

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.

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**THE NATIONAL LIFE STORY COLLECTION**

**INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET**

**Title Page**

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[F7805 Side A]

*Recording with Humphrey Spender at his home on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 1999.*

[break in recording]

*I'm just wanting to do a little sound test. Can you tell me whether you did any work yesterday?*

Probably not nearly as much as I intended to.

*And what sort of hours might you have hoped to work?*

I am always aiming at working from half-past nine in the morning until... Really, my kind of work demands good light mostly, but let's say until seven o'clock or so.

*Gosh, that's a very long day.*

Which is quite a long day.

[break in recording]

*To begin at the very obvious place, and say that we've documented it on tape, can you just tell me your name and where we are?*

My name is John Humphrey Spender, and we are at a place called Ulting in, which is about four miles from Maldon and about six miles from Chelmsford, and we're sitting in a house designed by Richard Rogers, which was completed in 1969, very early in 1969. And I used to live in the vicarage next door, this site of the modern house being part of the vicarage garden. And we came to the vicarage in Ulting in 1948.

*What brought you here?*

Because we lived in Lavenham, which is a very complicated story, and Lavenham, we lived in a house called The Great House in Market Square in Lavenham, and Lavenham very quickly became a kind of tourist industry, suffered from a tourist invasion, and since the house was in absolutely the centre of Lavenham, we found people simply peering in through our windows, even through gaps in what I hate most in the world, lace curtains, which I had to put up. And we decided that that reason, combined with the fact that there was a very mysterious connection between the house and between my wife's past history, which made her rather uncomfortable, we decided to go. At which point I looked around for another property, and dealt with various agents, and an agent wrote to me and said, 'There's a...you being a painter, I know you're not going to like this particular thing, but here is a house in a place called Ulting, which is an ugly old Victorian vicarage.' So I came down straight away, thinking, now he's got it absolutely wrong, it sounds exactly the kind of house I would like. And when I got here, I thought, this is it. And there's a lovely Victorian vicarage. Incidentally a Victorian alteration from an originally, quite ancient place. And I bought it straight away. And lived there from 1948 until 1968, twenty years, is that right? Yes, twenty years. And, brought up a son and an adopted son there. And then of course when they fled the nest, the house became absurdly big, and so I decided to build another house in the garden. And again, from a very involved story, I managed to get a permit to build from the Council, to build a house which the majority of the Council thought was absolutely outrageous and beyond the pale and an insult to the countryside, and so on.

*How was it that Richard Rogers came to do it?*

Well, a colleague of mine... Because I had studied architecture at the Architectural Association between 1930 and 1934/35, and a colleague of mine turned out to be living near here, his name was Andrew Carden, let's say I was a colleague when we were students, and I thought, well, what could be nicer than to get him to design a house? And

it turned out that I, from the word go I didn't like his house, his design, and also he didn't have a car, and that implied that I had to go and fetch him and take him back whenever he would come and see the site, or discuss the site and so on. And so I started designing a house myself. And one day an ex-student of mine from the Royal College, from the Textile School at the Royal College, turned up and caught me doing the drawings for my new house and looked over my shoulder, and said, 'That's absolutely terrible Humphrey, you can't possibly build that.'

*What were you drawing?*

I was actually drawing a, doing a perspective drawing of my plans for the house. And...

*But what had that been, what were you...?*

Oh, what...the style? Well it was a kind of, sympathetic to the local vernacular, clapboard, white windows, black clapboard, pitched roof, pitched only one way. And it was inoffensive, but pretty boring, and not very skilful I think in using space and so on. So, this girl was called Natalie Gibson, who is a very talented designer, and is head of the St Martin's School of Art, fashion department, fashion and textiles at St Martin's now. And I thought, well Natalie, you're right, it's pretty terrible. 'Tell me what to do.' And she said, 'I've a good friend called Richard Rogers who's just starting up with somebody called Norman Foster in a set-up called Team 4 in Hampstead; why don't you go and have a look at the kind of thing they're designing?' And I went up to Hampstead and looked at some work they were doing which was on the drawing board, they were doing for Cornwall, where there was a very skilful placing of houses up a slope overlooking one of the Cornwall estuaries, I think it was near Fowey. And I thought that's exactly the kind of thing I would like. And it's... Because I had been a fairly rebellious student at the Architectural Association, and was very much into Bauhaus stuff and Mies van der Rohe and Gropius and Corbusier and people, and this seemed to me to be along the lines that I had always approved of. So I immediately said yes to the Team 4 people. And

Richard said, 'Yes, OK. I will have to charge you twice the normal RIBA fees.' And I sort of raised my eyebrows, and thought, well I wonder why, but, OK, I said OK.

*Did he tell you why ever?*

Because domestic architecture he said wasn't really his line, and although he liked the idea of having a go, he...he couldn't interrupt his...they couldn't interrupt their normal office procedure without extra charge, that kind of argument. I didn't quarrel with it very much, I just thought, OK, well, if I'm onto a good thing, one's got to pay for it. And so he started quite a pretentious line of letter-writing and talking about spaces for living and loving and combining the open air with the indoors, and proportion and so on, and methods, and in particular technology, methods of building. And I...I laughed occasionally, because I thought it was a bit pretentious, but on the whole I agreed with what he was saying. And so we started. And in the middle, he'd got quite far with the designs, when he wrote to me and said, 'I have been given an offer of a very good connection with a firm called Wates (I think it was), which I simply can't refuse, financially can't refuse it, and I'm afraid I have to stop work on your house. Very sorry. No charge of course for the work already done.' And I had to accept that. And it was at that stage that I went to my neighbour, ex-student colleague. I'm beginning to remember, I've got the chronology wrong. And he did this design which I didn't approve of, and actually he, he committed the one fault by which you can actually sack the architect, the estimate for building it was at least £10,000 more than the cost limit. And that's a point at which you can say, 'OK, forget it. I'll pay you just for the work you've done.' And then, at that stage I started designing my own, and, so I've got the chronology wrong.

*Don't worry.*

I must try and get it right sometime.

*Don't worry.*

Anyway, then eventually Richard wrote to me and said he could come back, would it be OK for him to come back? And I said yes. And we went on from there, with all kinds of, the usual kind of disasters, which delayed the completion of the house. And he said that the house would take a fortnight to build, and it took a year, and that kind of thing.

*And was he intimately involved with it, as it was built, or not?*

He put most of the thinking and actual hard work onto his chief assistant, John Young, who himself had been a student at the Architectural Association, and, John Young was very enthusiastic and really quite a bright spark. Richard took very little interest, it seemed to me Richard took very little interest. And since it's been built, has taken absolutely no interest of any kind.

*So he didn't learn what worked and what didn't?*

That's...you've absolutely hit it. He... It seems to me a very natural thing that if you want to learn more about your own profession, you find out through various completed jobs what has succeeded and what has not succeeded. But he never came back to me, he never...there has been no single question. John Young has in fact taken a fairly, what they now call on-going interest in it. But I mean, now, at this present time that I'm speaking, there's a big technical problem, there's a big subsidence occurring, which is causing all the steelwork to distort, and causing a lot of trouble with the windows and the bulging out of a forty-two-foot run of window frame. And, the engineer is taking trouble, presumably feeling a bit guilty about it. And, I'm... But they certainly haven't offered to pay for it.

*Who is the engineer?*

The engineer is a firm called Anthony Hunt.

*And is it the same person there now who built the original?*

Yes. Yes, they're both... The bloke who comes down here, and I have to say that they haven't yet charged me for their visits, was not employed when they actually designed the engineering of the house, the structure of the house. But Anthony Hunt in the background is obviously consenting for him to come down here free of charge. So they are monitoring it.

*And have they built similar structures that have got similar problems, or is it bad luck about the subsidence over here?*

Well I think that the house is built on more or less the same design in terms of structure and steel work as an award-winning project they did for a firm called the Reliance, it was called Reliance. And this is...there was a little factory called the Reliance factory. I don't know what Reliance produced. And I know that the steel work is exactly the same, and I think the principle of glazing and plastic-coated steel which is the...which is the outer face of the house, and the flat roof – incidentally the flat roof has been a bit of a disaster – I know that they are based on the Reliance. I remember thinking at the time, well, half the work, half the drawings were already done for the Reliance thing, so, this wasn't thought out as an entirely original project. I do know that Richard Rogers was very proud of the actual detail of the steel work, but that's a very esoteric kind of pride, because nobody particularly is going to know that the junction of the main beam where it joins the stanchion is something very exceptional; the ordinary layman is not going to appreciate that. Nor are they going to appreciate the fact the span of the main beams are on the long dimension rather than the short dimension, precisely because Richard wanted the main beam to look very deep and strong. And then the module of the proportion depends on the production of the corrugated steel work which forms the roof, and if you look upwards now you can see the ceiling here is two units joined together supported on a central beam, so that the dimensional module is the actual production length of the plastic-coated steel.

*So that was a given, that was the...*

That was the given, yes.

*Right. They weren't specially made, they were manufactured?*

Yes. They weren't...they were the biggest they could get, yes. I don't think they pushed the firm into increasing the size. Of course the steel work was obviously custom-made, and...

*Could you actually, for someone who might be wanting to hear these tapes in years to come and lives in Japan or something, could you actually describe the house?*

Yes. The house is basically steel, glass, concrete, excluding all the wet trades, such as bricklaying, plasterwork, and so on. The architects' theory, which I may say I don't entirely believe in, is that the plan is what they call demountable, which, by which they mean that any moment you can shift the partitions and alter the internal plan. This seems to be fairly, fair nonsense, because, the moment you start moving the partitions, then you're faced with changing the drainage and the electric wiring, and the steel flanges on the main beams and so on, which are there to accept the point at which the partitions make contact with the steel. The glass is a forty-two foot run of continuous glass supported by vertical mullions, and the frame is aluminium rather than steel, and the reason why it is not double-glazed is that if it had been from the word go double-glazed, then the aluminium would have to be replaced with steel frames, and that would have been very much more expensive, and there was a limited money, depending on the amount of money I received from the sale of the old vicarage. Then, a very basic principle is that the plan depends on two very important things. One, which was specified by myself, that my working studio should be buildings separated by space from the actual dwelling, because I like the idea of actually going out to work, I thought it was important to get away from domesticity and actually go out to work, although it's only twenty yards' walk to my studio. So that was a very important feature of it, which led Richard Rogers to start talking about the intervening space being a kind of room without



a ceiling. The other thing, important thing is that it has what's called a service core, a central core to the plan in the dwelling, is such that all the drainage, that means all the lavatories, showers, bathrooms, kitchen sinks and anything connected with that, is centred in a limited area, which is quite an important technological feature. And, I give him credit for that, because that is an interesting idea, and an important idea.

*And it's worked by the sound of it.*

And it's worked more or less. What hasn't worked has been a flat roof, and, in parenthesis I add that, Maxwell Fry, another very important architect, once came here, because I was a student with his wife Jane Drew, and roared with laughter and said, 'Flat roof is absolutely absurd in 1966. Here is a heading in the *Observer*, The Great Flat Roof Disaster, written in, pre-1966. So it's incredible that architects are still doing that.' And of course he was right. Thirteen years after the roof was put on, it had to be replaced, and...largely replaced, very expensively, although I kicked up a fuss and got a very reduced price. But the reason being that, an overlap of roofing felt, an overlap of three inches, turned into a gap of one inch, and of course started letting water into part of the insulation which was cork, so that the layer of cork became a kind of sponge, and the roof simply started to leak all over the place. The firm that put it on, I risk slander by naming the firm, can I? Ruberoid. asked me, 'How long has this roof been on?' And I said thirteen years. And they said, 'Oh that's not bad at all is it?' As though that should be technically the limit of a roof. It seems to me utterly absurd. A roof should last about 100 years it seems to me. So that was...so that has been a regrettable feature of the house.

*The architects espoused flat roofs almost like a religion though didn't they. It was a huge sensitivity wasn't it.*

Yes. Because of Corbusier and all the early Bauhaus architects who were building flat roofs. But of course Maxwell Fry, having been responsible for a lot of building in areas which were very hot, like Delhi, and had very little rainfall, and certainly very very little frost, very little extremes of temperature which cause expansion and contraction, they put

flat roofs on in selected areas where it would, where it probably has worked all right.

The other big failure...

*Actually, just before we move away from roofs, can you just talk about your studio roof, which isn't entirely flat.*

Ah yes. The studio, the flat roof is cut into two parts by what Richard Rogers calls a factory style gable, gabled roof, where there's a fairly gently sloping, a forty-five-degree slope towards the south letting in a very controllable by blinds south light, and the north slope which is quite steep, I would say seventy degrees slope, lets in the north, lets in north light. The south facing slope is very easily controllable, so that I have complete control of the light, which was an after-thought, I had to put that in afterwards, put blinds and things in. Now the gable, the pitch there lets the hot air generated by a very incompetent electric fan system put in by Richard Rogers, lets all the hot air rise upwards and leaves the working part completely cold. So I have again very expensively had to put in a sliding false ceiling, a very ingenious false ceiling which I'll show you later on, in order to keep myself warm. Also I've had to put in a partition, sliding partition to divide the studio into two parts, in order that one part at least shall be warm. And I've had to put in a huge jumbo sized storage heater with a fan to blow hot air round, which blows a lot of dust and stuff around, and makes me sneeze. So, technologically really one, one can't call this building high tech. I've always called it very low tech. To do Richard justice, he disclosed a sense of humour, because I wrote a very scathing article about the whole project for a fairly influential little architectural magazine called *Building Design News*, in which I really...was really offensive about the house and its failures, and Richard then had cut it out, had it framed in a very high tech Perspex frame, and sent it to me for my lavatory, to hang in my lavatory. So he has a sense of humour about it.

*Do you take that to be an apology?*

It was I suppose a kind of apology. I would have rather than the apology had been in more practical form.

*Did you respond?*

I laughed and, I mean I wrote and thanked him for it. No, I mean, there's never been any suggestion that they feel wrong about it. You see most of their gods, Frank Lloyd Wright, Sullivan, Corbusier, the Bauhaus lot, are known...and including Lutyens of course, who's a very traditional architect, are known to have made incredible mistakes. Lutyens forgot all the staircases in Hampstead Garden Suburb. And Frank Lloyd Wright was always sort of forgetting to put bathrooms in, or... One of his major mistakes was to make long corridors which had no kind of light at all except artificial light.

*What's your studio like in the summer in terms of temperature?*

Everything gets too hot. The house gets intolerably hot. So you see, one of the things we were taught in the AA, the golden rule of domestic architecture is that you are warm in the winter and you are cool in the summer. This is exactly the opposite, you're roasted in the summer and you're frozen in the winter. So I have dared to... I think this was one of the things I wrote in that article, that it breaks the basic rule of domestic architecture.

*And the main windows of the living part are east-west then, presumably?*

Yes. Now that's quite important that you've raised that point, because, at one stage in Richard Rogers's mind, this design was a prototype for groups of houses, settlements of houses, on the assumption that the steel work and the component parts were producible, were factory producible. Now, I decided, in fact instructed him, to close down the south view, so that I did not overlook the vicarage which lies to the south, and to close the north view obviously because it's near an impenetrable hedge, and open up east and west in the dwelling. The studio has no wall light at all, no wall windows at all. Now if you group these houses into a settlement, and the adjacent houses are rotated through, ninety degrees is it? yes, ninety degrees, then the view from one house looks onto the blank wall of the next one. And although I've never actually worked this out on paper, I think that

means that no house in a grouping of houses is going to look into the vast amount of window space of the adjacent house. So, and that could be fairly cunningly exploited, and I think that was thought out fairly carefully. I need to stop actually, because I need to go.....

[End of F7805 Side A]

[F7805 Side B]

*I just wanted to document on the tape that you've just very kindly brought me a copy of Country Life, September the 23<sup>rd</sup> 1999, which has an extremely good set of photographs, and an article by Alan Powers about the very house we're talking about. So, I shall hope to get that to go alongside the recording.*

At the time... Are we on now?

*Yes.*

At the time it was, just after it was completed, it did receive a lot of publicity in the architectural press. A lot of it put out by Richard Rogers' office, very inaccurate information, reducing the cost price, emphasising the, what they call the de-mountability, which I think is nonsense, and always reproducing outdated plans, all of which annoyed me very much. Even in the very grand book, which I can probably show you if you remind me, the house, the plan published is the wrong plan, and the drawings don't really give a very accurate impression of the house.

*Just...I'm a very impractical person, but, I would have thought it would be very difficult to move these partitions, because you would surely have to move them right outside the house. How could you turn them round inside the house?*

It's exactly what I am saying. It's absolutely daft to think that they are easy to move. If you are prepared to spend a very great deal of money, then you could, but you would have to... Underneath this particular partition that we're looking at, is a mass of electric wiring, so you've got to re-route the electric wiring. I'm reminded at looking at this partition of Richard Rogers' negative attitudes towards, for instance skirting boards and tiles, and one negative attitude which I totally approve of is the fact that he very much dislikes the gap between the top of the normal domestic door and the ceiling. So that all the doors in this house, and this is quite an important feature, all, including the sliding

doors, and the cupboard doors (otherwise there are no doors), they all go up to the ceiling height, and I think that's an important piece of the design and a very satisfactory piece, which people don't on the whole notice, but would agree with me if I draw their attention to it, that it's a happy making thing. The space between the normal domestic door and the ceiling is impossible to deal with. You can put a sort of blue and white china plate up there and draw attention to it, but it's still normally very unhappy proportion.

