, two or three years there, John went off to Lancing, and I went to a school called Beaumont, a sort of Jesuit school in old Windsor, round there, and we completely lost touch. It wasn't until 1930 that I went up to Oxford and John was there at a tutor's I think trying to get into Balliol where his two, three elder brothers were I think, or two at least, and we met up there again.

*You had gone to do law, had you?*

Mm?

*Did you go to read law?*

Yes I did. Yes I did law at Exeter College, and I had a very great tutor called Dr Cheshire, who was the father of Leonard Cheshire who was the great V.C. group captain. And I did law, read law there. And John hadn't got in to Balliol, he was at some tutor's.

[BREAK IN RECORDING – WIFE ENTERING]

*Yes, we were just talking about, do you know if it as a great blow to John not to get into Balliol? Because he was always rather under pressure wasn't he?*

Well he did get in eventually.

*But to have to go through it in that route, when the others had been rather brilliant.*

Yes, John wasn't, let's face it, he wasn't academically brilliant at all, I mean that's the thing; he had tremendous charm and great flair, terrific energy, nervous energy. And John's great strength was, he made friends easily. And so when I went up to Oxford, in my college was a chap who had been at Lancing with John and said, 'Come and play tennis and someone called John de László is going to join us,' I said, 'My God! that name rings a bell'. And we became great friends again.

*If you hadn't known you were about to see him, would you have immediately known it was he, from having not seen him for many years?*

Yes I think so, because he still stammered and still looked very much the same and spoke in the same way, and still had the same charm. And so really from then onwards we became tremendous friends at Oxford, and in the holidays, and after Oxford we both joined the R.A.F.

*Can you just tell me a bit more about the Oxford days, tell me some stories that could make it come alive. What days do you remember, I mean, how would you have spent time with John then?*

We were at different colleges, and we had our different set of friends, and if I wanted any sort of social life it was with John and his friends. I mean you mentioned Sandy Glen, one of the, they shared rooms together, there was quite a gang of them, and madly sociable, parties and things like that.

*What sort of parties?*

Well mostly sort of cocktail parties. In those days they drank sherry chiefly I think.

*And what sort of things would have been talked about?*

What what?

*What would the conversation have been about, what was interesting them at the time?*

I think rather, very simple, normal sort of human things really, nothing very deep.

*But I mean, was the conversation mainly about girls, was it about horse racing, was it about painting, was it about work, was it about Oxford?*

Certainly about girls, and certainly, John was rather keen on learning to fly, he joined the Oxford University Air Squadron I think it was called, and there there was a quite a chap, a great friend was a horseman, so, he did point-to-points and things, and spoke about that. Spoke an awful lot about the coming war, which we felt was coming, and John had quite a few fiends among the Germans, including one called von Bohlen, who were a relation of the Krupp family, all made it a bit difficult. And there was another one called von Trott, who I met quite a lot, and he was one of those who started this *coup* against Hitler and was caught, poor chap, and was strung up finally.

*What do you remember about him?*

Terribly good-looking, and the girls all sort of fell for him completely. He was a Rhodes Scholar at Balliol, and not at all pro-Nazi, very anti-Nazi. But there was a group at Oxford of German Rhodes Scholars who were definitely doing German propaganda, Hitler propaganda, and one slightly realised this. But Adam von Trott didn't like the regime at all really, and when he got back to Germany he sort of, poor chap, he had a terrible time, not quite, very loyal to Germany in one way but at the same time horrified by what was happening, so he was sort of in between the two things, had an awful time.

*And with your knowledge of him, were you surprised that he was as brave as he was, or was that...?*

No, not really. He had great personality, great courage.

*Did you ever meet Herman Abs?*

Who?

*Herman Abs, who was a banker who was involved in some way with that plot, but he survived.*

No, I didn't know I don't think, no.

*He survived.*

No. I really wasn't in Balliol so that I only met these people through mutual friends who were in Balliol.

*I'm just going to.....*

End of F6763 Side A

F6763 Side B

*So, do you think, I mean, on the surface of it John had grown up always in England, and had English friends, and his father had a great deal of status in English society, but yet somewhere he didn't feel totally English because of all these other connections. Do you think that was an important part of him, or just a minor strand?*

No I think that was very important. And the sons all in a way tried to become terribly English and terribly British, and all of them would have loved to become sort of English country gentlemen, this sort of thing. And of course the mother was a Guinness, the banking family. And I think the sons all suffered a lot from what happened to their father, and they used to imitate him in a way, sort of German accent, they used to rather make fun of him; at the same time they were slightly frightened of him I think.

*And they had no trace of a German accent themselves?*

None at all. Oh excepting maybe the elder one, Henry; I think Henry was like a sort of rather German professor type, and the one who was probably among the other brothers the least popular. He remained, I suppose in a way rather German in a sense, but, he looked like a sort of German professor.

*And was he particularly close to Philip?*

I think they didn't get on too well, was my impression.

*So, sorry...*

In a way he rather rebelled against his father and annoyed his father.

*Which must have been a very daring thing to do, under that...*

Yes, a little bit. Yes. And his mother found him very difficult.

*In what way?*

Well he was one of these people who used to analyse everything terrifically. If you mention any subject at all, instead of leaving it alone he would go into every sort of detail and want every sort of explanation. I remember going to visit his mother once, rather old, in her older age, and she said, 'My God! I'm worn out, I've just had Henry here, and he squeezed me like, he's left me like a dried orange, I've been squeezed out completely.' And I knew what she meant. He was a very tiring person.

*And do you think he was aware of it, was he someone who was no good at sensing what the other person was feeling?*

Yes, maybe a little bit, but he was always terribly... The main thing is that he was terribly active, and he had a very successful little chemical business which he had built up, and he always wanted to learn more, he was one of these people who want to go into everything and study everything. He was rather brilliant as a chemist. But socially, I'm not so sure. I think they all found him a little bit tricky.

*But would they have been very loyal to him, or not?*

Oh yes, they were very, a very close family really.

*So you had obviously met up with John again as we've talked about at Oxford; when did you actually re-meet any of the rest of the family?*

Well, the first time was pretty agonising, because John said, 'Come to lunch,' and they had this house in Fitzjohn's Avenue, where he had a studio, and I was about seventeen or eighteen I suppose, and he said, 'Come to lunch on Sunday'. And I hadn't realised, I tried to go by Underground, and I got the Underground to Hampstead. It was pouring with rain, and I suddenly discovered that I had to walk about a mile down to Fitzjohn's Avenue, and I arrived at least half an hour late, absolutely drenched.