*Also the idea of taking the door right up here works terribly well, because of the form of the ceiling itself.*

And the grooves in the ceiling, yes.

*Presumably on the reverse of it, if you have a curtain rail, that doesn't work so well with the grooves. I mean, presumably the only thing to do would be to have an incredibly special curtain rail.*

Well you've hit on another quite important thing which I had forgotten. One of his negative things is curtains. Absolutely hates the idea of curtains. So he provided us with these roller blinds, and we were supposed in the winter simply to exclude the darkness so to speak, contain the light so to speak, by drawing these blinds down. Well, the flat...somehow the flat surface, although they're very warm in colour, because they're two...two...I hate the word shades, they're too hues of sort of orange, yellow and, and ordinary yellow, it's a warm colour, somehow it was very un-cosy and uncomfortable. And so we, at huge expense, because this is a very expensive thing to do, we put in a curtain which has a run of forty-two feet, and since I was always taught to multiply by three in terms of area of fabric, that means we've got three two's are six...126 feet of fabric times eight feet high, which is a lot of fabric. And recently we've had to, five years ago we had to have them cleaned, which is an enormously expensive thing to do. And of course Richard would hate, he hates the idea of curtains, because of the way they change the appearance from outside. And I have to agree with him, they don't look...they do break up the run of glass.

*Presumably, looking at it more positively, it is a fantastic surface, once they're drawn.*

It's very...it's lovely, yes. It's perhaps rather strange that part of my life I've been designing textiles, patterned textiles, and my choice for these was plain colours.

*Can you say what it was, for people who won't perhaps come to the house?*

What what was?

*What the curtains are.*

Oh the curtain is simply plain colours, revolving, related colours in the area of yellow and orange, and then saturated colour, de-saturated colour, that's a neutralised colour, and pure colour. So it's...what a colourist, the word a colourist would use is harmonic. And I've intentionally avoided any kind of discord.

*Is the pheasant that's now appearing in through the window a domesticated one?*

The pheasant is a very damaging one, and, I love it, in a way I love it. It doesn't normally come as close as this; it must have sensed you were here I think.

*Wonderful.*

Yes, he's very handsome isn't he. But we have a lot of... I mean one of the things that makes the garden very difficult is rabbits, absolute pestilential rabbits, squirrels, and I regret to say these very handsome pheasants, which have one very odd habit which is that, any newly planted plant which might have cost nowadays six or seven pounds, they immediately nip the upper growth. They don't eat it, they just sheer it off as though with secateurs, and leave it lying there. (laughs) Incidentally I had the, the hedge which divides the two properties, divides this house from the vicarage, which you can't see

now, which is behind you, I had planted in 1966, thinking ahead by two years, and when the hedge was first planted by a professional firm, I came down very excited the morning after it had been planted, and eighty per cent of the plants had been nipped by a pheasant, who had simply travelled down the whole length. But it seems, in the end it seems to have done them good, because it meant that they've branched from the sides and from the base.

*Probably just a very useful [inaudible].*

That was a useful pheasant, yes.

*Well since they've cropped up, we're also...there are many many lovely birds feeding just by the window. Are you passionate about birds, or is it...?*

Well, I love watching, it's a kind of menagerie there, yes. And there's a big range of birds. There's woodpeckers, tits, greenfinches. I keep them very conscientiously fed. I hate them to come and be disappointed, and find nothing. Also I've had a terrific battle with a squirrel, and had to buy an anti-squirrel nut holding thing.

*Are they all grey squirrels round here?*

They're all grey squirrels, yes.

*And have you noticed much change in the wildlife while you've been here, to do with pesticides and everything like that?*

Yes. Well, there's a lack of sparrows; there used to be lots and lots of sparrows. There's a lack of thrushes. That familiar sound of a thrush breaking a snail against a stone has gone now. We used to have lots of hedgehogs, which used to hibernate in a leaf... There are lots and lots of trees in the garden and all round the garden, so there are huge piles of



leaves in special places, and they used to hibernate in the leaves and come up to the house and feed, very noisily, after dark. And that's a sad loss, because I loved the...

*And is that because of pesticides?*

I have absolutely no idea. I wish I knew. I've no idea why these things happen. We've...the garden is appalling soil, it's...it's gravely and clay, and eight or nine inches underneath the top, if you're digging a hole to plant something in, you have to use a pickaxe and a stone hammer.

*And, going back to the curtains, can we just say, they're vertical...*

Going back to the...?

*The curtains.*

Oh the curtains. Yes.

*I mean, is it...if you're here in autumn rather than deep cold winter, is it tempting just to have the lights on at night and not close the curtains?*

I do find that the physical effort of pulling these curtains across the windows is quite considerable. And so I do tend to, to have the windows free of curtains, yes.

*And does that make you feel vulnerable, because you are obviously completely visible should anyone be out there?*

Only if I switch it on so to speak. I mean, normally I just forget that and, I like the idea...I like the idea of seeing the stars and, and the sort of ambient light at night. And also the bats, there are lots of bats, which are very nice to hear whirring around.

*And do you feel secure here, is it still a part of the country that is reasonably safe, or not?*

I feel very secure. Only when people remind me that there are such risks. Rachel tends to feel, would feel insecure if she was here alone. And I think my wife occasionally, not often but occasionally said that she was very careful to lock up and... I mean I, I get very slack about locking up, and leave the doors open. Sometimes at night when an apple falls from the trees and thuds onto a garden table, I think, oh gosh, I'm going to have my throat cut any minute. But normally I feel quite secure.

*Mm. And, I suppose, thinking about the vertical of the curtains, I mean, in a sense this house is about horizontals and verticals, isn't it?*

Yes, very much. Yes, and proportion. Richard was very proud of the proportion, which presumably employs the golden section or, or two...I don't know, two squares perhaps, I don't know. Anyhow, proportion was one... And it is a very satisfying proportion of room to live in. Incidentally, he was very anti shelf, and the shelves, because we have so many books, much against his wishes were put in at the last minute, which means that there's no wall space to hang pictures, which perhaps is odd for the house of a painter. He was also very hostile to Pauline's idea to have a focal point of heat, actual physical stove, and we...eventually he consented to have a stainless steel pither, and John Young found us a second-hand stainless steel pither, which was very good for twenty-five years, after which I got fed up, and also too old, to handle the ash and the need to cart in loads of anthracite, and also hated the amount of dust that it produced, and so now we have a rather old-fashioned looking continuous burning oil stove, which is miraculous. The central heating started by being oil fired, there being a 600-gallon tank in the studio area, with an underground pipe leading to the dwelling. So we, we have an oil feed into the dwelling from the studio, which I thought sensible to make use of by putting an oil-burning stove, and this, this is a miracle, because it does, it needs no attention for the whole winter. If it gives trouble it simply means that it's got to be cleaned, because it produces a bit of soot.

*So it's really there for comfort almost, because you've got other heating going on as well.*

It's there as a definite necessity for heating. That stove, together with one, two, three rather ugly night storage heaters, makes fairly comfortable temperature on rarely freakish, freakishly cold occasions when there's heavy heavy frosts, and there's ice on the insides of the glass as well as on the outside. It isn't adequate, and we have to have extra electric plug-in stuff. Incidentally, that...that leads to another thought, which I've immediately forgotten.

*Do you get Jack Frost patterns?*

Oh, the other thought was, condensation. To start with we had absolutely massive condensation, such that they had to put in a condensation gutter, which runs inside the house, along the whole length of the two runs of glass. And every...in really cold weather, every morning the...all the glass was simply covered with moisture which flowed down, and caused the house, the whole house to be very very damp. And suddenly someone introduced me to dehumidifiers, and that solved, completely solved the problem. So any moment now, and we're speaking at the end of, no the middle of October isn't it, any moment now I've got to put the dehumidifier on, which is noisy, but is a miracle really.

*And do you get Jack Frost patterns?*

Oh yes, lovely, yes. And I...I have been known to photograph them and take rubbings from them and use them in design very much, yes, lovely patterns, yes.

*Did it come the whole length of the window?*

Yes.

*Gosh that's amazing.*

Yes. Particularly in the bedrooms where there's...

*Mm. And, continuing the... Sorry, I'm just slightly confused. As well as the night storage heater, is there also a central heating system?*

No, because the central heating broke down, the actual mechanics of it, the oil-fired unit, oil, broke down, and they said, 'Oh no problem, we'll get another one.' But the firm that had made it (this is fairly typical of high tech thinking), the firm that had made this unit had gone out of business, and it was impossible to find a similar unit, as small, because it was a very small unit. So, after quite an extended search for an alternative oil-firing unit, we gave up and simply had to have night storage.

*And was Richard Rogers aware of that? He couldn't solve this problem?*

No, he couldn't solve it. No, John Young tried to solve it. And actually John Young was very good, he scoured the world for an oil-fired unit. Oh the heating was by means of air, blown air, not radiators, which came up through grids in the floor. There's another quite important feature of letting a lot of light into a space, and that is that it discloses the impermanence of colour on things like carpets and upholstery and rugs. Later on I'll show you what the original colour of this carpet was, there's a little patch of the original just outside the shower room there, and it's an incredible change.

*Over how long?*

Over, I should think this carpet is fifteen years, over a period of fifteen years.

*Mm. And, the grilles that I can see from there, letting in the hot air, are all placed very near the windows, which presumably meant the air was likely to go out. Are there others in the centre of the room?*

I think there was a very positive idea behind that, which was that the area adjacent to the windows was likely to be very cold, and it was that air which they were aiming to heat up. But of course it was that that caused the condensation you see. So that when they heated that air it met the cold on the other side of the glass and immediately precipitated whatever water vapour there was. So anything like boiling and steam coming from kettles and... It's incredible the amount of actual water that a dehumidifier collects during the winter, I mean it can, it can collect as much as, I would say three litres a night.

*And was the condensation the other problem that you were going on to speak about when I interrupted you?*

Yes.

*Yes.*

Yes, condensation was a big, a really, major problem.

*Could you talk about the layout of the house and how you've used it?*

Oh the plan is a convenient one. It's a kind of circuit. You can walk, do a round tour around the central service core, and it's a very, geometrically a very simple plan, simply sub-dividing a large rectangle with no extrusions of any kind. So it's a very simple plan. Although people do get lost when they first haven't realised the fact that you can walk round and round and round.

*But how have you used it, how does it get used?*

I don't quite see what you mean.

*Can you just... I'm trying to make it come alive for somebody who might never come here. That it's...*

Ah I see. The adjacent... Well the kitchen is very...next...very much adjacent, almost open-plan adjacent, to the dining, to the eating area. That I suppose is the most important thing. The kitchen and the service core separate the living and working area of the dwelling from the sleeping area, on the whole. But what rooms are used for what purpose is fairly flexible. That's to say that what used to be my son's bedroom, although it still has a bed in it, could very easily be converted into a study or a library or, whatever, simply by removing the bed.

*And how many sleeping areas have you got?*

At the moment there's, in terms of actual beds, there's one, two, three, four, four beds.

*Mm. And do you ever work in here? I mean given that the light is so extraordinary, do you work in here ever?*

Yes, if my work means research into books and things, for instance I'm doing something at the moment which meant that I had to look at a marvellous thirteen-volume edition of surveys, botanical... I forget the...I forget the next word. Botanical drawings, botanical something or other. And I wanted to find certain flowers, and I would do that kind of research in here rather than in the studio probably, yes, so I do work. But when my wife was here, this was very much her area, and I was...because I didn't want to be interrupted and she didn't want to be interrupted, we worked in our separate areas. So I was most of the day in the studio.

*And it's obviously a house with a great unity, which is exciting, but presumably also if, say, all the bedrooms were being occupied or all the bed spaces, noise must be a problem, and privacy.*

Noise is a problem, yes; in spite of intervening quite deep cupboards, noise is a problem, yes, you're quite right. And it would have needed a fairly cunning, highly sophisticated insulation against noise.

*And do you ever have the desire to be able to close the door on people? I suppose you could in a way, in your studio.*

I can completely shut the studio up, yes, and do so, and sometimes I hear some, oh I don't know, Jehovah's Witnesses or something calling...(laughs)...and I shut myself in. And there's no bell, in fact the bell of the dwelling doesn't work, so... But that's something I should really be seeing to.

*But when you were living here with your wife, and maybe sometimes your son would be here, did you ever feel that you wished there was a part of the house where you could just close the door and be alone?*

Yes. I think they did more than I did. Certainly my son did. He... I think to start with, he got fed up with the amount of attention it took from me. I was very excited and involved with the building, when the house was being built, and I suppose talked about nothing else, and was constantly in consultation as to what should be...in what way the house should develop, if any area of doubt came up, and he got a bit fed up. And I think probably when you are about sixteen, between sixteen and twenty-five, you probably do want privacy, and he didn't get as much as he wanted. However much he closed that door, and if I wanted the radio on, he could easily hear the radio through that partition, yes. Yes that, that is...

*And did he go through a terrible pop music phase that you suffered from?*

Well I was into the same phase, so...(laughs)

*Really?*

I...I am very fond of pop music, yes.

*In particular, what?*

Well, it's old-fashioned now. I thought that Mick Jagger, the Beatles, and famous groups like, famous songs like *Hotel California* and the Eagles and *I've Got My Troubles*, *You've Got Yours*, or *You've Got...*the other way around, *You've Got Your Troubles*, *I've Got Mine*. And, even...even terrible sentimental songs like, I think Cilla Black, *Anyone Who Has A Heart*. They were very much theme, pop theme songs to my musical life, yes. So I wasn't...I wasn't ever anti. I am a bit anti now, because, and maybe this is just a sign of age, I think there's just sort of dreadful lack of vocal talent. I think people think



they can sing simply by holding a microphone close to the mouth and, and not singing. The amplification by the microphone simply doesn't produce a good voice. Whereas I think people like Cilla Black, and even Vera Lynn, very old-fashioned, Vera Lynn had an absolutely perfect pitch, and was in many ways a wonderful singer. She could have been a very successful opera singer if she'd really wanted to. Several very good opera singers like Julius Puzow[ph] started life as pop singers.

*And how often would it be being played, was it...?*

Much...a lot. It would have been played a lot. I had much more time, that's simply a matter of physical energy I suppose, in those days, I seemed to me I had much more time to, to want to take a definite time listening to music. The music I listened to was more, was more often highbrow, more often classical, or, or modern, than it was pop, but I would...I would listen to pop. Pop could stop me working, by literally making me cry or getting me involved in the rhythm, and... When I was young my sister, when I was very young, about six, my sister used to call me Tappy-Wappy, because I was always bouncing table knives on the table, using them as drumsticks, and beating out rhythms of popular music.

*Do you have music on when you're working in the studio?*

Yes. Too much I think, too much.

*And it's again a big mix, or...?*

Whatever...mostly Radio 3. Some...sometimes 2. But again, I find that really present-day pop music is incredibly repetitive, incredibly themeless, pretentious in thinking that the wording is philosophical and sophisticated when it's not. But maybe that's just age. What do you think?

*Well, I mean the records that you've mentioned, that you find very moving, is that inherent in the song itself, or is it by association with the period when you first heard it? Something like the Cilla Black or Hotel California or something.*

I think because of actual musical tunes, I mean some of which.....

[End of F7805 Side B]

[F7806 Side A]

Are we on?

*Yes.*

Some of which are derived from classical music. I mean I have a particular distaste for the sentimentality of Andrew Lloyd Webber. But nevertheless I think that *Goodbye...* Oh remind me, Argentina. What is that? A marvellous song.

*I know what you mean, but I can't think what it's called.*

*Goodbye Argentina*, is a marvellous.

Don't Cry For Me Argentina.

*Don't Cry For Me Argentina*, is a marvellous song, but it happens to be based on a theme of Brahms, absolutely; I couldn't lead you to the theme but I remember making the discovery. And I think most of the big tunes of Andrew Lloyd Webber are probably pinched from Schubert or some of the classical composers.

*And do you sing, I mean are you someone that sings by himself?*

No, absolutely can't, can't sing at all.

*But that doesn't stop people.*

I longed to... My sister was quite right that I did long to be a drummer, particularly when I was at school which was Gresham's School at Holt, and we were forced to join the OTC, which I hated, and I wanted to divert the kind of gun, rifle area of the OTC into being a drummer. But of course there were lots of lots of people who wanted to be

drummers, because it was a very engaging kind of exhibitionist aspect of OTC where you...you were functioning in a way which was sort of, rather, a very enviable way. They wouldn't let me be a drummer, but they gave a bugle, which gave me a headache for the rest of my life I think...(laughs)...trying to blow my bugle. I did succeed in blowing the occasional right note.

*I'd like to go into detail about that period in a bit. We've started sort of at the end in a way. Can I just carry on the sort of noise theme here. You have a television. Presumably if somebody is listening to the television, can you hear that all through the house as well?*

Yes. When we first installed, not this television which is fairly new, but the original television, Quentin, my son, wrote a notice, 'Mr Burglar, please take this horrible thing away' and stuck it with tape onto the television screen. Absolutely hated it. So clearly it was interrupting him. Mind you, he was trying to do very ...he was trying to... I think he was studying philosophy and mathematics, subsequently mathematics, at Cambridge, so he was trying to read Sartre, say, and his trend of thought was interrupted by dreadful things happening on television.