*What were you wearing?*

I don't think I even had a raincoat, I probably had just grey trousers, slacks, and an ordinary jacket. And I turned up into this enormous dining-room, and the whole family were there, an enormous lunch party. And Philip de László gave me the most terrible sort of furious stare as much to say, 'How can a son of mine have such an awful friend?' So unpunctual, turning up like that. But Mrs László was absolutely sweet and sort of, saw I was terribly embarrassed, and more roast beef was brought in and I was sort of settled down. What they were doing was, he was painting some of the family; I think he was painting Paul, who was the barrister, was all in his legal robes and things, and they were all there. Paul and his wife, and she was called Joey; Henry and Vi, his wife; and John. I don't think Stephen was there. Anyway, we all settled down round this great table. And that was the first, my first impression of, the first time I met Philip de László.

*Do you remember the scene well enough to describe it, do you remember the dining-room and the people?*

A very large dining-room, and it was a very big house altogether, you went into this great house. And of course after that I went there a lot, I used to play tennis there, there was a great garden, and I used to watch him painting in the studio.

*Do you remember what was on the walls of the dining-room?*

No.

*And presumably there were staff serving, it was a formal dinner, or not, lunch, Sunday lunch?*

I think there probably was staff, yes I'm sure there was.

*And what was the atmosphere?*

It was sort of, all these chaps around the table, it was quite jovial, I mean it was all really very easy-going in a sense. And Mrs de László was very kind and friendly, and she was marvellous with me.

*Was Philip definitely the head of the table, I mean was the table dominated by him, or not?*

Yes, he was in the middle of the table, and he certainly, yes, dominated the thing.

*So was it that Philip would be asking the sons questions and they would respond, or was the conversation more general than that? Was he directing things in that sense?*

I think so, I think he dominated the conversations, but at the same time when you're a whole crowd like that, everybody sort of talked away.

*But do you think, had it been everybody else there but Philip, the lunch would have been very different?*

Yes. I think it would probably have been much easier in a way.

*And do you think everyone would have felt that?*

Yes. I remember going there to lunch on one occasion when there was, I suppose he was really a picture critic, and he was mad on Impressionist paintings, this other chap, and Philip de László couldn't bear this, he was very representational. And they started an argument, I'll never forget, I was absolutely fascinated by this, Philip de László saying, 'When I see a chair, I see a chair that looks like a chair,' and this other man said, 'Well Impressionist is much more flue an easy-going'. And, they had a great argument.

*Do you remember who the critic was?*

No.

*And do you remember the outcome of the argument?*

I think they agreed to differ.

*And do you remember any paintings that de László had that weren't his own, do you remember other artists who he did like and respect?*

No. Not really. One thing he was quite keen on at that time was, he wanted to do a great painting on the suffering of women during the war, and he asked me if I knew any sort of beautiful girls who would come in, mantillas and sort of veils and things, and he built an altar, started to build an altar in his studio, which, I used to go and look at this altar. He never completed it. He did do sort of odd girls and things in this altar, but, it was never finished.

*Do you know why it wasn't finished?*

I think he died before it was done. Also he was so busy doing portrait painting that he never really got around to completing this altar.

*Have you got an impression of what it would have been, had it been completed?*

Yes, it was sort of an altar, rather sort of Catholic I suppose, with candles and things and statues and things, and the women kneeling there with great veils on their heads praying, like sort of peasant women really. And he showed me more or less the sort of sketches of it and what he planned to do, but he never completed it.

*And do you know what triggered the idea for him?*

I think the horrors of the war, which he had seen I think in Hungary and other places after the war.

*But it's very interesting, because I haven't heard anybody else talking about a painting like that that he would have set up from imagination so to speak, that wasn't dictated by a commission or whatever.*

No, he was, this was going to be his great *chef d'oeuvre* I think, he was quite determined to do this, and unfortunately he died too...he died fairly young in '37 I think.

*That's right, yes. But, were there any other occasions when he talked about doing a painting like that, or was this the only time you remember?*

That's the only one that I remember really. But I used to go into his studio and watch him painting, and what struck me was the speed at which he got a likeness. He didn't like anybody being there much but every now and again I used to sort of peep through.

*So you were peeping rather than invited?*

Yes I think a bit.

*And would you have been peeping from behind him, so you could see what was happening on the canvas, or what was it?*

Yes, because it was quite a big studio, and you would sort of creep in from behind and sort of watch. And I'm not terribly sure we didn't even go through the studio to go out to the garden, to the tennis court, and John and I would go and play tennis.

*Could you describe the studio, what you remember of it?*

I think, I seem to remember sort of parquet floors and just a big room, and great sort of canvases and things. I don't really remember.

*Where would the light have come from?*

Oh my God! I don't remember any of that.

*You don't remember if it was a glass roof or what, anything like that?*

No.

*Or electric light, or...?*

No.

*And, was there any sort of raised part, if he was doing a portrait? Where would the person being painted have sat?*

Yes I think there probably was, a sort of raised, I seem to vaguely see a sort of raised stand there, and they would sit or stand or something.

*And, do you remember at all, would they be quite a distance from him, or very close, or any sense of that?*

I think quite a distance, mm.

*And what would he wear to paint?*

He wore a sort of, like a sort of gown. Mm. [INAUDIBLE].

*Did he look like an image of a painter? I mean did it look as though he dressed up as a painter?*

Oh yes. He liked to act the part of the painter very much. He was a bit of a showman, there's no doubt about that, he liked to be the sort of, the real old-fashioned painter with his easel and, yes.

*And, can you remember who you saw him painting at all, did you know the people you were peeping at?*

No. I think at one time he had, he was finishing off one of Marina, the Duchess of Kent, and I seem to remember seeing her there, and he hadn't quite finished, and she was very beautiful.

*And when you say he was very quick to get a likeness, can you describe watching that?*

Yes, he did a sort of outline sketch straight away, and then in no time at all you sort of saw the person there completely come to life.

*And would that outline have been in paint or in pencil or...?*

I think it was in paint, but I wouldn't like to swear to that. My memory's extremely vague, it's a hell of a long time ago.

*Would your impression be that it would have been an outline with an almost single line, and a single colour, or would he have been...?*

A single line I think, mm. But there again, my memory is very vague on all that. That was in 1930, sort of, between '30 and '37.

*And do you have a sense that he would be conversing with the person, or would there be silence and awe, or would it be at all relaxed?*

I think he probably did converse with them.

*And, you obviously got to know him quite well judging by the sort of conversations you had with him.*

Yes.

*Could you describe the development of getting to know him, from this Sunday lunch onwards? Because you were...*

Well yes. After that we used to go to sort of parties. He was very sociable, and that was one of the things, he was quite determined to sort of prove that he was back in British society. And Lucy, his wife, didn't, wasn't too keen on the social life, she was much more a quiet sort of person, much more interested in the family really. And he used to give these terrific sort of parties in Fitzjohn's Avenue, and I and all my family used to be invited and we used to go there. And what I do remember was that he used to receive rather at the entrance with his wife, and we used to all sort of queue up, and he used to sort of make the most comical remarks about people as they came in. One or two were overheard, I mean quite hilariously. There was one poor girl, a friend of one of the sons, and I remember him saying, 'Are you a friend of one of my sons?' This poor girl said, 'Yes.' 'You are the ugliest girl I've ever met.' Things like this, sort of half under his breath. When I and my family came in on one occasion we were all rather bird-like, looking, sort of pointed and things, and he said, 'Ah, here comes the El Greco family.' Sort of hilarious laughter all round. And this sort of thing, he loved sort of making a show of things like this, sort of, in rather a loud voice.

*And how did you all feel about it?*

Well we thought it was great fun and we laughed.

*And do you think he would have prepared that comment? Because after all he would have known you.*

Yes, quite possible. I'm not sure about the poor girl.

*That sounds quite spontaneous.*

I suppose, yes, I think that was a much more spontaneous...

*And do you think the children thought twice about inviting people, were they quite careful about who they brought?*

I don't think they minded too much. But she was, they used to imitate her too, I mean, they all found their parents a bit odd I think, and Lucy, especially Lucy de László had a reputation of sort of putting her foot in it sometimes. I mean they used to tell me, there was one occasion where Princess Alice of Athlone came to tea, according to the sons, and she turned to her and said, 'Do you want some more tea Mrs Alice?' And of course, hilarious laughter all round. This is the sons who told me all these stories. They used to tease them a lot.

*And, do you think the Guinness part of the family was important to the sons? Because that always gets rather played out of the story.*

Yes, I think very much so. I mean, quite honestly they used to play down the Hungarian side and play up the Guinness side, it was quite natural being in the U.K. and all that. And, yes they were very proud of their Guinness connection. It was the banking side of the family, not the brewery side.

*Yes. Because, as I understood it, the Guinness family was less than delighted when Lucy got married to de László; did you pick up on any of that?*

No. That was sort of, so much before my time.

*Mm. Because there's a marvellous wedding photograph, I don't know if you've ever seen it.*

Yes, I've seen it.

*The Guinness family look as if they're at a funeral really, and there's this marvellous romantic figure in the middle.*

Oh dear.

*And the children felt Guinnesses as much as de Lászlós, they had good contact with their family and things?*

I think so, yes. And certainly they tried to develop their connections with the Guinness family, the boys did, in fact I think John at one time worked for Guinness Mahon.

*And did you know Marit Guinness, who is part of their lives, at all?*

Rings a bell.

*But she wasn't a big figure there?*

Yes.

*And what happened, once you had been greeted by the de Lászlós at their parties, where was the party actually held?*

Well, it was held right through the house, and including the studio, and there were pictures everywhere. And I remember him showing sort of the bigwigs, a lot of important people there round the studio, and the walls where all his pictures were, and he was explaining them to them, and admiring them and...

*And were people slightly tongue-in-cheek, having to stand in front of these pictures and admire them, or were they delighted to be allowed in and given effectively a very special private view?*

I think they were delighted, especially as a lot of them had been painted by him, and he made them all, the women, beautiful. I mean I remember one family, a Bolivian family called Patiño, and the girls were quite beautiful but they were about this sort of height, and he made them sort of tall, slim, beautiful, long-legged creatures. And, he made the women always very beautiful.

*And how was he viewed for doing that? I mean, was he taken seriously?*

Oh I think so, because he, the face was always fantastic, and, there's no doubt that he had terrific talent. They used to compare him perhaps not terribly favourably with Sargent and Augustus John, but I think they were a little bit jealous of him really because he being so successful and painting so many pictures in a hurry, and was the great portrait painter of that time.

*And, I mean effectively the parties were also sales parties weren't they. I mean, they were not looked at as that?*

As what?

*Well they must have been partly to drum up more business, and to push his career forward.*

Yes.

*Was it not viewed as that?*

Yes, a little bit I think.

*And would you, would your family invite the de Lászlós back?*

I don't think they did funnily enough. And I have a feeling that my family and the de László family, apart from of course John who was always at home, I don't think they ever got to know them very well.

*And would you have enjoyed the parties?*

At the de László place? Yes, very much. Among them asked a lot of young people, John and all his friends, and the other brothers and all their friends, so we used to get together and, it was very much a mixed party.

*And what would have been eaten and drunk?*

Oh I think it was sort of the usual sherries and, in those days they used to have Martinis, dry Martinis were the great sort of drink at the time.

*So it was...*

I don't remember whether there was champagne or not, I just don't remember.

*So it was fashionable but fairly moderate?*

Yes.

*And presumably there would have been either staff or caterers?*

Oh yes absolutely, it was quite a posh affair. And a lot of sort of titled people who were announced. You know, it was quite important.

*And what would people have been wearing?*

Funnily enough some men used to turn up in morning coat, but of course we young people were just in ordinary suits.

*And, did you go into the bedrooms of the children, I mean would you have gone into John's bedroom?*

Very rarely. I nearly always stayed on the ground floor.

*Because, were all the rooms full of Philip's portraits, would the boys have had them in their rooms?*

On the ground floor there were a lot of portraits around the walls.

*But you don't know whether they went all the way up the house?*

No.

*And so how did your relationship with Philip develop from this rather hostile lunch to the point where you were arguing with him about quite sensitive topics?*

Well, John being the youngest and unmarried, I used to go around with them a lot, and they used to go down to Wentworth a lot, he used to play golf down at the Wentworth Club.

*John did, or Philip did?*

Philip. And so John and I used to tag on, they had a great Daimler car and a chauffeur and we used to drive down there and lunch there. And this sort of thing, I mean, I was taken with them to quite a few places, because John being the youngest he went around, and I just sort of remember. And of course also some of the other brothers used to invite me out to various places.

*Who did Philip play golf with?*

I don't know.

*Was he any good?*

No, I shouldn't think so.

*But, so, did he take an interest in you, did he start asking you your opinions, is that how you began to debate with him, or...?*

Yes, he was quite interested in sort of talking about things generally. And he was quite interested in politics, and especially the developing problems in Europe, I mean he realised that something ghastly was going to happen, and he took the view, why shouldn't the Germans reoccupy their own territory and re-arm, and the French sort of re-armed and all that, and... I found that a bit tricky, because I was rather pro-French.

*So how did you deal with it, were you polite to him or did you really argue back?*

No I used to argue back. He used to get a bit puce in the face. We remained great friends.

*But, so he was genuinely arguing with you rather than trying to bring you out as you were growing up? He wasn't being paternal, he was really engaging?*

No, he really liked to argue, yes.

*And when he lost his temper, how did he lose his temper?*

Well he used to get rather red in the face and... But in all a very nice friendly way.

*So you never had any real hostility between you?*

No, not at all, no.

*And did he talk about his paintings?*

To me, not at all, no.

*And would he ask you about your life, or was he really pretty much totally egocentric?*

Not too much; he used to ask about my relationship with John, and couldn't I make John work a bit harder. John used to imitate him, sort of, 'Vy do you not vork, vy do you not read books?' 'Why do you always chase the girls?' this sort of thing, you know. John really I think hardly ever read a book at that time.