*When did you first have a television? In your life I mean, not in this house.*

I think we... Oh gosh, that's a good question. I think we didn't have a television till about 19...probably about 1955, which was when we were in the vicarage. The vicarage had so much space that we had a couple living in, and paying off their rent by domestic help and gardening and so on, and I remember they had a black and white television which I remember feeling slightly critical about, and thinking probably rather pretentiously, I shall never have a television. But of course I realised that, inevitably, that eventually it was inevitable. And then, we tried...having...having accepted the idea of having a television, we realised the need to go into colour, and I remember resisting going into colour for a long time, which has to do with my antipathy to ordinary colour photography and still thinking that black and white photography is much more powerful.

But eventually of course we went into colour. And now, I mean I think of television as a kind of, one of those miracles, because such a lot has developed, particularly in terms of colour, and the way colour is true. Because I mean, in the first days the use of colour was very unimaginative.

*Can you give some examples?*

Of the use of...?

*Of how it's changed.*

Well, commercials for instance have, are sometimes now, particularly now that digital control has come in, which is one of those miracles which I see happening but don't understand... I know the kind of apparatus which is available to apply digital. Digital can...has a control over the colour on the screen, which wasn't possible before digital came in. And somehow the resistance to absolutely undiluted, fully saturated colour has broken down. There used to be, I remember once discussing it with somebody responsible for colour, because I...there was a point when I was about to have something to do with a television production, and going into colour fairly deeply, and him arguing that there was a kind of standard of colour mixing which was to do with what they call flesh colour. So that everything had to be modulated according to the colour that a human face appeared on the screen, that there was a kind of rule that you didn't have colours which visually altered the skin colour on the screen. And of course by surrounding a face by a very bright magenta red for instance, the eye responds to that by introducing a complementary into the colour of the skin. So their nerves[??] were based on quite knowledgeable principles. And it happened that when I was teaching at the College I had to study colour a lot, because I found that students came in from provincial art schools with no knowledge of colour at all, so I decided that I was going to fill that gap, and read about twenty-five, without exaggeration, about twenty-five books on colour, and put together a lecture which took a whole day, couldn't take, it couldn't take less, and involved three projectors and so on. So I did get to know quite a lot about it.

And so they were very...they were very...the producers were very nervous about making the face look deathly, green, or... It's called complementary contrast, you induce a colour... You place a colour centrally in a field of colour, and the surrounding field will induce its complementary into the centrally placed thing.

*Obviously I want to go into the paintings in a lot of detail a bit later on, but having had to do that sort of research in order to lecture to students, did that presumably, it then fed into your painting, did it make you terribly self-conscious about colour, did it break into anything more instinctive you might have been doing, the theory of colour?*

Well, one of...when I was lecturing on colour, one of my students, and actually it was the same student that told me that my design for my house was ghastly, one of the students, she got up one day and said, 'I do appreciate that you have taken a lot of trouble to put together this lecture, but in fact you are making me very nervous. I think I have an instinctive knowledge and reaction to colour, and that I, I know that I am a good colourist, people tell me so, and your lectures are making me nervous.' And I knew that the same thing had happened to one of the tutors at the Bauhaus, Johannes Itten who lectured about colour, and one of his students had said exactly the same thing, and he said, 'OK, well if you feel confident about your instinctive use of colour, then go, don't...leave the lecture.' Anyone who thinks like that is absolutely at liberty to leave, and I think that's necessary to say that, because, could be. But I, from the word go I said, there is no such thing as a theory of colour, which can inevitably necessarily produce good colouring. What there is, is knowledge about colour. So that if you are working to your own instinct, then you can apply your knowledge of your colour, rather than your theory about good colour, you can apply your knowledge to knowing what you have actually done, and then do the same thing in other areas of the colour circle. And so that was, that has been my principle about painting and designing, is, is never from...at the start, never to exploit my knowledge; but when I've done something, then I apply...and I ask myself, what is it that I have done? And particularly in terms of textile design, where you are commercially required to produce what they call colour ways, which is six different colour schemes of one fabric, then you've got to know what you've done with

one range of contrasting or harmonic colouring, you've got to be able to do it in another area of the colour circle. So that's really what my idea has been.

*And presumably it also, the knowledge becomes innate as well, so the merging between instinct and knowledge becomes more blurred.*

You're right, it does, yes. Yes, your instinct develops a dependency on your knowledge, yes. But there are things like, there are inexplicables, kind of, just life phenomena where... The thing I quote is something that actually happened to me once. Lying in my bath, I suddenly saw an oval of turquoise green just sort of floating around the white wall of the bathroom, and I thought, this is an after-image, but what, what is it from? And I looked around, and there was a bright magenta slab of soap. And I had allowed my eye, unconsciously while thinking of something else, allowed my eye to look at the soap, and then shifted, and this after-image floated around. I think the after-image is a thing that people don't give nearly enough thought to. For instance, a lot of ghost stories I think depend on the fact that the after-image of a normal light shade, which is a conical section, truncated cone, the base of a cone, if your eye...and that's normally an ordinary tungsten bulb, or in the old days perhaps a candle, is producing a very yellowish kind of light, the wavelengths are all in the yellow and orange and red area, so that when you shift your eye unconsciously, you might have been reading a book with this light partly in your eye, in your visible field, you shift your eye to another part of the wall, you see what is the shape of a skirt as an after-image, which is normally a kind of turquoise blue or a purple-blue. And I think some of the ladies in blue crinolines are simply after-images, which are very powerful, with certain individuals more powerful than with others. But when you go home, if you allow your eye to rest for twenty seconds, you see that sort of magenta on that half-concealed mat there, unless your sight is abnormally, is abnormal, you're going to see a very strong after-image floating around. You have to wait for the after-image, but...

*With your knowledge about colour, if you're looking at the work you've done first instinctively on a painting or for textiles, and you might then plot in some way, relatively*

*consciously, how you might treat another area of the same work, presumably there is still an element of surprise, that you might decide what you are going to do next and then find it's very very different. How much can you predict now, because you've got very much experience?*

Not often, but sometimes I do know that I'm going to put a very...I'm going to use complementaries for instance. Let's say I've used a lot of yellow, or orange, and I know that I'm going to go into the blue area to produce a complementary contrast. Oh here's a visitor. I'd better go to the...the bell doesn't work.

[break in recording]

....this house and the colour, and colour. John Young, the senior partner of Richard Rogers, was himself very involved with colour, particularly very brash, fully-saturated colour, which was kind of fashionable, being very sort of pop I suppose. And so he and I worked very much in collaboration, even to the extent that he went in search of a Woolworth's product of electric plugs which were red and orange. And he bought plugs which were both red and orange and then split them and joined the top and the bottom so that any electric plug might be both of those colours. Incidentally, talking about electrics, one very annoying thing about the house is that there is no cross-switching system, so that you can't walk into a room, turn on a light, walk out of it through another door, and turn off the light. And the switches are all on the wall sockets. Which means that in the dark, if you come into the house in the dark, you have a big sort of grope ahead of you, trying to locate the wall sockets and the switches.

*And was that because of some reason why it couldn't be otherwise, or was it just not thought out?*

Well, good question. I, half-way through I...when they were doing the electrics, and they were putting in the wall sockets, which are well placed in the sense that they're not on the ground, they're sort of two foot six away from the floor, upwards from the floor, I did



start to discuss this and said, 'Oh by the way, I want some cross-switching,' and I was told that that would be another £1500. Well this was in 1967-ish, '68, and of course £1500 was worth a lot more than in 1999, today, and I just said, 'Well I can't...I can't afford it.' I don't believe that answer actually, I think it could perfectly easily have been put in at very much less cost.

*It's interesting that something like that wasn't standard actually.*

Very...yes, I think it's incredible. And it's extremely annoying, and until you're used to it, I mean people, guests who spend the night here find it very annoying, because they're so used to going into a room and almost automatically putting their hand up to shoulder level to find a switch.

*Just picking up where we were interrupted, I was asking about having absorbed over the years a lot of knowledge about colour, how often you are surprised in your work when you, when you may have thought something out, how often it doesn't look as you had imagined, or whether you feel very in control, and whether that's a sad thing or, how important the surprise element is too.*

I'm often surprised at the extent to which I get into habits of colour. I mentioned just in recent, just now, I mentioned blue as the complementary to yellow-orange, and I find myself automatically doing that, and I have to really stop myself in my tracks and say, why not exploit another area of complementary contrast? I find myself looking at other people's paintings and thinking, that's marvellous colour, I wish I'd done it, and why haven't I done it? It's very difficult not to be influenced and not to be imitative in designing and painting I think, yes.

*If you have decided to use a complementary colour and seen it so to speak in your mind's eye, is there still a margin of difference between what you saw in your mind's eye and what actually happens?*

Yes, there's always a gap between the mind and the hand and the mind and the collection of colour tubes and things, yes. Yes, you can be struck... I mean, I wish I had an immediate instinct. I work very largely on scraps of coloured papers, rather than have to go on mixing and modulating and so on, I have huge collections of coloured papers, cut out from journals all over the place. I'm very involved now in gradated colours, colours which move subtly from, either from one tone to another, which means one lightness-darkness to another lightness-darkness, or from one hue to another, I'm very interested in that. And one needs to have a lot of knowledge about what's going to happen, that. I'll show you some work in the studio that I'm doing now to do with that.

*Because of wanting other people to be able to share this, can you actually, as well as showing it to me, would you mind telling me so that it's in words on the tape as well? I know it's hard.*

Yes. Well, in theory, I think my... I'm always trying to do something which is perhaps against my nature. I long to use brilliant singing, undiluted, fully saturated colour, really kind of joyful colours, but perhaps, maybe by nature I'm not altogether so happy as that. I tend to appreciate very subtle neutralised juxtapositions of colour. There's a thing called closeness of tone where you, you put two... The natural happening of tone is that blues are darker in tone than yellows, say, and more subtly, a red which tends to be blueish is darker in tone on the colour circle than a red which moves towards orange. So that if you change the tone value and make the blueish red lighter in tone than the orange red, then you've got something which is immediately very stimulating, almost a discord, almost the shock tactics of hearing somebody like, Beethoven suddenly produces a violent discord, two adjacent notes played together. So that, that's the kind of thing I think knowledge of colour makes possible, other than... You're less likely to do it by instinct than you are if you've got the knowledge of what you're doing. I... I don't think that by nature I am a very good colourist. I depend very much on observation of other people's work, particularly modern painters' work. A painter like Howard Hodgkin I think is a marvellous instinctive colourist, gives me a lot of food for thought.

*Which of his have you most been thinking about?*

Individual paintings you mean?

*Mm.*

I went to the exhibition at the Hayward and there were so many there, I can't isolate a... I think... I mean he's up to all kinds of tricks, like letting the actual painting wander over the frame and that kind of thing, but I think his, the pictures seem to me most important in terms of colour, they're just very exciting in colour painting[???].

*And what exactly are you exploring in the studio at the moment?*

Well, the particular job I'm doing is that my son... My wife wrote a lot of radio plays, quite a lot of which were actually produced by people like Reggie Smith and Martin Esslin and Douglas Cleverdon and that lot. And, he's going to do a vanity publication, pay for a publication of about five of these, and he suggested that I do the cover. So from the word go, I thought, this is going to be an opportunity to use very very brilliant, fully-saturated colours, and that's what I'm working on at the moment. And also work in collaboration with modulation, so that a green can gradate or modulate into a yellow, or even a blue, even two complementary colours can modulate into each other, so that you have an area which starts on one edge or one side as magenta and goes off, becomes a green at the other edge, which, that's roughly speaking the complementary.

*And at the moment you're experimenting with a view to this being the shape determined by the book, or are you...is this working through other pieces of...?*

Oh well everything has to work together. There have to be... I mean, one of the most difficult things about designing and painting which is illustrated by computers now, that you have so many directions in which you can go, I mean, so that, so that you've got to be very decisive, and I'm not a very decisive person. So that always I impose limitations.

Limitations are friendly things, so that if somebody says, 'I want it to be a certain size, and you can't use more than A B C number of colours,' that's always useful. To have the whole field of possibility open is a kind of agony really. I remember Hugh Casson saying that the great difficulty about designing is being decisive, you've got so many directions in which you can go. Somebody the other day suggested that I did a couple of days studying a computer programme called Adobe Photoshop, where you're using a scanner and you can put one of your designs, or any, anybody's design, anybody's painting, under the scanner and you get it up on the screen, and then you can go in one of fifty-five different directions, which are to do with dimension, are to do with colour, to do with proportion, to do with brightness, darkness, texture, plainness, endless... I forget the right phrase. Computations.

*Permutations?*

Permutations, combinations, endless permutations and combinations, of everything together. And so I like, I rather like limitations. Well there are limitations about this cover, it has to be a certain size, and I've imposed certain limitations, that by symbols I want to suggest the themes of the plays, and that's a useful limitation, all of which of course add to the amount of time spent on doing the design.

*But, does the work you're doing on the cover relate to the work you were doing anyway?*

Yes, everything I do leads to something else, that, in the process of doing things, there are all kinds of bits of coloured papers and cut-outs, and experimental modulations of colour, and the use of different materials like pastel as opposed to acrylic paint, or the whole new ranges of coloured pens and things which come up from time to time. That leads me into the 'might come in useful sometime' syndrome, so I, I have boxes and boxes and files and files full of coloured papers and, and different things that I've done, which do in the end sometimes lead to a whole painting. I mean, this is one of the difficulties that, yesterday when I was working on this cover, I suddenly came across a possibility by the

remnants of things that I'd cut out of a whole range of paintings. This makes it awfully difficult.

*I know it's possibly not a good idea, but can you give me an inkling of what those paintings might be, or are you superstitious before the...?*

I don't often plan paintings, I let them happen according to drawings that I've made, and I do quite a lot of drawing, according to lots and lots of display books, of which I have samples of rather idle sort of doodling in colour, and at any moment I get an idea for a painting. One of my own awarenesses of my failure is that, and I mean a certain kind of failure, which is to be taken up by a gallery. Galleries love what they call recognisable handwritings. In other words, they really demand that you shall go on painting the same thing over and over and over again, and one can quote many artists who have made huge successes because they've never diverted from one procedure in painting. One particular artist is a German painter called Hans Hartung, who discovered that if you take a very broad brush and give a wide, dip it into black and give a wide sweep across a canvas, and the bristles separate and give you a lot of parallel lines on that sweep of the brush, and his painting has depended on that ever since. Maybe I'm being a bit unjust to him, because he might have moved off a bit. But I have always rejected repetition. When I first came into this area, I.....

[End of F7806 Side A]

[F7806 Side B]

When I first came to live in this area I became absolutely fascinated by the sea wall, which wanders along the Blackwater Estuary, places like Goldhanger and Mersea and so on, and I did a lot of paintings which I do think were rather good of the sea wall, and I found that I could sell practically everything that I did if I exhibited them locally. They were not realistic really, they were highly distorted from a realistic point of view. But I then thought, well this is too easy, I can just go on, and I don't really need to think, I can just drift into, go...it becomes a kind of routine, you know how you start the painting and you can simply make variations. I don't like that. And so, I do tend to jump around from...I don't like using the word style, but I suppose I have to, from style to style, from content to different content, from abstract to semi-realistic, from decorative, from happy to gloomy. I've painted, I've done a painting recently which I like very much but nobody's going to, ever going to want to buy it because it's apocalyptic and very gloomy, and indicates the end of the, end of humanity really. I've been asked to do a painting based on the theme of the Millennium; what a vast kind of emotional range. I'm tempted to do a very apocalyptic painting, because my feelings about the way the world's going are rather gloomy. On the other hand, to get away from that gloom one is tempted to do rather joyful paintings. So that, my approach to painting is jumping around all over the place.

*Can you describe the apocalyptic one that you've done?*

The apocalyptic one simply is a couple of, more or less smoking shells of explosive devices, what the BBC would call explosive devices, lying on a very texturally upheaved ground, and groping in the background... And there's a very angry, flaming sky, and groping around an area of what is obviously desolation caused by explosion are creeping around the remnants of humanity, crouching and groping figures. That's really what it's about.

*What sort of scale is it?*

Oh it's...I very seldom paint large, this is a painting I would think about, eighteen...no, perhaps two feet by fourteen inches, twenty-two inches by fourteen probably.

*And how did that image evolve? Did you have a composition set as a whole, or did it grow from one part?*

No, it evolved through a very...through... It's a remnant from earlier exercises in painting, earlier desires about painting. I became, probably as a result of Auden's writing about the industrial north, I became very fascinated with ruins and industrial decline, and the old tin mines and, and lead mines, and twisted metal. This was exacerbated, this was increased by Graham Sutherland's paintings of bomb damage and my own experience of looking at photographs of bomb damage during the war as a photo-interpreter, and I've always had a desire to go back to paintings of industrial decline. There was one painting which I think was bought by Francis Spurling[ph] of a totally ruined area, which derives from what I saw in the area around Bolton, the decayed textile mills and so on. And that's...and I suddenly realised that, I've realised since then that I wish in a way I'd kept this thing, faced with the idea that they're very unsellable, because people really want to be I think probably cheered up when they buy a painting, which explains the success of the extremely good paintings of Mary Fedden, who was painting some very sort of, songs of joy of colour and, and symbol. But, I did give that up. And since then I've really been wandering around from theme to theme.

*But the way in which the apocalypse painting has picked up on the earlier industrial images, is that something you've discovered now that you've done the apocalyptic painting, or did you know it as you were painting it? Can you see the relationship retrospectively, or did you consciously know it was there?*

I think probably I can say that all my paintings develop from a start which is something left over from previous work. And I had two kind of textural areas. Of course texture is a very strong area of mine, I'll be showing you later, and I've made a kind of invention,

by which I can more or less make a frottage or a rubbing from any three-dimensional object. And I had some areas of texture, and I suddenly realised that just to place two blobs of these textures on a background would be interesting in itself. And having done that, I then, then the thought occurred to me that these are like large bits of matter which have been dropped from an aeroplane or, or even come out of a gun and they've just fallen. And then the whole idea of, of these objects containing something sinister which is about to explode, that idea developed. And so, ideas develop as I go along. And, I find myself suddenly doing something which was very far from my original intention, it just is suggested by what happens on the surface. And that can have to do with something quite chancy, like a certain coloured pastel is lying around and I've been too lazy to go into the pastel box and I've just picked up that particular colour and started experimenting with it, and then that leads to a whole painting. So it's very chancy. I envy very much the ability to take another approach to it. I mean I think most artists have that to a certain extent, but they don't perhaps allow accident to play such an important part as I do.

*So, with the apocalyptic painting, it sounds as though it's grown in a very organic way, and there wouldn't in this instance be any drawings leading up to it.*

There wouldn't have been any drawings, no. No, although I've got...I've got sketchbooks full of drawings, sometimes drawings from books, Edward Bawden was a great believer in actually copying things, I've learnt that, rather learnt that lesson from him, sometimes drawing from nature, sometimes drawing from memory, I make, I try and carry sketchbooks around with me, particularly if I'm travelling, and use them, ideally I would like always to have a sketchbook, and any moment where one's waiting for a train or something, one would be able to draw. I do up to a point. And those are kind of reference books, and sometimes they, they turn into smallish paintings themselves. I have a habit which a lot of people say is a very bad habit, but I insist on going on doing it, of allowing a drawing done in situ to develop and develop and develop, and so it becomes, eventually becomes something quite different. Some people say that I, in doing that I ruin something potentially good, by going on too long. Not knowing where to stop is a great phrase which is, which artists use, knowing where to stop, or



keeping things very simple. There's a famous Mies van der Rohe saying isn't there, less...less is more, yes, less is more. That kind of principle is always in the back of my mind.

*But, so you are working on the same drawing, you're not keeping the original drawing and then drawing again [inaudible]?*

I'm working on...I'm working on the same drawing.

*Right.*

Because sometimes it's to do with simplification, yes, sometimes it's to do with eliminating whole areas. I know that for instance, earlier today you mentioned Eileen Agar, and I know that she was a great one for doing what's called 'painting out', so that you allow certain elements to remain and block out all the background, and that's a very useful thing to remember, and quite often I do use that, because the whole thing can become very much, too complicated. One very important thing I think is that I was very, I was born very short-sighted, or developed very short sight, and have been very short-sighted up till about a year ago when some kind of miracle has been done in my eye, so I appreciated and enjoyed very detailed, wonderful...like Indian miniature painting for instance, I would put my eye very close. My mother's jewellery had a very great effect on me, by putting it very close to my eye and enjoying the volutes and spirals and intricacies of gems and gem setting. And so that's always been a temptation for me to do. I doubt whether I could find it, but I've got an interesting painting dating from about 1937 I think when I first became involved with Mass Observation, a kind of painting which Tom Harrisson very much went for and encouraged me to do, which was invented detail. But where does this detail derive from? It derives from, in my case from my mother's jewel box I suppose, and from all kinds of remembered images, of maybe Edmund Dulac and Arthur Rackham, all the kind of childhood influences which are terrifically important, and which now Turner Prize shortlist painters are trying to abolish from their minds. Don't let anything which is traditional creep in, they seem to me to be

saying. We've got to be original, we've absolutely got to be original; photograph the insides of a washing machine, or the intestines of a cow. Incidentally, I did rather go for that cross-section of a cow. Had to admit that I found it very fascinating.

*Why?*

Again partly to do with, I'd been describing, it was intricacy. I'd never realised, I'd sort of thought of the inside of a cow as being a lot of open spaces, and a few blobby balloon-like objects which were the sort of spleen and the liver and so on, floating around. And suddenly one is faced with this amazing intricacy of closely packed organ of intestines and veins and muscles and, and things, and it seemed to me to have a connection with, with Oriental art, with Indian temples, with... A kind of intricacy which has always fascinated me, certainly with Indian miniatures.

*When did you first see Indian miniatures?*

I think an uncle, rather a distinguished uncle, J A Spender, who edited a paper called the *Westminster Gazette*, which changed into the, the *News Chronicle*, and eventually into the *Chronicle*, and eventually into the *Guardian*, he was liable to say, 'the lure of the East', and he had been to India on journalistic projects, and he was quite an important man. He had a...he had an approach to the ear of Asquith when Asquith was Prime Minister. He hated Lloyd George so it was Asquith he went for. But he was quite an important man, and he went to India to talk to the Viceroy and all that kind of thing. But he wasn't able to resist Indian art and he came back with Indian miniatures, and I think that's probably when I was ten or eleven I saw things that he showed me. And then later in life Pauline's close, some close, very complicated relationship with her mother, a name, Gayer-Anderson, two identical twins, one of the twins had lived in Cairo and been purchasing antiques for the, for King Farrukh, and had collected, a big collection of Indian miniatures which are now in the British Museum, together with a famous bronze cat which is called the Gayer-Anderson cat. And those Indian miniatures, he showed me a lot of those and were absolutely fascinating.

*So in both cases you were able to handle them in a way [inaudible].*

I was able... Because I was short... Oh I was able to look at them very closely, and because I was short-sighted I was able to get really sort of three inches away from them, I could get three inches away and really enjoy the technique. I mean technique is another thing which has very much influenced my work. My enemies call me a technical trickster, and so I am slightly at the mercy of technique, and suddenly make discoveries of incompatible solvents not mixing together and exploding somehow, and having fascinating effects on the, on the surface of the painting.

*Just going back to what we were talking about with the painting, when you were saying that sometimes you'll paint out rather like Eileen Agar did, are we talking about a period of weeks with a painting, or are we talking months, or years?*

Oh years.

*Might you pick up something [inaudible]?*

Years, yes, I think a painting in a way never finishes. You get stuck, and you think, what shall I do next? And you really don't know. You put it away and maybe accidentally you come across it, let's say three years later, and you think, why on earth didn't I realise that that is the... I know how to go on with that now, I know how to make it a successful painting, or in my opinion a successful painting. Very difficult to date them of course, people hate pictures which are dated 1930 to '80, that kind of thing, but one has to sometimes, and I do. The painter John Banting, in the 1950s, or late Forties, discovered that his paintings dated 1931 sold very well – perhaps you'd better suppress this – and so he started dating his paintings 1931. (laughs) And they... I suppose the artist in a way is allowed to cheat on his own [inaudible]. I think de Chirico did that, didn't he.

*It's interesting actually, because in a way that brings in the other aspect of the art world, which is the industry around it, and the dating of paintings and the writing about paintings and the art history and the critics and everything, which in a way is very remote from the actual processes of the studio isn't it.*

I think you have to be very self-controlled, very cynical about it. I mean, my own gallery, do I mention it? Yes I suppose so, yes. Do I mention it?

*Yes.*

The Redfern Gallery took me up for four or five years between 1940 and 1946, and now if they...they are totally disloyal and they just sort of suddenly give you up. But occasionally, let's say once every three years, you bump into one of them and they say, 'Oh we'd like to come and see your, what's going on, see your work,' and maybe they come down. And they say, 'We don't want to see anything later than 1955.' And that, that's it, they've just made up their minds. They think that since 1955 you've gone to the dogs, that your work's no good. I think that's an attitude based on the commercial idea which I've, I repeat myself now, which is that they can sell a recognisable handwriting. I mean I've actually tried to sell a painting by William Scott which I bought before he developed his abstract style, and it was actually said to me, 'Oh this is not a typical Scott; we're interested in a typical Scott.'

*It could be argued that because it's not a typical Scott it...*

It's all the more interesting.

*Mm.*

That particular painting actually is now in the public gallery in Birmingham I think.

*Well I was going to say, it sounds as though it should be in a museum.*

It is in a museum, maybe Wolverhampton, yes, I can't remember.

*But, the other thing, just picking up, because there are so many things cropping up in this, you said you'd found, you had invented a means of making a rubbing from almost any three-dimensional object.*

I'll be showing you a lot of that, but I'll just tell you briefly about it. I was influenced by Max Ernst, and in those days it was called frottage, and it was used a lot by Man Ray and Max Ernst and a lot of artists around them, minor versions of Max Ernst. And I woke up and I...one day I was fascinated by the texture on a shell, and thought that would make a marvellous rubbing, and was very annoyed that of course it's very difficult to make a rubbing of a three-dimensional thing; you've got to sort of push the paper around, and eventually it loses its point. So I spent several sleepless nights thinking about this, and suddenly, Eureka, I realised that if you rotated a shell into Plasticine, you would get an impression of the texture, and you could then push the Plasticine flat, and it occurred to me there was a parallel between the, Mercator's projection of the, of the flat, the flat rendering of a globe, the Earth, because it distorts of course, it distorts the thing. But then I thought, well Plasticine, it's no good having it on Plasticine; what's the next move? You can't take a rubbing from Plasticine, it's too soft. So, you can use the Plasticine as a reverse mould. And so I thought about that, and came across some material called PVA which is polyvinyl acetate, and experimented with painting the textured surface of the Plasticine with PVA, but of course the two things then stick together. So, that's no good. So, I think, well, there's a commonsense answer to that, and that is to sprinkle the Plasticine with, brush it over with talcum powder or French chalk, which is talcum powder, and that's going to be a resist[????]. And that worked, and the PVA then pulled off and left this ravishing texture to every detail. Then, the PVA is not much good as it is, because it's a semi-transparent, rather ugly material, so, what do you with it? So you...I thought that up, and experimented. You paint it a dark tone, back and front, and you then take a roller and roll over a lighter tone, let's...at its extreme, let's say white over black, which is what I first started with, and the protrusions will pick up the white.

Well, the roller of course, you're dealing with a not totally level surface, so the roller misses out, so you've got to find another means of applying the light over the dark. And, eventually I came to this very elementary thing of simply finger dabbing. So you have an area of white quick-drying paint which you pick up on your finger and dab over the black surface. And so I collected a huge quantity of what basically is white on black textured areas, and, for a time what...how do you use these? And gradually I introduced them into my paintings. And now I've found a method of introducing them into, as part of the process of etching. Although it isn't exactly etching, it's...it's more accurately called intaglio printing. But the result is something really that only I at the moment have the patience to do. I'm faced with the problem of telling people how I do this, practising artists how I do it. I decided to be generous-minded with it, and I've given the secret away to a lot of people, partly because I think they probably won't have the patience. It's a laborious process, I mean the PVA, you have to do seven coats, and you have to wait for it patiently to set you see, and so that's quite tricky.

*It's very exciting, inventing a process.*

Well all those... I find a great deal of excitement and satisfaction in all those processes, and now I am, I am experimenting a lot with pastel, again partly because an ex-student of mine called David Blackburn, who was picked on by Kenneth Clark as being one of the, about to be an important painter, has developed a miraculous technique with pastels, and he came down the other day. Now, I am faced with the problem of knowing that I'm being very influenced by his painting, and of trying not to do what he's done you see.

*And presumably it's a two-way process.*

He claims to...I can't believe it, he claims that I did him, that I taught him very well. On the other hand, when he was interviewed by the block writing the introduction to his book, he says that the Royal College of Art was no bloody good at all, and since I was his tutor at the Royal College, it's rather contradictory that.

*Mm. Shall I give you...*

Shall we break off?

[End of F7806 Side B]

[F7807 Side A]

*You were just talking about various family members who have hopes of objects or finance or whatever that might come to them from you. And, it's one of the things that we try and document in the recordings really, are people's feelings about death, both the first death they encountered, which presumably might have been a grandparent in your case? I don't know.*

In my case it was my parents, because my, both my parents were dead by the time I was fifteen. And my mother died when I was twelve, and my father died when I was fifteen. I seem to remember strongly resisting being taken to see the corpse, and I...I have succeeded in eliminating the memory of that, but I think, my sister tells me that we were taken to see the corpse in both cases. I cannot, can't remember a single thing, so evidently I must have hated it if I was taken to it.

*Mm. And at that stage, would you have been told about death in a religious context, did you have a religious upbringing in those terms?*

My father talked always in clichés, and he would have used the ordinary clichés about life's journey coming to an end, and crossing the sticks, or passing over. And we used slightly to mock him at using these kind of conventional clichés. So no, no kind of reference to death would have been made, apart from the fact that from the age of four until eight my...the First World War was a background to my life, and I was constantly hearing of the deaths of, of for instance my grandmother's favourite son, my mother's younger brother, was killed, which absolutely devastated both my grandmother and to a certain extent my mother, who... That might have been one of the reasons why she became what was then called an invalid, and lay, spent a lot of her time in bed. My grandmother was a much stronger character, much more physically energetic, and slightly eccentric, and I think refused to let it get her down in that kind of way, but she allowed...because of that event she became a Quaker, and devoted a lot of her life to



dealing with refugees and doing her sort of good works in relation to the various war, the wars going on in various parts of the world.

*Mm. I mean I'd like to talk about all the family members in a lot of detail eventually. But when your mother's death occurred, do you think you thought that there was an afterlife, do you remember what it meant to you as a youngster?*

I didn't give it a thought. My parents, apart from the horror of being taken to see her body, my shaming thought, remembrance, is excitement at getting into a Rolls Royce, which was involved in the funeral. And for me that was a really dramatic event, because I mean I was mad about cars, cars being much less frequent in those days than they are now, and getting into a Rolls Royce was quite something. So all kind of sentimental thinking about death, I mean maybe I didn't realise the extent to which my mother had been totally removed from life, I mean I probably didn't realise. Although since she was an invalid, and ill a lot of the time, and in bed a lot of the time, doing embroidery and, and such, she was much less of a mother to us than were two of our domestic servants.

*Yes. I'd like to talk about...*

Whom you know about probably.

*Well I'd like to talk about that in a lot of detail. But, I mean do you now think about death quite a lot? Have you thought about death all your life, do you think?*

No, I haven't. I thought about death when it was quite likely that I would be killed during the war, and I thought about it as something that would happen mercifully, was likely to happen mercifully very quickly. I've always thought of, hoping for a sudden death, rather than the prolonged type of death that my first wife had for instance, which was five years. And nothing...my own...my thoughts of about it are limited to the wish that I shall die quickly. And in fact I think I am about to negotiate that document which begs to prevent a prolongation of life, through being a total bloody nuisance to one's

friends and relatives. I mean think of, think of people feeling that they ought to go to visit you in hospital, that they ought to bring grapes, and, and things, just horrifies me. Just as thinking of people going to my funeral horrifies me. So that I've really abolished the idea of having a funeral.

*What do you think death is, do you think it's just an end, or...?*

Total finish, total blank, yes, I don't think of...I just...it doesn't seem to me possible. A very curious thing happened when, when my first wife was nearing the end, she was persuaded by some well-wishing person to deal with faith healing, and she was put into contact with a very curious character whose head was still full of shrapnel from the First World War, who was in constant pain and who was blind and who was led around by a kind of amanuensis, and he used to come and visit her, and at that stage she was clearly dying, and she used to recover for about an hour, two hours perhaps, and saying more vehemently than she usually said, because all the way through her illness she said she knew she was getting better. But for two hours she would sort of try and get out of bed, and say that she was perfectly all right. At the end of all this, after she had finally died, this bloke took me aside and said, 'I'm convinced that you will now want to communicate with your dead wife.' And I said, 'Why?' And he said, 'Well, it's inevitable, that you can't suddenly cease a relationship like that.' And I said, 'OK, well what's the best way of doing that?' And he said, 'The best way is for you to commit suicide.' Which seemed to me absolutely extraordinary. Because by committing suicide you will go to where she is, and you will join up again. And, that seemed to me in a way so absurd, that, I revert to the belief that it's a complete blank, it's a complete end.

*So do you ever have a sense, say now of Stephen or someone you've been very close to all your life, and who has suddenly not there, do you ever have a sense of anything?*

I have... Curiously enough, I have an increasing appearance of my first wife in my dream world, so occasionally I sort of think, well, maybe she's trying to get in touch, but I...I honestly don't think it as a very serious thought.