*And do you think he felt he should be reading books, or do you think...?*

Yes, very much so. Studying harder, instead of really enjoying his social life.

*So was he very upset by his father, or not?*

A little bit afraid of him, in a way, but admired him tremendously. Terrific admiration for his father, right up to the end.

*But he wasn't sufficiently afraid of him to do what the father wanted?*

No. I mean he was away so much, and the father was away a lot, going round the world painting, and America and everywhere, and John was at Oxford, and after that the R.A.F. really. I think John became a stockbroker for a time after Oxford, I'm trying to remember what happened to him.

*Do you remember the Arctic expedition?*

The which?

*The expedition to the Arctic with Sandy Glen.*

Yes, I didn't go on that, thank God, but he went with Sandy Glen and a few others, and we all roared with laughter, and he grew a beard, a beard.

*Oh right. Who took this photograph? Oh it's not a photograph, gosh.*

That's a painting.

*Who did that, do you know?*

I think that's by his father.

*Oh, and then John has signed it...*

It's a photograph of a painting by his father, or a sketch by his father.

*And then John has signed it to his father.*

He signed it to me I think isn't it?

*It says, 'To Philip'.*

Yes, I'm Philip.

*Ah, OK, now I understand, sorry, I was getting confused, because they seem to have given it to one another.*

Yes, you see there's the signature there.

*The signature's by the father, yes.*

Does it give a date there? No that's the date of the...

*'32, November '32 I think. That's the date he signed it to you. I think there is a date there, which is also '32. Right. And do you know where the actual picture is?*

I wonder whether John's family have it.

*And is it very like John?*

Yes, at that time.

*And, would he have found it difficult sitting for his father, would it have been a bit agonising, or not?*

To do what?

*To sit for his father.*

No, I think he got so used to it, ever since he was a child, being the youngest he was the one who was always being painted, as a sort of child, eating tea and things at the table and all that. And so no, he was quite used to it.

*And would he have been painted by his father out of affection, or was the father trying to discover something through painting?*

I think his father was very fond of his sons, and really sort of quite proud of them; they were all really very successful, especially the older ones.

*And was Philip the sort of person who would suddenly sketch one of them when they were doing something, or was it always set up formally?*

I think it was fairly formal, from what I remember.

*So he wasn't the kind of artist that couldn't stop drawing, and if necessary drew on the plates if there was nothing else to hand?*

I don't think so, no, I think it all had to be done rather formally.

*And did he ever draw or paint anything for you?*

No. The nearest to the family, he did an aunt of mine in Paris.

*And what do you think of the paintings, do you like them?*

Yes, I thought that the likeness was amazing, I liked them very much. You always recognise them, perhaps they're a little bit too much the same, they had this sort of, what you call it, tufter thing sort of round the neck, I don't know what you call that thing, sort of... And he always saw that his paintings, he had this, all the women had the same sort of appearance.

*Well that was one of the things he seemed to have done very often, was to not have the sitter wearing their own clothes, but to actually provide them with a costume.*

Yes.

*So setting up something slightly artificial right from the beginning.*

And this sort of scarfy thing he would tuck round their necks.

*Mm. And was that regarded as something very particular to him, or was it regarded as normal practice?*

I think at that time it was fairly normal. It wouldn't be now I don't think.

*Mm. And, I mean what do you think the impact was of his portraits? If you were to see perhaps a group of them now, do you think it would tell you more about styles of portrait painting at that time than it would about the individuals in the paintings, or is that too brutal?*

I think a bit of both. The likeness was always terrific, and, no, I think it was...they tell you a lot about the people who were painted.

*So he didn't make them so much more beautiful than they were to the point of a complete distortion?*

No, the likeness was always there. But they were at their best.

*Indeed. And do you think he, as well as making them look rather more beautiful, might he imbued them perhaps with more intelligence than they had, would that come over, or do you think that's not...?*

I don't think so. I think where that came over was in the men much more, people like Austen Chamberlain and people like that, and in his early paintings in Hungary there, he did one of the Pope, or one or two of the Pope, and they've got a lot of character. But I think in his social women, they were just rather beautiful.

*And that's really rather how he regarded women?*

Yes, I think so.

*And what did you think about the Chamberlain portrait, did you think that succeeded?*

I thought it was marvellous, it had a lot of character, and... He did...I think his men were very very good indeed, he got a lot of character in them. But I'm not a connoisseur of painting, I mean I'm not a critic at all.

*But it never occurred to your family to commission a portrait, it wasn't something they would have done?*

Excepting this aunt in Paris.

*Yes. And did you have family portraits, were you painted as a child for example?*

No. I don't think my family went in for this at all.

*What was on the walls of your house?*

Well, eventually we had these sort of Impressionist paintings, because I had an uncle in Paris who had a great collection, which he left to my family, part of it, and so they had a lot of these sort of things. But otherwise, at home, I don't remember much, nothing very special.

*And would you have gone to galleries? I mean, knowing about Philip's paintings, did that make you want to go and look at, say, the National Portrait Gallery?*

Yes, I think so, especially, you know, when John would say, 'Come along, there's a portrait of my father' in this place or that place, 'let's go and have a look.' And of course he found this wonderful entrée, he would go to Spain for instance where his father had painted all the royal family, and John went and saw Don Juan as he then was, now the King, and have a look at all your, 'paintings by my father,' and that was a wonderful entrée to this. Anywhere he went, practically every great house in England there was a portrait.

*And did you go too sometimes?*

I went sometimes, yes, it was great. I don't remember, but I seem to...

*You don't remember where you went?*

No.

*And, as I understood it, Philip was very keen that John should go on the Arctic expedition, to make him a man; does that ring true to you?*

I never heard that. But John himself was very keen, and he very much wanted to prove that he was British, and was able to...that's why he joined the R.A.F. squadron and all this sort of thing, he was very brave, awfully good really, and quite determined. Of course Sandy Glen was a great friend.

*What was he like at Oxford?*

Sandy Glen? Oh he was a tremendous friend to all of us. But, I don't know, nothing special.

*And did you all carry on being quite close friends, did that persist?*

Another one called Eddie Shackleton, who became Lord Shackleton, and he remained a great friend, I saw him quite a lot, till he died not very long ago. Can you switch off?

*Certainly can.*

[BREAK N RECORDING]

*Did you think that going on the Arctic trip changed John, as Philip hoped it would?  
What did you hear about the expedition?*

No, I don't think it changed him, but I think it was a very good experience for him. He really toughed it out there, grew a beard, became rather macho. But he never changed, he remained exactly the same, charming person.

*And you and he remained close friends throughout his life?*

Yes.

*And what was the impact on the family of Stephen and Diana's accident? It must have been enormous.*

Oh, yes, absolutely ghastly, absolutely grim. Because they were very popular. And it was a terrific shock.