*And, having had suicide suggested to you, I mean had you ever thought about suicide anyway?*

Yes, after she died, what that bloke said did, did put a kind of germ of a thought into my head, and I thought, well, life is pretty miserable now, so, yes, I might. But I knew that, I knew that I wouldn't, somehow I knew that I wouldn't. And since then, if I've been in great physical pain of any kind, I've sort of thought I would rather die than this. Even to the extent of having a, a kind of monumental itch all over my body for no disclosed cause at all, I've felt, God! it would be better to be dead than to be itching like this, I mean for quite, really trivial reasons. But my thinking those kind of things is really qualified by the fact that, during my first wife's illness, an aunt of mine, the wife of another very distinguished uncle, whose son had been killed in the Second World War, a very handsome young man, she wrote to me and said, 'Avoid self-pity like the plague.' And so, if ever I feel self-pitying or very depressed or faced by inextricable conflicts, I find myself quite, forcing myself to think of, let's say Kosovo or Rwanda, or a mother holding a dead baby in its arms, and the kind of dreadful kind of misery that one sees on television, I think, in a way really brings one to a sense of proportion about how lucky one is, how lucky one is to have two legs, two arms, food, heat, comfort, and how trivial some publicly made complaints. Like the person who gets on television and says, 'Because I was abused when I was a teenager, or when I was a kid, because I was abused, I haven't had a good night's sleep and I've had headaches and I want to be sick, and I can't concentrate on my work,' rubbish, I think, rubbish; why don't they stop and think how lucky they are? These are kind of, slightly shaming thoughts I think, but I do genuinely, you know...

*And you said when we were talking this morning that your mood in the studio can change a painting from one day perhaps to the next or whatever. Are you someone who has quite big mood swings, or do you tend to be level, or...?*

No, big mood swings... One of the things I do frequently say about painting is that, as opposed to another painter I know, knew, because he's dead now, Michael Rothenstein, who used to wake up every morning wildly excited to get back to his studio, to carry on the work he had been doing the previous day, and therefore feeling the same as he did the previous day, and in fact who felt the same the whole time, as opposed to that kind of excitement, I wake up feeling a different person. I wake up feeling depressed, say, or particularly laughey, or, depending on who's with me, and what I do reflects my changing mood I think.

*Mm.*

And I'm fully, I'm fully aware of the fact that that leads to what we've already talked about, about changing styles.

*If you become depressed, it might only last a day; it's not something that takes three weeks to get out of and then a great cloud lifts?*

It's probably a day, because, quite possibly the cause of depression is something evanescent, like having put a dearly loved person into a bad mood or, or having offended someone and knowing that it's going to... Having had a... I absolutely hate having quarrels, I hate fighting. I am prepared to suppress what I genuinely think are quite logical causes of complaint, I'm prepared to suppress them in order to avoid a quarrel. I absolutely hate quarrelling.

*Did you have terrible quarrels early in life, does it relate to some...?*

Well as children, as children we quarrelled a lot. And I remember, I remember being told by various nannies and so on that my mother had had to retire to bed with a headache and feeling faint and so on because we had been quarrelling so, and I think, I think Stephen wrote a poem I think involving that line of thought, about us quarrelling as children. Yes, and I... I'm sorry, I've lost the thread of your questioning.

*I was trying to find out why you're so worried by the idea of quarrelling, whether it's a, has some horrible root.*

I think, I think from childhood, yes, I think from childhood.

*Mm. And, just carrying on with the, talking about death while we're on the subject. You said you almost don't want a funeral. What do you want to happen?*

Oh, I would be happy if there was a kind of memorial concert, rather like the one that Stephen had in St Martin's, where my favourite music was played, and my choice would disclose a very, I think the word is...is...no, a very shifting, eclectic, I think the word is eclectic, eclectic choice of music.

*What would it be?*

Oh which would include, together with a famous slow movement from a Schubert quintet, which I understand practically everybody is choosing for their memorial concerts. I might shift that on that account. (laughs) Down to, *You're Driving Me Crazy* or some such pop song of the...when was *You're Driving Me Crazy*? I think, *You're Driving Me Crazy* must have been pre-war, pre-Second World War I think.

*And have you written it all down so that people will know?*

I'm going to. I haven't yet, no. I've told Rachel quite a lot of the things that I want.

*And do you have a sense, I know that some people have, of, through their children and grandchildren, a sense of continuity, even if they're not going to be around themselves, or do you think that doesn't make a difference?*

I don't really have such a sense. I do rather anxiously look for signs of my better qualities appearing in my own son, and being slightly worried that some of them aren't appearing. (laughs) I do that. I wish he – and he wishes also, that he had been more creative purely in the sort of visual sense, in terms of painting and, and sculpting, and creating objects, and, and being observant about... You see one of the things about my grandchildren is that the whole of this place and my studio is full of, not altogether conventional objects, some kind of dotty objects, and yet my grandchildren have never observed one single thing. They just come in and demand to watch *Neighbours* or something on television. What can a ten-year-old find to watch in *Neighbours*, I ask myself? Must be some mysterious thing. Is it just that they're sitting down and being passive, and not having to stir their minds into any activity? I hope it's not that. That's one of... I mean I can talk for ages about what I wish for my grandchildren. One of the things that annoys me about dying is that I shan't be able to see what...whether they all turn, whether they turn out for the good.

*But you feel very connected with them by the sound of it.*

I feel connected in the sense that, I wish I could love them, and I don't. My wife when she was sane told me that I had no understanding at all of children, and that I was hopeless with children. I think she's probably right in the sense that I'm pretty hopeless with children. And she told me that, that I failed to see that they were marvellous. I wish I could think they were marvellous. I don't. (laughs) There are enchanting aspects of them of course, because, no child could be a child without knowing how to seduce in a way.

*Mm. And, can I just now briefly, because there's lots of things I want to go back to that we talked about this morning. When we were talking about colour and how you have both an instinctive understanding of it and an intellectual understanding of it, and I was asking once you've done part of the painting and you start consciously considering how the rest of the painting will relate to it in terms of colour, whether...when there is an*

*element of surprise that comes in, there's always as you said a margin of difference between what you had in your mind's eye and what you actually then add on.*

Mm.

*How much is that to do with colour and how much is it to do with the form in which the colour is placed?*

I think, not so much form as area. And here certain rules unconsciously do apply, because it's simply a natural visual reaction. The colours which are by nature lighter in tone than the colours which in their nature are dark in tone, like purple, purples and ultramarine, and the whole range of blues which are by nature darker in tone; yellows, light greens, are in their pure form lighter in tone, the lighter in tone tend to make more impact on the eye, and that's simply a physical thing, that they effect the, the visual perception, they effect the machinery of the eye more, therefore they tire it out sooner. So, you evolve a rule from that, that if you're putting into a relationship light tones and dark tones, then the darker tones occupy a larger area than the lighter tones, and they balance out so to speak, in terms of the mechanism of the eye. I don't... I know that, there's a writer called Adrian Stokes, and Kandinsky too, who write a lot about how colours attach themselves to three dimensions to form, and of course, a very obvious sort of classic, a rule of classical painting is that the blue area of the spectrum is, because it happens in nature, is the distant aspect, whereas the warmer colours, yellows and oranges, are the foreground. So you will find it's a kind of aesthetic formula almost that classical painters like Claude Lorrain and sometimes Turner, not always Turner because Turner went fairly berserk about colour, tend to put blues in the distance and reds and orange and yellow in the foreground. That's almost a kind of rule. But then one gets into a state of mind, as every self-respecting student does, where you are out to break the rules and do exactly the opposite. So it's...it's a complicated line of thinking, and one's really kind of tossed around by it.

*Mm. Did you know Stokes?*

I didn't, no. I found it quite difficult to understand his book, his writing. I found it very fascinating, and I tried to understand it. It was one of the many books I read in preparing my lecture, and I'm sure I quoted from it in my lecture.

*Did you know, connected with Stokes, did you know Margaret Gardner?*

Margaret Gardner.

*Who was Barbara Hepworth's great friend, but was also a friend of Stokes'.*

No, I didn't, no. Was she American?

No.

No.

*No, I don't think so. And, can you actually tell me a little bit more about your lecture on colour, because, as we've said off tape, it doesn't actually exist in manuscript form, so...*

No. Well it derived, as I think I told you, from the fact that students used to turn up, relying completely on their instinctive colour sense, and we instituted actual tests for colour blindness, the Ishihara test, where quite a surprisingly large proportion of students turned out to be colour blind. So you... Blind was the wrong word, deficient. But then students didn't like to be called deficient, so we had to find another word, which was, I don't know, colour inactive or something. And, so, the whole thing goes mad really about instinct. If your, the mechanism of your eye isn't working, and if you see red as grey, which a badly colour-deficient person does, then what the hell is it all about? You really do need to know what's happening. And so, I started to... Having been taught at the Architectural Association by a very memorable and honourable character called Holmes, John Holmes, who wrote books himself about colour, and having been taught



colour theory, which was that there are rules by which you can make good colour, I instinctively, I ran away from that, I didn't think there could possibly be rules. But I did, I then argued to myself that we didn't know, I for one didn't know enough about colour. And one had to start from the beginning, so, the obvious place to start was Newton in his experiments with the prism, and the splitting of white light into its component wavelengths, and the general effect that that had on one's perception, and then, a remarkable discovery made by a Frenchman called Chevreul, who noticed that all the black in embroideries and tapestries, if it was placed into reds, all that black looked green. I mean he couldn't get away from the fact that, although it was exactly the same batch of wool or silk as looked black in another area, and he actually went so far as to get hold of the people who had handled the tapestry, and who were using the wools, and they proved to him that it was exactly the same, out of the same batch of dye, there was no question that it was different. So he started investigating, why did this black look reddish if it was placed amongst green? And he came up, although not altogether accurately, with the idea of, of complementary contrast, that somehow that black became infused with the complementary colour of the colour which surrounded it. And then, I forget which, whether it was Newton or... And then of course I read Goethe who equally had his theories about how the eye behaved, particularly in relation to complementary contrast. And then I read the theory which has to do with the science of optics, that the eye has what are called receptors which can be divided into three basic elements, named by colours which are green, red and yellow, violet, green, red and yellow. I should say violet... Sorry, violet blue... I'm forgetting it myself now. Violet blue, red and yellow. And these receptors can be made tired, so that if the red receptor was tired out by looking longingly, for a long time, at red, then the other two receptors, namely violet blue and yellow, which combine together in this sense, although not always, combine together to make green, you will see green, because the other receptor is tired. And from there, that seemed to me an extremely convincing theory, and I worked all round that theory, questioning myself, what happens if you look at yellow? OK, well if you look at yellow, then the two others are violet blue and green, what do they make? A kind of turquoise. And that is true. And the question, What is the complementary of what? can always be answered by simply doing that experiment, making a disc of the colour that you want to

know the complementary of, holding it up, looking at it for twenty seconds, and then into your line of vision will come its floating complementary, which literally floats about. There are various rules; the best way of inducing complementaries, I mean there were certain students who simply refused ever to be able to see a complementary, an after-image. I mean maybe there was something slightly wrong with their vision, possibly these were the colour-deficient students. Then that led me into reading a lot of books, and I accepted the fact that to demonstrate these you had to have a prism, you had to pass a ray of, a parallel ray of white light through a prism, and actually show a spectrum on the screen, which is very exciting really, because you see this kind of rainbow thing, and generally brings out a sort of wow! from the audience.

[End of F7807 Side A]

[F7807 Side B]

And then there are things...I mean if you ask, I will ask you now, if you ask...mind you, I don't know how much you know about colour. I'll ask you the question: What happens if from different projectors, you project onto the same screen an overlap of a red and a green?

*Black.*

Well, you say black. It isn't, it's yellow you see.

*Right.*

So... Everybody says grey, or black, because they think... There are two systems, one is additive colour mixing and the other is subtractive mixing. If it's additive colour mixing, which is pigments put on paper, which are then reflecting light, and you mix red and a green pigment, and allow it to reflect back the remaining light, it won't reflect anything back because they're absorbing the whole range. But you are dealing with subtractive method in projection, and red overlapping green produces in fact yellow. And when you actually show this, and you have your big screen and you have a yellow disc, you have a green disc and a red disc, and you ask that question, everybody says they cancel out, black. And you gradually bring these two discs together to overlap, and they produce yellow; that stirs an enormous amount of interest. And you then, you then go on to describe that that principle of subtractive colour mixing is involved in television colour, in some forms of printing of books, and so on, then you can really get people involved. I always thought it was a fatal mistake to do what our teacher at the college, at the Architectural Association did, which was to simply reel out a list of rules, one of which is, if you put a very bright colour, a fully saturated colour into a neutralised grade down, surrounding, that bright colour will look very very bright indeed; in fact that's the best thing to do, to show off a really bright colour is to surround it with grey you see. Well there is a certain amount to be said about that, but it's a rule. In other words, if you're

designing a carpet, or if you're designing a piece of interior decoration, paint something bright red and the rest of it will have to be grey you see. And then there was, there was a whole system which was broadcast by an American colourist whose name I forget now, where there was a whole system of harmonics, where colours close together on the colour circle were harmonic, distant, were contrasting, altered in tone, were discordant and so on. So you made up these rules of harmony and discord, and attached them to pleasure or non-pleasure or pain to the eye, and so on. Discord was automatically described as painful to the eye, as it is in music, used to be described in music as painful to the ear. I just said no, that is not so, I mean a discord can be a tear-jerking or spine-chilling thing, both in colour and in music. And then of course I got on to the various composers like Scriabin who had actually made machinery to translate colour into music. Scriabin constructed some kind of extraordinary Heath Robinsonian organ where you pressed a key and it became a colour. Inevitably the upper ranges became cold and blue, and the lower notes, the base, became warm, and seems to me, that seems to me absolutely, hardly worth discussing, I mean it seems to me so obvious. Another interesting, well may be interesting thing, is that, all my life I've attached, I believe this is a well-known thing with a name to it, I have attached colours to things like days of the week, and composers' names, like, Beethoven to me is black and dark green, and Mozart is gold and dark brown, and Monday is green and Tuesday is pink and Wednesday is biscuit colour, Thursday is grey, and so on.

*Go in, Friday?*

Friday is red, Saturday is coffee, Sunday is black. Well now Sunday being black has probably quite a logical reason, because my father insisted on putting us into absolutely dreadful clothing, the Eton, black Eton suit with stiff collar and tie, black tie, and, ridiculous costume which I absolutely hated. And the fact that we had to wear starched collars which cut into one's neck have given me all kind of complexes about wearing dress suits and stiff shirts and stiff cuffs and things, all my life. And, aspects of our clothing as children, like wearing gaiters, which cut into the back of, just underneath the knee, and stiff collars, and uncomfortable shoes, and horribly uncomfortable clothes, all

connected with...connect with colours. Black, black is Sunday inevitably because that's what we had to do on Sundays.

*Presumably, did you have to go to church as well, or not?*

Oh yes, we had to go twice to church. Which was a black-making thing. And when we, Stephen and I were sent to prep school when we were about seven, which was absolute misery, I mean, weeks of tears and, hated every moment of it, and at... Stephen and I went to an absolutely Dickensian school, which is two hours' taping in itself. We had to do low church in the morning and high church in the evening, and...

*And did you ever believe in it, were you ever swayed by it?*

I went through a short phase when, at Holt, at Gresham's, I was put into, I wonder if it still exists, into Confirmation, and the Bishop of Norwich is asked to lay his hands on one. And Stephen always says that he laid more than a hand, he kissed him. (laughs) I went through a very, a kind of mystical phase in which I persuaded myself that I was a very spiritual being, and thought higher thoughts, and went into long meditations and things, yes.

*What stage was this?*

Oh that was when I was being confirmed, and I became convinced that I was very religious and needed to pray a lot, and used to go down on my knees and believed in... But it didn't last very long, no.

*And, going back into your colour lecture, you also used slides as well as the projectors, did you, of particular painters, or...?*

Yes. Because of...because of these things we're talking about, induced contrast, which is not necessarily complementary contrast, but it is mainly complementary contrast, you can

induce changes in certain colours that you are using. For instance, if you take a strip of grey and make it pass across a field of red, and across a field of green, the grey when it's going over the red will appear to be green, and when it's going over the green will appear to be red. So, that is an amazingly...that principle, I mean there are endless variations on that. And there was a character called Albers, Josef Albers, who taught at the Bauhaus, who produced the most marvellous book, which in fact isn't a book, it's a kind of box with screen prints, where he puts this into practice, where you can actually make two colours look like five different colours by passing these colours across different fields. And I have one slide where I'm using the same blue into a kind of diagrammatic slide, and it's absolutely amazing, the blue in one part of the slide appears to be emerald green, and in the other part appears to be violet blue. And nobody, I mean people just literally said, 'You're cheating, we need, we simply need to look at this in another form. If you give to us on paper, we can then mask out, we can mask out areas of blue, and really test that they are the same blue.' So that I did these diagrammatically as well, which took a lot of time, and I did it by a system that I invented called inter-cutting, which is like the inlay of furniture where you get a light wood set into a dark wood, and by cutting three or four surfaces at once you can interchange them and tape them from behind. So I made large diagrams of this. It depends to a certain extent on scale. It becomes less and less convincing as you increase the scale of course. And eventually I did convince people. And I tried to convince industry, carpet manufacturers and wallpaper printers and so on, that they could economise on dyes and different coloured silks and wools and things by employing this principle, and they could...they could imply five colours and use only three you see, which would presumably save quite a lot of money. But they were not to be convinced, they hated the idea. They wanted to go on spending the money.

*Pretty unusual.*

And this went through... Yes. And then of course, there were...there were slides which could, which could draw gasps from, of disbelief from people. I mean there were... I borrowed these experiments largely from Albers, I knew in which direction to go, and I elaborated them on my own, and I made...I pushed them further than he had pushed them.