*What do you remember of them?*

He was full of charm, great fun, and very sociable. Diana was also very sociable, and they were sort of a sociable young couple of that period, which was pre-war wasn't it really. I'm trying to remember what date he was killed.

*I'm not sure I can remember. But, I mean some mothers, particularly, would not have been able to go forward after that, but Lucy somehow...*

I think her mother suffered terribly from this. In fact I'm not sure that her body wasn't found in the Thames, the mother. After this, whether she committed suicide or, I don't know. It was a tragic thing.

*And how did Lucy and Philip cope with it?*

I'm trying to remember whether he was still alive.

*I think he was, yes. Oh perhaps I'm wrong, I thought he was.*

I don't really remember when they were killed. Was he still alive? I'm a bit vague about all that.

*And did John change as a result of it?*

No, I mean obviously it was a great blow, I don't think he changed much.

*And how did he develop then?*

Well, when the war came finally, and John married, I suppose it must have been about '37, '38, or even '39, maybe, to Peggy Cruse, and then the war came and he joined the R.A.F., and then finally when he was taken off flying, he joined the R.A.F. Intelligence, and I joined him in that eventually and I was in various squadrons, and finally ended up with him in the Air Ministry looking after the French section of the Air Ministry, coping with General de Gaulle's air force, and so we were there together for a long time.

*And did you see a side of him through working with him that hadn't been apparent before? Because that was a different kind of relationship.*

Yes, we got on terribly well, and, I think that he was very active, very energetic, and his great strength really was his facility with which he made friends; in fact some friends used to say that John should really have formed a company called Contacts Limited and sort of just dealt with sort of introducing people and meeting people, and finally he did this at the end, he became a, he joined a head-hunting firm, which really is what he should have done from the beginning I think, because this was his great forte. He was marvellous at meeting people and getting to know them and getting the best out of them, and had a terrific number of friends and acquaintances.

*And presumably that world would have been very alien from Philip de László's world, so it would have been very hard for him to find where he should have been really, it would have been...*

Yes, that's right. I'm trying to think, I'm a little bit vague about what John did after Balliol. I think he joined a firm of stockbrokers, Messel & Co.

*Oh right.*

The firm I think was called. And he must have done that for quite a few years, until the war came.

*And do you think his father would have encouraged him in something like that, or would he have been rather disappointed that his son had gone into stockbroking?*

No, I think for John he probably thought this was not a bad training. Certainly didn't discourage him I don't think.

*And was John just devastated when his father died, or was there a certain weight that lifted off his shoulders?*

I think he, yes, he was devastated, because he thought his father died too young, and he was still painting very well. But, in a way, yes, he felt perhaps a little bit freer. And he adored his mother, and they got on terribly well. And, yes, maybe the whole family felt slightly a weight lifted.

*And, John had marriage problems too didn't he?*

Yes.

*And how did he cope with those?*

Not very well I think.

*What were his homes like when he left the de László household, what was his own domesticity like?*

Well very attractive really. He had the little house, a place called Wyndham Place off Bryanston Square somewhere, somewhere round there. Unfortunately it was very short-lived, because they were there... I think they only married in '39, and then of course the war came and so, then there was the awful business of going here and there, in the R.A.F., and then, when he was in the Air Ministry they bought a little house near the Wentworth Club, Virginia Water.

*Was that really because of the connections with the golf club? It seems a strange place for him to have gone.*

I don't think there was any connection with that, it was just a question of finding somewhere sort of near London.

End of F6763 Side B

F6764 Side A

*And how long were they in that house for?*

I think they were in that house during the whole of the war, because their marriage didn't really come to an end until about '45 I think, and I was out in South America at that time, as John and I... My mother was in Bolivia where she had had a stroke, she wasn't well, so as soon as the war was over I went out there. I married in '45, took my wife out there, and John and I formed a little company called Ribon-de László, with the idea of doing trade with South America.

*In metals or in everything?*

No, everything. John had very good connections with business here, and his brother Paul was an English lecturer at Marconi and all this sort of thing, and a lot of sort of connections with industry through the family and other ways. And I sort of looked after the South American side, trying to sort of sell these products. And so for about a year we did this work, myself out there and John looking after the U.K. side, and John came out there and joined me out there, just after he separated from his first wife, Peggy. And he was very depressed, and they had three children of course which was very disturbing, and Peggy went off with one of the Hennessey family, and a great chateau in France and took the children. And so this was an awful blow for John.

*Had he any idea it was coming or did it come out of the blue to him?*

He may have had a vague idea I think. Yes I think perhaps he did, felt things weren't going too well.

*And was he close to his children, was he a...?*

Yes, yes very close really, so this was part of the trouble.

*And when you say he was depressed, how did that show itself?*

Oh, sort of moody and worried and what's going to happen, and that sort of thing. I suppose it was quite good for him to get away with me to South America, we had quite fun out there, he was there for quite a few months, in the Argentine and in Bolivia, he came to stay with my family, my mother's house in La Paz. And then he came back and we carried on this business for quite a long time together, and eventually we developed a business in Venezuela together, formed a company out there, a manufacturing business.

*What were you manufacturing?*

Mostly steel furniture. And that again had a Guinness connection, because Ned Guinness, who was a sort of cousin of John's, in the same branch of the family, had been sort of chairman of a company called Sankey Sheldon which made steel furniture, a subsidiary of G.K.N., Guest Keen & Nettlefold. And so we had their agency in South America and so finally in Venezuela we decided to produce this furniture, which we did for quite a few years after, until there was a *coup d'état* out there, the usual thing, and the whole thing sort of collapsed. But we carried on together for quite a long time. And then John started a sort of, a business with reports on European companies, which I wasn't too much involved in and by then I was much more concerned with my own family business, buying of chemical products, but we remained in the same office and sort of helped each other.

*You know I'm slightly confused about John, because he was supposed to be not very academic, and compared to, say, perhaps Stephen who was rather brilliant, he was...*

He wasn't an intellectual, John, let's put it that way.

*But he must have been pretty agile to have been able to adapt to all these things.*

Very. Very agile, and not at all stupid. And really quite clever in many ways, you know. He was very practical, he solved every problem, and he was very persistent and, pretty good.

*So, when he was not working very hard at Oxford, that wasn't something that carried through; he wasn't always deflected from the business world because he was having a great social life, that rather changed?*

Oh absolutely. No, after he had married especially, of course the war came, during the war he was very active. I mean during the war he was really awfully good in the office, and was very active and did very well.

*And so as a business partner, you had no qualms about it, he was completely reliable?*

No, not at all. I mean he was, in a way he was very much the contact man, knew a lot of people, and we worked very well together.

*So had there not been the coup, you might have continued in that area quite happily?*

Yes, and then we sold out our business in Venezuela, and then the business more or less sort of came to an end, and so John then went in for much more analysing companies in Europe, an analytical business. And then, after that we got involved with American stockbroking firms, a firm called Esterbook[ph] who asked us to set up an organisation in the U.K., and so for quite a few years we went into stockbroking. I wasn't involved in that though, I was in the same office as John but he really did that.

*And he had a flair for that as well, or not?*

Not so much for that as so much as organising the company. We had a lot of sort of trained stockbrokers who worked for us.

*And would he have been happy doing that, or was it a means to an end, would he have enjoyed it?*

I think he quite liked the admin side, but he wasn't really terribly involved in the actual buying and selling of shares. We had sort of experts doing that. Then following that, finally John joined this firm of head-hunters.

*Which firm was that, do you remember?*

Yes, Shepherd and something.

*And that was where he was very happy, you think?*

Yes, I think it was much more his line really, but it was a little bit too late, because by then he was getting on in age and so he had lost the contacts that he had had previously in all the... If he had done that twenty years earlier I think he would have been a great success.

*And did his domestic life become happier?*

Well then he remarried, Rosemary Townsend, the ex-wife of Peter Townsend, and that was I think very happy for quite a few years, they had two children, one who painted that picture out there.

*Could you just tell the tape about that picture? Could you tell the tape about that picture?*

Yes. Piers de László was the younger son, the son of John de László and Rosemary Townsend that was, and, I became great friends with him and sort of helped him with one or two things, and to thank me he said, 'I'll do a painting of your drawing-room,' which he did, he came here and did it, and we had a great laugh. He is quite a chap, Piers de László.

*In what way?*

Well he never married, lots of girlfriends, and paints like mad. He now lives in Spain and Portugal most of the time.

*And he presumably never knew Philip, but do you think...*

No he never knew him.

*...it is in chance that his grandfather was a painter, or do you think it's something John in a way talked to him about, or handed to him, or do you think it's something in the genes?*

Well funnily enough his mother Rosemary started painting also, and I think this probably set him off. And Piers found that he was really much better than his mother at the painting and carried on from there, and he went to a school of art here in England, and started producing very good stuff.

*But would he be interested in Philip, would he ask you about Philip?*

Yes, very interested in that.

*And do you know what he thinks of Philip's paintings?*

I don't think he's ever commented too much to me about that. But Piers doesn't paint portraits quite so much, he paints much more interiors of houses and exteriors of houses. He gets extraordinary good light.

*And was John close to him?*

Yes, very.

*And was glad that he was a painter?*

Oh yes. In a sense, he said, you know, John used to laugh and say, 'My God, I had a father who did nothing but painting, then I had a wife who took up painting, and now I have a son. It's too much, surrounded by sort of painters.'

*And he had no desire to paint himself?*

No. No talent at all that way. John was very much a down-to-earth practical person.

*And did he have Philip's paintings in his house? What was his home with Janet like?*

Yes he had lots of paintings.

*Sorry Rosemary.*

Absolutely, yes, all the family inherited masses of these paintings. And they're now sort of scattered among the family, the younger ones.

*But that inheritance again could have been a bit of a weight. Did he want to have Philip's paintings in his homes?*

Well I think he admired them a lot. And I think that he sold one or two when he was in need of cash. But, he was a great admirer of his father's paintings, so it was terrific.

*Did he have other paintings?*

Not that I can remember, it was practically all his father's paintings. He may have had his wife's paintings, Rosemary's, one or two of those.

*And was his house very very different from the house he grew up in? Where did he live in the end anyway?*

Gosh, my memory's awful. Their main house was down in Kent, down in the country, a place called Plaxtol, when they were together, and all they had was a little sort of *pied-à-terre* studio here in London, but in the house at Plaxtol in Kent they certainly had lots of their father's paintings there. That was a very nice house in a village, and a lovely garden, and they had everything there, all the family furniture, the paintings and everything, yes, down there.

*So in that sense there was a lot of continuity?*

A lot of what?

*A lot of continuity in his life in that sense.*

Yes.

*There was no rebellion against it?*

No, none at all. No, they...

*Right. And, someone we haven't talked about very much is Paul. What was Paul like?*

Paul was a dear, he was a barrister, also rather analytical, and you know, if you said to Paul, 'I live twenty miles out of London,' and he would say, 'Oh it isn't twenty, it's twenty-one-and-a-half'. But I was very fond of Paul, and he was very kind to John, and...

*In what way?*

Well, when John, all his matrimonial problems, John was alone, he used to have him at Christmas, and he used to have me, because my family were out in South America. And Paul was married to Joey McConnell I think she was called, a firm called Booker Brothers McConnell. And they had a great house, one of these Lutyens houses down

in Surrey, was it Surrey or...yes, somewhere in Godalming or somewhere like that. And at Christmas they used to invite me down, with John we used to go down there, and I was very fond of Paul, he was a dear.

*And, what was his relationship with Philip, was that easier than John's?*

I think that in a sense it was rather a business relationship too, as the father used to count on Paul a lot, he was very solid and a lawyer and a barrister, and he used to advise his father a lot on legal matters. And so I think they were quite close.

*Did de László have a sort of agent as well? I mean he showed with various galleries, but was there anyone dealing with the business affairs? Because they must have been pretty huge.*

Yes I think there was. I'm not terribly sure about who that was. Mm.

*And it wouldn't have been Lucy, Lucy wasn't in any way overseeing things?*

No, I don't think so.

*Right. And how close did the family stay after de László's death? Did the brothers and the mother cohere still, was it as much a family afterwards?*

I think so, yes. She ended up in the Onslow Court Hotel, near South Kensington, and that's where we all used to sort of meet.

*What was it like?*

After the war, pretty awful. But nice to go and have dinner there with her and lunch there. I'm trying to think what happened then.

*Why did she end up there?*

Well I think she didn't quite know where to live at the time. I'm trying to sort of think. She was old, and not very well, and they thought she was better off in a hotel where she had all the service she could get.

*So it wasn't that there was not enough money for her to have a home?*

No I don't think so, no I think she was quite well off.

*Mm. And what was it like going to have meals with her? Were you doing it because you really wanted to see her, or because you knew she was alone?*

Well a bit of both. I was very fond of her and I used to like going there, and sometimes John would come too and we would go and have dinner or lunch with her.

*And what was it like?*

Well, you know what these sort of hotels are like. It wasn't very attractive, but I enjoyed seeing her.

*And what was her state of mind, did she have a life after Philip?*

Yes, I think she lived very much in the past, I mean she adored Philip, you know, and it was...

*And did she have many people going to see her, was she isolated, or not?*

No, I think a lot of people, and particularly her sons who were very very good to her. Of course by then Stephen was dead, and Henry was sort of getting on, and he was the one who she found a bit difficult. But the others used to go certainly a lot.

*Mm. And you've talked about Pierre. What about John's other children?*

Which one?

*John's other children. Did he...?*

Oh Charlotte was the other girl, Piers and Charlotte were the two by Rosemary, the two last ones. Before that there was Martin, this is through Peggy, Martin, Lavinia and Camilla.