The book, the Albers book which, the box of stuff which was in the Royal College library, the librarian told me that there were massive requests to withdraw this book. Worse still, since they were loose leaves in a box, individually screen-printed, he used his Bauhaus students to print them, they all started being stolen, and so, the whole thing became rather complicated on that level. I mean I, I did get certain students deeply involved and experimenting.

*Do you remember who, which students?*

I can't remember now, no.

*Did you ever meet any of the Bauhaus people?*

One of the Bauhaus people in fact was head of the weaving department at college, Margaret Leichner, who had been acquaintanced with Bayer and Paul Klee, and all the famous people like Johannes Itten and Albers and Gropius, and she had known them. But she, she had known them as a student, and they were staff you see. Otherwise...

*But had she found them approachable? What was the relationship between the students and staff?*

Well she said that life was very exciting. She said yes, that they were very stimulating, and... I met... My grandmother knew the wife of Moholy-Nagy, mostly pronounced Moholy-Nagy [phonetic], Lucia Moholy[ph]. In fact she, my grandmother introduced me to Lucia Moholy-Nagy, who was suitably interested, I mean asked...I must have been only about thirteen or fourteen I think. And, she was trying to push me along Bauhaus kind of... I didn't need much pushing, I mean we were... I and two other students at the AA were very revolutionary, and I'm ashamed to say that, terribly, I was terribly rude, and conceited, and... One of my staff... The name's just this moment vanished. He won a competition for Norwich town hall, which was an exact, not exact, which was an imitation of Stockholm town hall, and was very romantic, and probably rather good in its,

in its way. Certainly probably rather good in detail and material. And to him I said, 'I have no respect either for you or for your work; I think Norwich town hall is absolute trash.' (laughs) Crap or something. And poor man, he burst into tears. I laugh, but I...I feel so ashamed of it.

*Did you feel ashamed at the time?*

No, not at all, no. I was terribly arrogant, and, not as arrogant as my elder brother was, but I was terribly arrogant. Well we, we formed a kind of clique which was, where we were called the Three Musketeers, and we operated on the principle of, of Le Corbusier and a few rather obscure Dutch architects like Dudok and, who was a master in brickwork, and, names I've now forgotten, but I mean Gropius, the famous names that have survived, Mies van der Rohe.

*Did you go to things like the MARS Group meetings?*

Yes, because, Lubetkin...I think MARS was Lubetkin, wasn't it?

*Mm. But Gropius used to go, didn't he, sometimes.*

Yes, we did, and in fact Lubetkin married the...Margaret Church, who was the sister of Kitty West, Kitty Church. Margaret Church was a year above me at the AA, so I knew all about Tecton and MARS and Lubetkin. And, oh yes, we were very highbrow and intellectual.

*Mm, right. Again I'd like to go into that in detail. Just catching things that I'm going to lose from this morning if I'm not careful. We started talking about colour partly because we were talking about television.*

Yes.



*And, you said you were involved at some point, and that's why you had started thinking about the colour technology and television. Did you actually work with television [inaudible]?*

No. No, I was a bit obstreperous, and I tried to meet, I tried to make a contact with television, because I thought they were being so dim about it, and I think I did succeed in meeting somebody who was in television, who gave me sort of adequate answers in terms of, of economics, in terms of expense, and, in particular this standard set by...flesh colour, what they called... This was a standard by which they had to adjust things all round it. And the fear that they were going to make the flesh look pallid or death-like or something. No, I had way-out ideas of...which have now been taken up, of bringing very exciting techniques into commercials. I mean...I mean I don't... I watch, by my own standards I watch too much television, but it's not all that much, and I think some of the most exciting things going on are in commercials.

*Anyone in particular at the moment?*

They're all amazing. Some of the car, some of the car advertisements are amazing, in the way they can shift space and shift context, and whirl things round and shift, and suggest movement which isn't there, rotation and diminishment and enlargement, and focusing. Amazing. I mean which is all done by pressing buttons and things.

*Could you have become interested in animation?*

Yes. A friend of mine, a Surrealist painter called John Banting, worked with Len Lai in doing that kind of film, what was it called? You said the word just now.

*Animation.*

Animation. When you're painting frame by frame, and, which is now of course a thing of the past, and you're shifting by digital manipulation, I imagine it's all done very

quickly now. But the whole of the Walt Disney world of, of animated cartoon, and the drawings, I mean, it always seemed to me, though I was, I think possibly rather ashamed to admit it, that some of the Walt Disney drawings were superb. Wonderfully imaginative. Rather in tune with Edmund Dulac and Arthur Rackham. I think strongly competitive with them. And now of course they're coming up at Sotheby's and Christie's, the original frames, and being bought as serious works of art.

*Mm. And, again related to that, when you started talking about computers, you were saying that one of the problems with them is that there are no limitations, or sort of, the limitations are only after so many hundred variants. If you knew what you were trying to achieve, can you imagine working on a computer; i.e. if you had set yourself limitations within, can you imagine ever working on a computer?*

Yes I can, yes. Given unlimited... I mean I think this is a question of age. Now I strongly feel that my working time is limited, as opposed to when one's young, one thinks one's working time is unlimited. And I know that it would be a big kind of, exploration, that I would have to by trial and error work my way through the possibilities, and I know that I could do very...I'm absolutely convinced I could do very exciting things with computers. I'm not entirely happy about the final printing techniques and the...what prints I've seen from the Adobe Photoshop prints that have come out of the ordinary Hewlett Packard printer, aren't all that happy-making about colour. One can still see the pixels, the individual dots of colour too clearly. But I think things have now, I mean, I can show you in the studio some photocopies that I had, colour photocopies I had done yesterday which are absolutely amazing. So I think I could have... I have to consciously stop myself from it. I had two days struggling with Adobe Photoshop in Southend, and I was pretty dumb about the controls, and how you actually manipulate it, how you did what you intended to do, when one went wrong. But I don't think it would take very long to master that. I've mastered a word processor recently, and I'm fairly happy with it now.

*And, I know this is a totally different angle, but over lunch you were talking about how I think your son had, or somebody had been bringing you components from a computer, and how inspiring you had found those.*

Yes, Rachel's brother, I'll show you in the studio things that I've made. They seem to me a kind of magic, yes.

*Could you just explain it for the tape, what those things are?*

Well, the...the inlaid circuits, that's to say copper, sent on various continuous complicated tracks which are overlapping and circuitous, and made to meet in mysterious areas, their meeting being represented by highly polished metallic dots and things, all this seems to me to equate with Fabergé jewellery, small eggs inlaid with precious jewels, precious metals inlaid with tiny dots of sapphires and diamonds and pearls, and exquisite kind of craftsmanship. In Fabergé's terms they would be hand-crafted, and of course in computer terms they're all machine-produced. But then the fascination of that is that there seems to be absolutely no limit to the smallness, to the size of the elements used, and that more and more things are developing into miniature, so that these hugely complicated circuits get smaller and smaller and smaller, and to that extent to my eye become more and more fascinating.

*Mm.*

Jewel-like things.

*When you were a child, if it was natural for you to go very close up to things, did you get very absorbed in for instance patterns on eiderdowns, or on floor coverings and lino, or carpets and things?*

Yes, very much.

*Can you remember those?*

Yes. My mother used to do embroidery when she was lying in bed, and used to make, used to use very beautiful silks, which came in little kind of bundles which were wrapped in a paper which was printed in gold and silver and itself very fascinating. And I used to love these little packets of silks, and I used to love the detail in her embroidery, and I loved... Her greatest treat, my greatest treat was to go through her jewel box and to be allowed to handle her jewellery. And she was a great fan of Edmund Dulac and Arthur Rackham, and their painting, their illustrations to fairy stories, which we were very largely fed on, fairy stories, are very jewel-like in technique. They used vellum, and wonderfully sort of crafted paintings which, detailed in the same way almost that Indian miniatures detail, patterns on clothing and magic carpets, and crowns. I was, at one stage in my life I was absolutely, when very young, about five or six, I was obsessed by crowns, and the jewels in crowns, and I used to draw endlessly, endlessly draw crowns with jewels, different jewels in them.

*Have you ever enjoyed wearing jewellery?*

I've worn in the past, I've worn rings, yes, I have. Yes, I've liked rings. But not to the...no. Only rings. And I became very keen on watches at one time, I couldn't take my eyes off shop windows full of watches. Still do rather.

*You never wanted to design jewellery?*

No, I didn't want to design jewellery, no.

*And who would read the fairy stories to you?*

My mother used to read to us; my father used to read to us. My father was a very good actor, a wonderful father up till the age of about, up till about eight, when one realised

that he could be slightly embarrassing. He used to read us Brer Rabbit and the black, there's a book about a poor little black boy.

*Sambo?*

No Sambo was much after. This was... *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, that's right, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. And Brer Rabbit was another kind of American negro book, in the days when you were allowed to make differentiations between black and white.

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

[End of F7807 Side B]

[F7808 Side A]

*I want to pick up on childhood books again later. But, I mean do you remember for example the curtains in your childhood bedroom and things like that, do you remember patterns of that sort?*

Yes, I can. Both my, my mother and father were married in 1904 I think, so that they, they were launched into art nouveau, and I can very clearly remember in all the houses we had, ending up in the Hampstead house where I was till I was about twenty-one, lots and lots of art nouveau. And I remember that there was a lot of reproductions of Rossetti and Burne-Jones. There was the, I think it's a painting called *The Light of the World*, which is Christ standing. It's a portrait format painting which was on the stairs in Hampstead. There were... There was a coal scuttle in beaten copper with a kind of art nouveau entwining tendrils and leaf, sort of art nouveau patterns. My mother took the... And we had a William Morris carpet which I can remember very well. And we had Morris upholstery. There was a cupboard with beaten copper doors which was art nouveau. Art nouveau was very much a thing in our lives.

*Do you think as a child you liked it?*

Yes, I was fascinated by it. Yes, I did, I loved it, yes.

*And when you say that the paintings were reproduction, I mean, nowadays the Pre-Raphaelite reproductions one sees are quite often soft of Athena posters and things. You're not talking about reproductions in that sense. What were they?*

I think they must have been torn out of books, and framed. I know that subsequently I came cross a lot of books where certain plates were missing, and I think that must have been the reason. And we were all moved, when the First World War broke out and I was four, we were all moved by my father to a house in Sheringham. Of course my father failed to realise that that was the obvious coast for invasion; almost immediately

Zeppelins flew over, and my father then moved us all right cross England to Bath in Somerset. And in Sheringham my mother created a kind of cubby-hole to herself. That was the wrong phrase, cubby-hole, a sort of, nest, which was panelled with pictures built into the panelling, under glass, which were all Arthur Rackham, and Burne-Jones, and Edmund Dulac I think. So that I, I was always sort of poring over these. And then, she took regularly, the family took a magazine called the *Studio*, and of course, that, that analysed all the then contemporary forms of design and went very deeply into art nouveau. So yes, that coloured my life very much. I do very much remember these things.

*But I'm not sitting in a room with any art nouveau in it.*

No, because they've, William Morris carpet for instance, which I used to have in a flat that I had in London when I was a student, they've all got worn out you see and have disappeared. And a rather disastrous thing happened when, when I was about twenty-one, which was seven...six years after my father died, the house had been more or less...this is amazing really, more or less controlled by my father's secretary, who was kind of having an affair with a cook and her sister, who were very important elements in our lives, Berth Ella[ph], Stephen's written a lot about. And between them they sold up, over our heads they sold up the contents of the house, which, within which were all these art nouveau furnishings and cupboards and beaten copper and pewter. I inherited a William de Morgan vase, which I sold at a time when I had very little money, and I inherited the William Morris carpet which has become worn out, and various little objects. Yes, William de Morgan is another name that cropped up. There's a lot of the vases and the pottery we had was William de Morgan.

[break in recording]

*Before we talk more about childhood, I'm still catching up on things from this morning. You mentioned Max Ernst. Did you actually meet Max Ernst at all?*

No I never met Max Ernst. The only person I was near to meeting was Lucia Moholy. No, I wish I had. But he was very, a very powerful influence. I mean John Banting was a very powerful influence, and he was... Have you heard of John Banting?

*Oh indeed, yes.*

He was doing a big mural for Rosamund Lehmann, and Stephen was very friendly with Rosamund Lehmann, and she lived in a house at a place called Ipsden in Sussex, was it Sussex I think. And, Stephen said to me one day, 'You must meet...' Because he had...he was friendly with Rosamund, he had met John Banting working on this mural, and he said, 'Humphrey, you must meet John Banting, you would love each other.' And he introduced me, and we did, from then on we did become very good friends. And, so I was very influenced. John was a, oh all kinds of things. He was a drunk and he was a drug addict, and he was eccentric, and liable to get himself into jail, and a very very fascinating, interesting person, who... Yes, he led me into Surrealism, into being very interested in Surrealism. One of whom was Max Ernst of course, and so Max Ernst I hit on more than anyone. But we...but our lives were surrounded with, highbrow I suppose, like, I mean a lot of the books that you see here are relics from... Stephen used to give me books about the then modern painters, and... And the house was full of books about artists like Dürer, and my mother's favourite painter was an Italian painter, a mediaeval Italian painter, Fra Angelico. And we had a huge reproduction of a Michelangelo, what's it called, it's a round Madonna, and the reproduction was sort of life-size and was hugely heavy, standing in the dining room I remember.

*Which house is this?*

This was in Hampstead.

*Right.*

And, oh I think my life is, is very influenced by the childhood surroundings and...



*Yes.*

Paintings that we saw. My father used to, who was fairly reactionary in his tastes, used to take us to the Tate to see George Frederic Watts, who used to have a whole room at the Tate, believe it or not, but who is now presumably squashed into the basement somewhere. And of course until Watts at the age of, Frederic Watts at the age of fifty-eight or something married sixteen-year-old actress, oh gosh, famous actress... That was considered to be a disgusting event, and so, the limelight was switched off for Frederic Watts.

*And would your father have felt the same?*

Oh my...that was my father finding it disgusting, yes.

*Oh really?*

Yes. Oh he was very conventional in his...

*And what did you think of Watts?*

Oh, rather fascinating. All allegorical, patience[??] on a monument[??] kinds of paintings. And together with Burne-Jones, King Cophetua, and Ophelia floating down the river, and the Pre-Raphaelites. I mean Watts was a kind of extension of Pre-Raphaelitism, but only in terms of subject matter and not in terms of technique, and we were very much brought up... My father was very friendly with Lord Leverhulme who, because he lived in, at the top of Hampstead Heath, and he had a collection of paintings by Pre-Raphaelites, Albert Moore and Alma-Tadema, other more famous Pre-Raphaelites, and so this was very much our intellectual food in those days. And although we might occasionally have scoffed at it, because we were always trying to appear to be

modern in our thinking and to be reactionary, I had very, not altogether sneaking admirations. I admired them a lot.

*Presumably you would have gone to see the Physical Energies sculpture as well. Did you get marched into Hyde Park?*

Oh, the...you mean Epstein, *Rima*?

*Well that, but also the Watts sculptures.*

The Watts, we would have gone to see that. Is that the sort of athletic figure?

*It's the horse and rider.*

Horse and rider. Do you know, I forget it but we certainly would have been taken to see that. And *Achilles* we were taken to see, and the famous one of Peter Pan, which was another artist, later artist. Gilbert, it was by Alfred Gilbert wasn't it. But of course *Rima*, Epstein, caused a serious event in our family life, because my...there was a kind of revolt like the uprising about Stravinsky's *Rites of Spring*, there was a huge outcry about Epstein's *Rima* in Hyde Park, and my father was all against, was all anti Epstein, and said, this is outrageous, this is hideous perversion of natural form, and obscene and all that. But of course we went into revolution mode and said we thought it was wonderful. (laughs) I think we probably did too.

*And did you argue back with your father, or was there a dialogue, or was it just a sort of parting of the ways?*

No, I think we did argue. I remember once, of course the young tend to scoff, and I remember once saying something about George Meredith, and saying he was a creepy old bore or something, and my father turned very cross and said, 'Before you can make a comment of that kind, you need to try and do what Meredith has done yourself. I won't

have that criticism from someone entirely half-baked about it, ignorant about it.' No, he, he stuck to his guns. There was quite a funny story. There was an Academician... We used to scoff at the Academy, as one does now, and there were painters my father regularly went to see, one of which was, one of whom was a painter called Charles Sims, who regularly, together with a painter called Almesbury-Brown[ph] who painted cows, and a painter called Farquharson who painted sheep, Sims painted a repeatable landscape picture which was a field and a sunset and some trees on the right, and a river on the left and so on. And one year Sims as an RA had the right to exhibit six paintings, as RAs unfortunately do, and suddenly we, there were the most wonderful abstract paintings full of rainbows and colour and drifting raindrops, and tangles of paint. And these were Sims', and we said, 'Oh, wonderful!' And my father said, 'Poor fellow, he's...he's lost his...he's really gone slightly round the bend.' And so these were considered sort of mad paintings. And we thought, we said we thought they were absolutely marvellous. My father got rather cross with that kind of attitude.