*And did he maintain a relationship with them?*

Yes. A very very friendly relationship with all of them.

*So he wasn't putting pressure on his children in the way that Philip had put pressure on him?*

No, well John had a difficult time there, because the three elder ones for a long time were in France, and then when finally, I don't quite know what happened, Peggy then divorced Hennessey and the three children then, or at least two of them came to live over here. One married over here, in fact Martin, Martin married over here, two of them married over here.

*And what did they do, what became of them?*

Well, Martin had a business, which he still has, a sort of travel agency, and is married to Mary, and they have a little house in Fulham. And they have their own little family. And the same with Camilla, she married someone called Kingsley, and they lived for a time just outside London, and they now live in Sussex, and they have their own family too.

*And Lavinia and Charlotte?*

Charlotte married someone who was very much a stockbroker, a banker, they live out in, just outside London in Barnes or somewhere like that, Charlotte. And Piers is the painter one.

*And Lavinia?*

Lavinia never married, she lives in Paris, a flat in Paris and I think they have a house outside Paris.

*And do you think, obviously for Piers there's a connection but I mean, do you think it matters to the others that they had a grandfather who was Philip de László?*

Oh yes I think they all have a great respect and admiration for him, yes absolutely, yes, it left its mark, certainly.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....take to the social life, but perhaps she had to do it for him, and in a way was rather naïve socially.

*Did you get an impression that she would have liked more contact with her own family than she actually had?*

Yes. I think she was torn between the two. She had to look after her husband, number one, and he had a very hectic life with the painting life and travelling all over the place to do these, and she used to follow him around. And I think the result of that, the children were very often palmed off with someone called Aunt Gee; I'm not terribly sure whether she was a real aunt or not, but she was a wonderful old lady, used to take them all. She was very strict with them, they used to go and stay with her in the holidays and things when the parents were wandering around Europe. Aunt Gee was quite a character.

*And do you think John would have considered himself to have had a happy life?*

I think until he married, he had a very sort of happy childhood with his family, Oxford, and all that. Yes, very much so. And was very spoilt by the family as the youngest. Sadly his marriages were a bit mixed up.

*The second one as well?*

Yes.

*And did he have a relationship with his grandchildren, did he know them quite well?*

Yes. Perhaps fairly distant but yes, he did sort of keep up with them.

*So, what really mattered to him towards the end of his life, what were the things that would have given him pleasure?*

I think probably his younger children, Piers and Charlotte, were the two he got quite close to at the end, actually, particularly Piers, the painter one. And he did all he could to help them.

*But he didn't have any great leisure pursuits of his own, he didn't have anything that developed like that?*

He had a great collection of friends, and then of course his final marriage, he married Judy Price I think she was called, and they went off and lived in the Cotswolds, and so then I rather lost touch; he used to come up to London and we used to have lunch once a week in our mutual club, Brooks's Club, but basically he lived down in the country there.

*And was that a happy marriage?*

I like to think so.

*And so in terms of your life, was he your closest friend, or not?*

Yes, I think. Our lives were touched all the way through, I mean we were very close in everything. Prep school, Oxford, R.A.F., business, right to the very end.

*And if you had to use five words to describe him, what would they be?*

Great charm, that's two words. A very loyal friend.

*And if you had to use five words to describe Philip, what would you use?*

Slightly lost between his Hungarian past and adoption of British life. I know that puts it rather funnily but, he was certainly torn between the two things. He wanted to be accepted by British Society, and yet he loved his early life in Hungary and his family in Hungary, and his associations there.

*And Lucy?*

Lucy was...I think found life a little bit difficult perhaps, in a way also in this sort of same sense. Very keen on her children, marvellous mother, and a terribly nice person. But maybe found life a bit difficult, I would have thought, all the sort of social life and the painting side and all that, but adored Philip and simply gave all her life to him.

*And what do you feel about the role of the portrait painter in society now, in the 1990s?*

I think there could be a revival a bit of this rather representational painting. Of course the difficulty is that most of the people he painted are probably dead, and so one wonders how much... I suppose the children of those who were painted will find the pictures desirable and all that. But as paintings, as such, I wonder sometimes.

*But what about contemporary portrait painters, do you think there's a place for them in society?*

Yes, I would have thought so, rather less.

*Have you commissioned any?*

No.

*And, we've been sitting doing this recording in front of an image which I'm rather intrigued by, and I wonder if you could describe it and tell me what it is.*

Funnily enough it says at the back here, 'Artist and his family in his studio at The Willows, Tilford, Surrey.' I never heard of that. At The Willows. I would have thought that was in his place in London, Fitzjohn's Avenue. I don't understand that.

*And did you ever see the painting?*

No, I don't remember ever seeing it.

*So can you just go through for me who is who, and tell me a little?*

Yes, well there's the painter, there's Lucy; that's the elder one, Henry; that's Stephen; that's Paul; that's Pat; that's John.

*And is that how you remember them?*

I remember John at school at that age, that's how he was at the pre-prep, and after that my new connection with them was much older, they were all by then sort of barristers and things and getting on in life.

*But would you have recognised them from that?*

I recognise John and the parents. I'm not terribly sure about the sons.

*And we haven't actually talked about Pat at all.*

That one.

*What was he like?*

A great go-getter, terribly active, an economist. Married a delightful wife, Deborah Greenwood I think she was called, Lord Greenwood's daughter. She was beautiful. And they were very sociable. And Pat was quite determined to get on in life and have a great social life and be a success and make a fortune, which he did do, he was very successful financially, he made a lot of money. And, I was very fond of him, but he was a little bit, I don't know what the word is, sort of, too keen on getting on financially perhaps, I don't know how you put it. But terribly nice to me, and when I used to, through John's younger son, he was always receiving us in his house and great parties and things. He was a great party-giver.

*And, I don't know if it's because of the way the postcard has been printed, but it's quite interesting to me that Philip de László seems to have put himself very much on the edge of this group. And that's presumably not how he felt about himself, he felt he was the centre of everything didn't he?*

Well, I think so really, yes. Yes, and he's very young there, I mean I didn't know him at that youngish age; when I knew him he was much much older.

*And the other striking thing is the fact that there is no girl child, it's a very male picture really isn't it. That must have been hard for Lucy.*

Yes. And I think so much so that they rather treated John as a girl. In a sense, he used to say that himself, that they used to dress him up in skirts sometimes even.

*As a joke, or not?*

Well I'm not so sure about that.

*And what did he feel about it?*

Didn't like it at all I don't think.

*But did it feel like going into a very male house? It must have done really.*

Yes I think so, very much.

*So might Lucy have been lonely on one level?*

She got on very well with her sons and they all adored her and treated her terribly well. I mean great respect, they loved her. But the same time jokingly they sort of imitated her, but they did of both the parents, you know, they used to sort of, the funny sort of way she...like the story of Mrs Alice. I mean they used to treat this as sort of great fun, they used to laugh at their parents, but they adored them both.

*And did you get the impression that Lucy had a close female friend, did she have close people outside the family, or not?*

Not that I can remember at all, no.

*And would she have been involved in charity work or local activities or anything else, was she...?*

Not that I remember.

*She as really given over to Philip?*

Entirely to him.

*Right. And in this picture, John's holding a cricket ball. Was he an athlete or is that a piece of decoration?*

No, but we used to go to the park and sort of play ball together and that sort of thing, and run around. At Wagners we used to do gym and things together. And, I remember he had a bow and arrow which we had great fights on, because he wouldn't let me use it much.

*Did he fight, did he have physical fights with people?*

No, not really.

*And there's a dog, which I seem to think was something de László was very good at painting.*

I don't remember at all.

*Right. But I have heard there were columns in the studio which, there's one here, do you remember the columns?*

That's why it makes me think that was a studio, and not somewhere in The Willows in the country.

*But if there were columns, it makes it sound as though the studio itself was an imposing room.*

It was. I think he sort of built up this room with columns and things, it was quite a big room.

*And I've been rather rigorous with you. Is there anything else that's crept into your mind while we've been talking?*

Oh, no not really. As I say, my sort of memory of him was very short, just seven years. And, he was very nice to me, but the sons I think at times found him a bit difficult as a father, because he was quite strict, and was critical of them. But at the

same time he was very happy when the sons did well as they did, I mean you know... And he went up to Balliol I think didn't he, because he painted the Archbishop of Canterbury for Balliol College, and he went up there and they had a great sort of party, and there was one rather funny thing happened I think, that, when the announcer announced His Grace, the Archbishop of Canterbury to sort of get up to talk, there was a voice in the distance said, 'Disgrace' in the background. Everyone sort of roared with laughter.

*But that wasn't Philip's voice?*

No. Finally Philip made a very nice little speech, how his four sons had been at Balliol and how attractive it all was and all that. It was a very nice party I think.

*But would he actually have come up to Balliol to see his sons ever?*

I don't remember him coming up to see John, but this was a very formal dinner party for the Archbishop.

End of F6764 Side A

F6764 Side B

*And would Lucy have come up to see John?*

No. Not that I remember when I was there.

*So in that sense, the family relationship was to do with the children coming back in to the family, rather than the parents being interested in their outside activities?*

Yes. I think though they were so taken up with the career of the portrait painter, and trying to recover his position after the horrors of being interned, that I think they were concentrating both of them entirely on the painting life, and I think the boys would have felt this a little bit. I mean, I think John did go on one or two trips with them.

*But there might have been times when they felt rather out of the picture and neglected.*

A little bit. And they were palmed off with this Aunt Gee.

*But also in adult life, if there wasn't much interest shown in the detail of their activities, that must have been a bit hard.*

No, the painter was a little bit critical of John, not sort of studying enough, it was like sort of interest there, because John was always out, he never looked at a book.

*And when you say that he was strict, can you think of any instances? Are you talking about over money or behaviour or...?*

I think sort of, in the house, I mean you know, he just wanted to know what they were doing and why they weren't working hard and all this sort of thing. I think that the boys used to avoid him as much as possible, my feeling was. An image.

*So he was quite intrusive?*

And they went off on their own. And he was so busy with his own painting that he didn't really have much time.

*But was there any conflict? I mean Lucy sounds a much more gentle person.*

Oh yes.

*So would she have been trying to protect them and would she ever have disagreed with Philip about the way the children were treated?*

I never saw any signs of that at all. I mean she really was so taken up with him that he was the kind of idol to her, and she just really did, followed him around, did whatever she could for him, for his career, especially after that awful war business.

*And did you have any impression whether their staff stayed with them a long time? Was there loyalty in that sense, or not?*

Oh he had a marvellous sort of secretary chap who looked after all his paintings and all the technical side, and the paperwork and all this sort of thing. I've forgotten his name now, but he stayed right to the end, and he was great.

*And what about domestic staff, were there people who were part of the household almost, or not?*

I don't remember anybody. That doesn't ring a bell at all.

*But equally you don't remember lots of turmoil because people always were walking out because Philip had been sharp with them or something?*

No.

*In those practical terms, was it a house that ran quite smoothly?*

I very much doubt it, but I don't sort of remember too much about that. Whenever I went to a meal there it was always very good, very nice, very well served, and very attractive.

*And do you have any memory of how Philip would have been with somebody serving him, was he someone who would have been relatively tolerant, or was he rather off-hand?*

No, I don't know at all.

*And did you ever see him in other social contexts other than in his home?*

No, I think the only thing were sort of clubs like Wentworth Club, but, not too much social contact there I don't think. Used to lunch together and all this. No.

*But in other words he was usually in his own domain, and usually in control there?*

Yes. Absolutely. And apart from that, of course he went off to various great houses painting. I saw none of that at all. And then he went to Spain and painted the royal family, he went to Greece, he went to Rome, he was all over the place, Hungary. He was away a lot.

*And did you pick up, I mean obviously he had these great connections, but that's not quite the same as their being friendships, and you go in and you paint a portrait and there is a certain intimacy, and then you come away again. Did you get any impression of that slight ambiguous position to be in, was that playing into his personality?*

I wonder whether he had any great personal friendships. I think that the connection with people like Sir Austen Chamberlain and all that was painting the portrait. Although Austen Chamberlain was terribly kind to him and did sort of help him when

he was interned and went as a witness and all that, in his favour. But whether there was any sort of personal friendship, I'm not, I doubt it a bit I think.

*And you say Lucy...*

But I was too young to sort of see that side of things.

*Mm. You say Lucy adored him; did he adore Lucy?*

Oh yes I think they were great together.

*So he did take care of her as well as she of him?*

Yes, they hardly ever parted. I mean she went on every expedition, every painting, whatever painting he had to do, any part of the world, I mean she was always there.

*But it wasn't just that that was convenient for him, I mean he wanted her there as his companion?*

I think so, I mean, I was too young to sort of be quite sure about that, but they seemed to be very close to me.

*So it...I mean there's two ways of looking at the lack of friendships. One is that there was some sort of failure to make friendships, or the other way is to say that they were each other's greatest friends and didn't particularly need outside friendships.*

The thing is, his whole career was the painting, and so anybody he knew were people he had painted. Whether he became personal friends of any of those I don't know enough, but my impression was that it was entirely a painting relationship.

*And therefore, for instance the parties you were remembering, the friendship came into it through the friends of his children.*

The children were much more open and easy-going from that point of view, and they had lots of girlfriends and boyfriends, and quite a sort of jolly time. And I rather suspect that the father's relationships were much more people he had painted. How close he was to any of them, I don't know, but I am not so sure.

*Is there anything you would like to add?*

No. I've said more than enough.

End of F6763 Side B

End of Interview