*Were you taken, I mean a lot of the RA shows at that point were portraits and things, weren't they?*

Terrible official portraits. There was a painter called Frank Salisbury, and another painter... Gosh, names. I'm amazed to find how many names I am remembering. A painter who could be very good, when he was not being pompous, in other words when he was not painting coronations and grand royalty portraits, I shall remember in the end, I bought, I found a painting...I found his...when I went to Morocco I found his cook sitting on the pavement painting, told me that he'd been his cook. Anyway, my father was great friends with Frank Salisbury, who was very very highly, I'm not sure he wasn't PRA, but a very grandly thought of painter, who painted royalty, and we were all taken to a meal with Frank Salisbury and we were supposed to sort of sit and worship. Instead of which we were rather cool and brash and not to be impressed. My father got very cross with that. Our attitude to the Leverhulme connection was a bit cool and brash and bored.

*What was the Leverhulme household like?*

Oh well, well all we saw was a very classical, columned building which was the gallery. I remember a courtyard I think surrounded by marble columns, and a marble-faced gallery with Alma-Tadema, Albert Moore. Albert Moore was always the ladies carrying jugs on their, carrying urns on their shoulders. And, I remember making some cheeky remark about why they didn't go the whole hog about nudity, and my father trying to quieten me. (laughs) My mother was a great friend of Galsworthy, who also lived very near the Leverhulmes, and in fact I can show you a book where I am...the illustration of a section of the *Forsyte Saga* called *The Awakening*, in which I am little John Forsyte. I think I know where the book is. Yes I can see it.

*What was Galsworthy like?*

I was not allowed really to see much of him. I think he was in love with my mother, I have a...I've developed a theory now since then. And, there's a book of his called *The Dark Flower* which is a rather marvellous book, which I think almost describes his feelings towards my mother. I mean in those days I don't think they would ever have had an affair or anything, but the fact... I mean I was taken up there by a nanny, and there was an artist called Sauter, s-a-u-t-e-r, who put me into various positions which were described in the text. And I was fed on chocolates, and made to be rather narcissistic I think. I mean I was made to, to think of myself as a very pretty, desirable object. And I think that's had quite an effect on my life. In fact, the whole of that side needs to be discussed. We were very much the, the showpieces, we were... We were taken around, the four beautiful Spender children, we were led around Sheringham, and everybody was supposed to gasp at what wonderful children, and that kind of thing, which I think has had a fairly bad influence on our lives. I think it was probably true from photographs that I see, I was a very pretty child. And so was Michael and so was Stephen, and so was Christine, yes.

*But the Galsworthy visit was not Sheringham, it was Hampstead, wasn't it?*

The Galsworthy visit was, was later, in fact I must have been about eleven. I think the illustration... Shall I show you the book?

*I'd like to see it afterwards.*

I'm attached to the microphone.

*I'm thinking of the tape, [inaudible] seeing it..*

Yes.

*And, the fact that it, the character is called John, is that because you were called John?  
Did you ever get actually that name used, or was it just your christening name?*

No, I was...I was christened John. I don't quite know why; quite possibly... It can't have been for that reason, because I don't think my...I don't think *The Forsyte Saga* had been... I don't know the date of *The Forsyte Saga*, I think it was later than when I...I think it was written considerably after my birth day, birth date.

*And the writing isn't based on you at all, it's that you were used as the model for the illustration?*

There is one edition where there is a sort of genealogical Forsyte tree, and into that diagrammatic genealogical tree does come the name Spender. So I think there was more than a casual attachment. You see my father was an aspiring novelist and wrote about thirty novels, and was always bringing friends into... In fact he, I remember him saying that his friends were much more annoyed if they were left out of his novels than if they were written up as unpleasant characters. So... It was very much the fashion then I think to bring one's friends in. I think H G Wells and Arnold Bennett and that lot were always bringing their friends into their novels.

*But Galsworthy was more your mother's friend than your father's?*

Very much so, yes. I mean it was my, it was my mother who took me up there, and, with a nanny, and left me there, and then went into private confab with Galsworthy.

*And do you remember him at all?*

Not at all, no. No, absolutely not.

*And where would they have met?*

Absolutely no idea, no.

*And you think they wouldn't have had an affair because of respectability, or because of their own particular values? I mean, would it have been to do with worrying about what other people thought, or themselves?*

I think entirely worrying about the image, yes. But, I mean I would like to know more about the whole context of adultery and unfaithfulness, and whether people in those days had affairs as easily and frequently as people do now; whether it was accepted as easily. Somehow or other I just think it's not within the realms of possibility that Galsworthy and my mother had an actual physical affair. I think it was very possible that they might have loved each other, that certainly he might have loved her. I do know that my father... My father did talk a lot about what he called 'sowing wild oats'. I know precious little about my father's private life. Incidentally, John Sutherland, the biographer of Stephen, is discovering very fascinating things about our relations, about my father in particular. Stephen and I have always suspected that my father was quite considerably homosexual, but again probably not in any sense a practising way. He was very much involved in boys' clubs, and doing good in... I think he, he was a very active member of what used, what were called Toynbee Clubs, which were entirely to do with boys rather than girls. I would like to know very much more. But in a way I think my mother was, was a kind of

innocent. I've always thought of her... I think she may have actually become ill, because she was horrified by that kind of aspect of life.

*So did either parent ever talk to you about fidelity?*

Never. No, never. My father talked about 'wild oats', which I suppose is a sort of talk about fidelity. But he used to sort of talk about somebody else. There were '*pas devant les enfants*' conversations about H G Wells's private life, which was pretty awful; Lloyd George's private life. I now it's a kind of joke to say my father knew Lloyd George; my father was I think almost in love with Lloyd George, and in the end was betrayed by Lloyd George. They were...they were hand-in-glove. And the talk, the 'not in front of the children' talk about Lloyd George seducing every housemate he came into touch with and so on, was overheard by us, and so that we knew that that kind of thing was discussed. But it was talked about with great disapproval, as though, really the man is absolutely out, is impossible, I mean how can he behave like that? That kind of conversation.

*And when your father talked about wild oats, was it apropos some abstract third person, or was it apropos himself, or you?*

Apropos of his youth I think. I've been told that, that when my mother and father were engaged, I... One of...the mother of one of my greatest friends had been a student at Somerville College, which I never can remember, is it Cambridge or Oxford?

*I think it's Oxford.*

At Oxford. Was a student with my mother, and saw her becoming engaged to my father, and falling in love with my father, and she said that they were 'embarrassingly physical'. They used to sort of, sit together on sofas, almost publicly making love, which would have been caressing and kissing and so on. Which I find almost impossible to believe you see, one can't conjure up these kind of images of parents I think.

*Did you ever sense that they were very fond of each other, or did it not seem that good a marriage?*

I...yes, there were terms of endearment. My father called my mother 'the okapi'. Yes, there were, there were quite a lot of terms of endearment used, and...

*What did he call her?*

An okapi, o-k-a-p-i, which is some kind of African deer which is very graceful. The okapi, which had beautiful graceful movements, and a very graceful face. And... But he, but he lived the kind of life where contact between married couples was much less than there is today. I mean, the idea of sort of washing up or, or ironing shirts, and doing anything domestic, for my father was absolutely out of the question. I mean he went out to lunch at his club which was the National Liberal Club every day, leaving my mother languishing in bed, and goodness knows what he got up to during the day. He was, he was travelling as a journalist, he was travelling all over the world; he did big reports about Ireland and, at one stage he went to India I think and, and Sudan, and places. So he was absent for a long time, goodness knows what he got up to. He may have, he may have had a very private unfaithful life, I don't know.

*And do you think it would even have crossed your mother's mind?*

Again, this might have been one of her, one of the causes of her unwellness. Although in the end it was all put down to some kind of tangled intestine, which would nowadays be very operable but in those days wasn't.

*Mm. But did you get the feeling that they were close in terms of sharing conversation and secrets, even if they didn't seem physically close? I mean might...did they share humour and jokes?*



They shared appreciation of Browning, Tennyson, Wordsworth, the Pre-Raphaelites. Stephen writes an interesting passage in his autobiography about how they used to read to each other, particularly when, there's one passage when we were, we were all taken up to Cumberland by Lake Derwent Water, and from our bedrooms we used to hear my father reading to my mother, and this was beginning to be the stage at which I was starting to be embarrassed at my father, because he was...he was very much an actor, and I felt a kind of falseness in his behaviour. He used to read Dickens to us when, he used to burst into tears about Little Nell, in the tale...was she in *The Tale of Two Cities* I think. This embarrassed me. Are we at the end?

[End of F7808 Side A]

[F7808 Side B]

*.....talking about your father reading Dickens and being very emotional, and that beginning to embarrass you.*

Yes. Well, embarrassment was very... I mean Stephen always used to slightly laugh at me for being so embarrassable, but my father, I think after, after...I would think about eight but let's put it a bit later, after about ten, up till that stage in terms of sort of pillow fighting and pretending to be a lion, and piggyback and doing fatherly things, he was a very enjoyable father, he was full of games and fun and attitudes about, slightly unsympathetic attitudes about stiff upper lips and being a little man, and being brave, and not crying, and so on, but on the whole an enjoyable father. And then suddenly he turned, he seemed to me to be a mass of, of clichés where he would talk in terms of, 'time the great colourist' I remember, one of his phrases. 'Dame nature'. 'Time having lavished his, applied his paintbrush to the sky and produced that purple sunset.' Purple Passages[??] is a good description of... And these appeared very much in his novels, and we, I think we used to slightly scoff and sneer at his novels. And re-reading them, I still think they were fairly good...fairly nonsensical really. I mean for instance, it became a kind of funny story to tell, that my father wrote a seven-volume life of Lord Byron called *Byron in Greece*, in which he never mentions sex at all. So, I mean to write about Byron without mentioning sex is a feat, which maybe one should have admired, I don't know.

*Did he have success with his books in his lifetime?*

I can't answer that. In the sense that... I think he thought of himself as a failure. I don't think he could have had a great success. He had...he had success with some of his journalistic efforts, in the sense, when he came across... He broke a story for the first time, but in breaking a... The great, almost great tragedy in his life was the betrayal by Lloyd George, because Lloyd George confided in him something which, my father actually said, 'Can I release this to the press? Because this is sensational.' And he then

released it to the press, and Lloyd George turned on him and said, 'I never said any such thing.' And that, and my father I think was deeply affected by that, and became really rather miserable. And then, he had... I mean he used to talk about us as his flock, and he... He stood for Parliament as a Liberal in an election in Bath, and he put Stephen and me into a little cart drawn by a donkey, not by a pony but drawn by a donkey, with us, we were made to hold a poster with his photograph on it. And I was eleven then and deeply embarrassed by this, but at the same time, absolutely desperate that he should win. And I cried and cried and cried when he actually lost.

*Did he?*

He lost. And he talked himself hoarse. I mean he actually lost his voice completely in his campaign, in his canvassing, and I was desperate that he should win, but he lost.

*Did he cry?*

I imagine that he might have, yes. I mean when my mother died, he...she was forty-four, he was...he was a good deal older, he must have been, forty-four, fifty-five or something like that, and he started to regard himself as a, as a pitiful, bereaved character with only his flock to look after him. And my sister, Christine, tells me now that she had to do all kinds of things as tokens of care for him. And I was made to go into his bedroom where he was being, his sick room where he was being, where he actually had leeches sucking blood from his arms, and I was made to read to him the Imperial and Foreign page of the *Times*, which I found desperately boring. But at the same time I was rather keen to show how well I could read, and quite enjoyed it from an exhibitionist point of view.

*Do you think he was trying to make you get into the habit of reading that sort of material, as well as it being convenient for him to have someone read to him? Was it meant to be for your edification as well?*

Yes, he... There is a letter from him which I have in a drawer where he expresses, where he knows he's going to die, and he expresses a hope that each of us should go into the, I add the word 'respectable', professions, and that I should go into the Navy, and that my eldest brother Michael should be, let's say a doctor, and Stephen might be a lawyer, or, one of the professions you see. So, in that sense he had very great ambitions for us. He thought that Stephen was totally on the wrong track, being a, pretending, trying to be a poet and a writer. And also he, he was very unkind to Stephen, because Stephen was hopeless at games, whereas I was very good at games, and Stephen was the kind of round shouldered, hopeless failure really. So from that point of view he was a disillusioned father. And we were always told that... He recovered from a quite major operation, and then suddenly decided, because of being a poor bereaved...he suddenly realised... I mean this is conjecture really, but both Stephen and I have always sort of thought this, that, he sort of woke up and looked around and thought, well, what are my prospects now? I've got no wife and my children are horrid to me, and, I might as well die, and I think he died. I think that...

*Did you feel guilty that you had potentially made him more despairing?*

Well we hadn't worked it out to that extent when he actually died, so I didn't in fact feel guilty, no. No I didn't.

*But, I mean another man would have thought, I'd better find another wife.*

Yes. I wonder why he didn't, I wonder why he didn't. I think that... You see I think he lived under the shadow of his elder brother JA who was a, by this time who had been given a CH, and, and who wrote I think very much better, and who, who wrote terrifically detailed lives of people like Asquith and, and who was an important man, and who altered politics, who had...who had Asquith's ear. And I think my father felt very much a second string to him.

*But did your father write the journalism because he needed to earn the money, or did he have a private income?*

He thought he needed to earn the money. In fact what was happening, I think largely unknown to him, was that my mother's parents were rich, and they were, unknown to him I am told, seeing his bank accounts, bank statements, and always making, paying into his overdraft. He was a very extravagant person, and although he used occasionally to go into reverse and walk around the house switching off all the lights and saying, 'No more treats, no more treats, we're bankrupt, we can only eat bread, and no more chicken, no more meat, and we must have bread and milk and...' I mean literally, I'm not joking, he used to do this. The cook was told that she must stop all kinds of things like legs of mutton and lamb and chickens and things. And that we were bankrupt. So he did have a vague realisation.

*So for how many days would you eat bread instead of chicken?*

Not very long. (laughs) I think he may have found that mysteriously his bank balance had gone up. But I mean when he went away on his treks, he was mad about going to... He was a man of considerable foresight. He wrote a book called *The Caldron of Europe*, by which he meant Yugoslavia, the present, by which we meant Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Yugoslavia. And of course it's all happened. And he went there a lot, and wrote up about it, wrote it up. But, he used to buy masses and masses of peasant wear, little painted, peasant painted wooden boxes, and, a painted wooden box is not a suitable birthday present for a twenty-year-old boy, and I remember at school receiving an exciting-looking parcel on my birthday, and opening it with trembling fingers, and discovering inside a painted wooden box, which I thought was a big disappointment. This was what my father, as an excuse for wanting to buy it, he had made it into a birthday present for me.

*What do you think you would have been wanting?*

Oh, a penknife, or a torch, or, or... Something...something the equivalent of a, what would now be a Walkman, or pair of binoculars, or something like that.

*Right. And what had your father's background been, what was his growing-up like?*

Well he always told us that, that they were very poor, that his mother, who was a struggling writer, and in fact rather a good writer, who wrote about twenty novels I think, Mrs J K Spender she was called, gave them... He always said that he and his brother Alfred, and sometimes another brother called Hugh, were given sixpence. Well sixpence was what, £5 I suppose, in those days, and off you go on your bicycles, and they had penny-farthing bicycles. And off they went wearing a kind of plus fours and woollen stockings with turnover tops and funny sort of hats, and bicycles which... He always used to mount a bicycle by putting one foot on the, what was called the step, which was a projection from the back wheel, and pushing it along with his, one of his legs, and then throwing his leg over the saddle. And I know that that was probably true, they went on a kind of elementary camping trip, making their money last as long as they could. I think it was a fairly loving family, but I think it wasn't...it was poor, I think they were probably...

*Where did they grow up?*

Bath. Bath was that side of the family. And subsequently we were, at various stages in our lives, I was sent to stay with an aunt who had remained in Bath, who had a house there. And we went to Bath quite a lot. And that's where he stood for Parliament.

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

We didn't know the Spender grandparents. We knew the Schuster grandparents, and we knew one who was a great-grandfather who had been a physician to Queen Victoria, who was called Sir Herman Weber[ph], and he wrote...he claimed, or his, his colleagues claimed that he had really invented vitamins, first recognised the importance of blackcurrant juice for instance, vitamins. And he was the father of my grandmother who

was Weber[ph]. But the Schuster family were very distinguished, a galaxy of knights of the realm, one of whom was a Fellow of the Royal Society. Sir Arthur Schuster, Sir Felix Schuster, who was a banker. There was another, Sir Claude Schuster. They were all sort of knighted, and very clever men. And their son, my uncle, George Schuster, was right-hand man to the Viceroy of India. So we, we were constantly being egged on by these distinguished relations, and being told that it was up to us to be as, to do as well you see, so we had that.

*So that must have been quite a lot of pressure on your father too, not only his own brother but his wife's family.*

Yes, I think he knew that my mother's parents held him in quite considerable contempt, which I think they did, and I think that was deeply disillusioning to him. John Sutherland is discovering all kinds of proof of that. And they realised that their daughter, my mother, was desperately in love with him, and so they didn't obstruct the marriage, but I think they were very disappointed by the marriage, and that he, in his kind of way he was a ne'er-do-well, or a hopeless earner. In fact that he lived up to his name of Spender and nothing was going to be able to...

*And do you think your mother stayed in love with him, or did she become disillusioned perhaps?*

I think she stayed in love with him. She called him all kinds of... She also called him all kinds of odd names. There was.... You know the scene, the rather embarrassing scene in *Look Back In Anger* where these two characters kind of do their mouse game. I've always found that scene rather embarrassing, perhaps precisely because it reflects some of the behaviour of my parents.

*Your...the behaviour of them imagine, or that you actually, you witnessed?*

No, that one actually heard going on. Kind of, okapi thing, and... I forget what she called him, 'my big...big furry bear' or something like that. And they always, they always called my... I mean my mother called me the Burns quotation of, 'Sleekit...wee cowering, timorous sleekit beastie'. 'Wee cowering, timorous sleekit beastie' I think, it's not quite right. They called me the 'wee sleekit', because I was like Burns' little mouse. So I was known as the little mouse.

*Affectionately, or rather critically?*

Affectionately. Eventually embarrassingly. My eldest brother Michael they called 'the bear with the sore head', because he was pushed into a bad temper by being impatient, being...being... I think Michael if he had lived, but was a kind of genius really, and he was very intolerant of stupidity, and... He had many faults but he was extremely clever, and I think he was...to be called a bear with a sore head, probably irritated him madly I think.

*And what did Stephen get called?*

Just a lump. Incompetent, pull your shoulders back, walk properly. A sort of, sort of disgrace really I think.

*It's a very hard thing to bear, having your parents not believing that you are going to be able to write or paint or whatever. I mean that must have affected him for a long time.*

I think, in a curious way it made Stephen absolutely determined to prove my father wrong.

*Because he wanted your father's approval, or because he wanted to prove him wrong?*

Because he wanted to prove him wrong. I think he...he painted in his own mind a picture of a budding genius. Somehow he knew that he was, he had an original mind I think.



From the earliest days I've always... You see my problem was that, I absolutely worshipped Michael, literally, I mean, he was god. He...he played the piano, he played the violin, he played the organ, he was a brilliant scientist, fantastic mathematician. He knew all about Newton and the prism. And, it really seriously upset me eventually to know that there were in the world better pianists than Michael. Somebody said Paderewski was a better pianist than Michael, and I was furious. And I really genuinely thought that Michael was the absolute tops. Well gradually I was disillusioned about that, and Stephen took over, Stephen became god. So, somehow or other I needed a god. And so, although Stephen and I quarrelled a lot, I was always on the defensive about Stephen, and I was made to play games like battledoor and shuttlecock, badminton, which was a sort of origin of badminton, and I knew that I would always win, and I hated winning, I always used to intentionally lose you see, because I wanted, I hated Stephen being put down. And then again, when we were at one of the schools we were sent to, because when my mother died my father thought that he must have his flock around him, so he took Stephen and me away, thank goodness, because it was a dreadful school, from this Dickensian school in Worthing, he took us away from that and put us into a school in Hampstead called The Hall, and I embarrassingly found myself being put in a class senior to Stephen. I hated that, I absolutely hated it; I wanted Stephen to be better than I was. And at that stage we quarrelled an awful lot I remember, because I think Stephen misinterpreted... I mean it may be I was tactless or let it out, I don't know.

*But do you think somehow then Stephen had a real inner confidence, if he had to cope with your father not believing in him, and with academic life not being great at school, somewhere he was still quite confident that he could succeed?*

Yes. Once he had found, and he was, he was so unhappy at the preparatory school for Gresham's, he was sent to, which was called the Osh, the Old School House, he was so unhappy there, apart from one music master called Greatrix[ph], that he got ill through being so unhappy, and so my parents had the perception, or maybe somebody else told them, I think my father's secretary probably told him, that, you can't leave Stephen in a state of such misery, he'll commit suicide or something. Because those were the times

when of course one did think of suicide. So he was taken away from Holt and sent to a school in Hampstead called University College School, which is still I think in Frognall, and there he found a master called Thorpe, Joseph Thorpe, who was quite an intellectual, who was mad about Eric Gill and the kind of thing which... Actually quite important that I mention that, because, whereas my father would think of Eric Gill as being quite disgusting, and curiously enough of course it turns out that he was justified, because Gill was busy seducing his own daughter, but we didn't know that of course. He hated Gill's kind of sexy sculpture and nudes and drawings, and I was buying books of Gill's wood engravings, which were very sort of sexy in their rather conventional terms. And here Thorpe I think gave Stephen that confidence which he needed, and realised that there was a potential poet. And there was another boy at the school called Leslie Stokes, I don't know whether he was any relation to Adrian Stokes, who I remember being brought back to tea and supper and so on. And Stephen made friends with the, the kind of student, pupils that Joseph Thorpe gathered around, and then Stephen became, I think probably editor of the literary magazine or something. No, he really found his feet, through one person's encouragement. But that was mainly after my father was dead you see.

*And was your mother a supporter of Stephen, was she more protective of him than your father was?*

I think she probably was. My mother, for me my mother was, was quite a mystery. I see her as beautiful, as very loving, in an embarrassing kind of way, slobbery, slobby, slobbery, yes. Over, too much kissing and slob in general. Embarrassingly in that sense. But very loving, and inclined to dress us up in absolutely ridiculous, uncomfortable clothes. Little Lord Fauntleroy, Kate Greenaway, literally sort of, white satin and dancing pumps, and we were put into dancing classes, and... Things which, when I think back to them, are, in modern terms where I see my grandchildren slouching around in shirts which are hanging down to their ankles, lovely comfortable clothes, and fairly slack and disorderly, but how enviable, my goodness.

*But in a way, dressing up in those clothes was turning you into an image of something rather than reacting to who you were yourself.*

A desirable image, yes. They had a friend called Dr Knivet Gordon[ph], and another friend called... Oh gosh. Quite a distinguished lady photographer.

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

[End of F7808 Side B]

[F7809 Side A]

*Now you were just trying to remember the photographer who your mother used to know.*

Well there was this friend who was actually a doctor and who was our GP, and pretty hopeless, who was an amateur photographer, and who was mad about photographing all of us, and there are lots and lots of his photographs signed 'K Gordon'. And then they had another friend who was a friend of Galsworthy's, in fact I'm wondering if it wasn't Galsworthy's wife, who... Anyway, she's in the National Portrait Gallery catalogue, having a quite distinguished photograph of somebody very famous, and she photographed us a lot. And, yes the physical image, the beauty, the beauty thing did have quite effect. My son very severely said to me one day, because he was very beautiful when he was young, 'You, Humph,' we called each other Christian names, 'you think far too much of physical beauty.' And I think that does, that is true, I do, I do tend to reject the lack of physical beauty, and I think he was right, and he's proved the point by marrying a physically unattractive wife, which is a fairly awful thing to put on tape. God! I've put it on tape. (laughs)

*But is she unattractive to him, or is she just unattractive to you?*

Well I can't believe that she's unattractive to him, no, I mean, she...there's quite a lot of love around there I think. One doesn't know about the private lives of one's children obviously. But I mean I find myself sort of simply saying how, how could one...how could you? So that... I think that is a relic from having been made very conscious of physical beauty when we were young, yes.

*But, I mean to our eyes you would have been no less beautiful as a child wearing a little T-shirt than wearing white satin, but presumably your mother wanted the whole picture.*

Oh she wanted the whole thing staged, yes, it was a... I mean she, she wrote quite a lot of poetry herself, and quite often they were in terms of physical, of actual words describing

the physical characteristics of child beauty, yes. About beautiful eyes and beautiful golden hair, and so on.

*And presumably your hair had to always be combed, it wasn't beautiful when it was tangled.*

Terrific attention paid to hair, and general appearance, and eyes. And you see, well, you see, a great drama in my life was when my, and this is something I said I've got to talk about, was a deep effect on my life. When I was about, I was born I think short-sighted, or I may have developed it shortly after I was born, but my sister noticed that I always held books very close to my eyes, and she wrote in letters about that high, she wrote something like, 'You are a silly nit' or something, and held it in front of me, at the distance of that television, and I failed to react, I didn't know what she was on about at all. And she gradually came towards me, and discovered that I, I could read letters that high first at about that distance. And she herself having normal sight realised that something was wrong. So she went to my mother and said, 'You do...surely you know that Humphrey's practically blind.' I mean one tends to use exaggerated terms. 'We call him pokey, because he's always poking around at things.' When she wasn't calling me tappy-wappy she was calling me pokey. And so my mother did this test, and eventually said, 'Oh, my goodness, yes, she's right,' and she took me to a...

*How old were you?*

I was about seven.

*But it's rather extraordinary that neither parent had noticed.*

Nobody had noticed, no, nobody. They didn't want to notice you see. I mean I think they joined into the thing. I think people in those days, they weren't listening to radio warnings. There wasn't a radio doctor or somebody saying, 'Look at your child's eyesight, see that he isn't peering at, and going close and so on.' Well, she took me to a

Dr Hosford[ph], again curiously I remember a name, who was very pinstriped, wing, stiff wing collar, grey-haired, monocle. And he did various tests on rather exciting machinery, and he turned round to my mother and said, 'The boy will be blind in six months.' And my mother fainted, literally, screamed and collapsed. Whether she actually lost consciousness, I don't know, but she lay down on a conveniently placed settee. And from that date I was no longer the world's greatest child beauty. (laughs) My hair was cut off, I was put into steel-rimmed glasses, with very powerful lenses. I was given the most extraordinary regime of small doses, increasing doses of arsenic, and I'll tell you what the effect of that was later on. I was made to do...I was made not to read, and that in fact affected my education, so I regard myself now as the most ignorant person I know. I was forbidden... I was made to do hours and hours of physical exercise of swinging Indian clubs, which nobody's ever heard of now, but it was kind of long wooden bulging things which you did exercise with round and round. Deep breathing, press-ups. All kinds of physical exercises. The most important thing being that I was not allowed to read, so I missed out on general education, which is reading of course, in our case was reading rather than television and radio and computers, which it is now. And when I went to this ghastly school at Worthing, a school called Charlecote[ph], I was not allowed... By this time I was allowed to read up till four o'clock, not allowed to read after four o'clock, and so what did I do after four o'clock? Nobody told me to do anything. So I started to get a football and kick it around in the playground, and if I happened to meet the headmaster's daughter in the shrubbery I would embrace her and kiss her, and I was...(laughs) On one occasion the, on a Sunday when the boys, the other boys were doing divinity, prep, I was kicking a ball around, and the headmaster turned up carrying golf clubs, and said to me, 'What do you think you're doing kicking a ball around on Sunday?' And I said, 'I'm doing exactly the same as you are, knocking a ball around on Sunday.' And he said, 'You cheeky young' whatever, 'come into my study,' and I was beaten. And actually my reply was scholarship material of course. And on another occasion I...(laughs)...I kissed the headmaster... You see our family was a kind of kissing family, and my mother used to kiss a lot. We used to kiss the servants. There was a particular servant called Agnes who must have been about thirteen or fourteen or

something, who was in love with me, and was constantly, at the age of eight and who was constantly kissing me. So it didn't...

*Wholly[???] un-sexual kisses, or not?*

Well, I suppose, un...they were sexual kisses, but they were un, not recognised as sexual kisses. I mean there was no sort of physical groping or anything. I remember being very fascinated because she had rather large breasts for her age, but that wasn't a kind of, that was just a matter of general interest. But anyhow, I was, I was seen by the, the matron, who was watching through a window, kissing one of the maids in the corridor, because it was my, it was our habit to do that.

*You mean as you might kiss someone in greeting?*

Yes, I just threw my arms around her neck and said, oh, I don't know what I said, I probably said, in inverted commas, I probably said, 'Oh darling' or something. And I was reported to the headmaster, and he said, 'Are you in the habit of kissing the servants?' and I said, 'Yes,' which was true. And he said, 'Bend over,' and that was a sadistic attack.

*Did your parents kiss the servants?*

I wonder. They were, the servants were very unconventional servants. They were taken, at the age of twenty-two, twenty-three, they were taken in as cook and housemaid, and they became absolutely essential, during the years they became essential components of family life. And they bathed, they bathed us, and, incredible, I mean I was...I was being bathed at the age of twelve by one of these girls. Now, admittedly she did seem to me, in hindsight she seemed to me to take a particular interest in soaping certain parts of the body, but whether that was sexual from her point of view, I don't know. While she was doing this she used to sing songs. They were Suffolk girls, and their father had been squashed by a goods train, between an engine and a, and the thing that goes...a tender,

squashed by the buffers, and so they were orphans, they were fatherless at the age of about ten or so, and they were made to become part of the money-earning household, taking in the washing and, taking in other people's washing and so on. So they were only too glad to go into service where they were relatively highly paid. Well they became objects of great affection to us, and to my mother. My mother absolutely adored them. And they were very remarkable girls, they were very remarkable girls. Stephen writes a lot about them in *World Within World*, and if I ever get round to writing about them, they were very amusing, very uneducated, but in a way very wise people. How did I get on to all this?

*Did you stay in touch with them all their lives?*

Yes, we... They parted from the family when they were about fifty-five or sixty or so, having thus been thirty, forty, forty years or so in our service, and we gave them a pension, and we bought them a house in Cricklewood. And, since they were very hard-working, so hard-working, they literally worked themselves to death, and died early deaths. A sort of, sort of previous civilisation in a sense.

*Mm.*

They were lovely people.

*So they must have been crucial continuity when your mother died.*

They were more important, in a way they were more important to us than, than my mother, yes.

*But you also had nannies.*

Oh masses of nannies, yes.



*They came and went?*

They came and went. One of them, who was a young girl of seventeen, sexually abused me. And curiously... You see I, I don't feel inclined to get in front of a television set and say, I've had headaches and sleepless nights on account of the fact that I was abused, more than once as a child, I was abused by a...my father thought I needed extra tuition in mathematics. This was the time when we were at school in Hampstead, and I was about twelve, and back to being very pretty, and, regularly, every week I sat in front of a master called Singleton, who proceeded to abuse me sexually. And I...I don't know, I sort of took it as... Maybe I quite liked it, I don't know. I was taken by one of the nannies, a particularly nice nanny, to...the cinema was just beginning in those days, when we were first in Hampstead, and we went to see *The Orphans of the Storm* at a local cinema, I wearing a, not very fetching pair of green tweed shorts, and the man sitting next to me simply undid my fly buttons and proceeded to abuse me. My nanny sitting next to me on the other side never knew it had happened. And for some reason or other I never told anyone about this.

*Had anybody told you anything about sex?*

No, nothing, ever.

*And nobody ever did?*

Later on when we went to... Certainly not at prep school. The only thing one learnt about sex was rather enjoyable scenes in the dormitory. On one occasion the matron came in and said, 'I've been watching you, you're all a lot of street urchins,' at which point I began to think, what happy lives street urchins must have. (laughs)

*She sounds as though she wasn't making too much of a fuss in a way.*

I think she was enjoying it herself, yes. I think she probably had been watching for weeks. Eventually there came a point when she said, 'I must report this,' so it was reported to the headmaster, and of course there was a terrible scene. Now where was I?

*Sorry, before we leave that, I mean within the context of the other boys, it was just accepted, it wasn't a big deal in a way?*

Oh no, it was just, it was...it was curiosity. And of course, I have very...I mean I am totally bisexual, and of course it had very enjoyable sexual elements to it, yes.

*But it wasn't for you as a child something that was disturbing in other words?*

I don't think it was, no. And that, that's really what makes me feel that the...the headache, vomiting, sleeplessness, life's been a misery ever since, is a put-up job, put up by lawyers, to people.

*But do you think there might have been, perhaps if your parents hadn't died there might have been a conflict between what was actually happening in your lives sexually and your mother and father's desire for the appearance that that wasn't happening in people's lives. Because it sounds as though it would have been unacceptable to them, they weren't going to suddenly say, 'Actually we're having love affairs ourselves, and your father's homosexual' and everything. I mean that wouldn't have been an image they wanted to present to the world, would it?*

No, not at all. Actually I have to ask you just to say that again, because I didn't quite follow your meaning.

*What I'm saying is that, you sound as though you were quite at ease with your sexuality from the beginning, and that maybe, had your parents not died, you might later have had more conflicts, because they liked to present a much more respectable picture to the world.*

Yes, I think you're right. I think... I think we were more than usually aware. I mean we had our private language to do with genitals and sexual organs and so on.

*You mean you four children?*

I think my sister was excluded from this, but certainly three boys did, because there was only a year between us you see. We had our own private language, and giggle, and giggles and things. I was just writing a passage in my autobiography where, for some extraordinary reason we chose the word 'exam', and the syllable ex was to pee, and the syllable zam was to shit. And when an aunt came to tea and said, 'How are you dear boys doing in your exams?' we used to collapse into absolutely hysterical laughter. And nobody knew quite why. I mean my parents used to think that this was an outrageous impoliteness to our aunts you see, but, nobody had a clue why we were laughing ourselves, literally until we were peeing in our pants, particularly with me. So there was this kind of private thing. And I mean I learnt about masturbation and so on very, very early, through a very strange event which was that my father had an absolute obsession, again here comes one of his clichés, what he called 'doing one's little duty', which was to shit. And it was terribly important to him that as children we did our little duty, and he used to walk round saying, 'Have you done your little duty?' And at the same time I lapsed...there is a connection which will appear later, I lapsed into revolutionary mode about wearing Eton suits on Sundays. And I, not altogether consciously but I thought I must punish my father for making us wear these horrible, horrible clothes. I mean it was real physical torture. So I will not do my little duty. Now I don't know quite how conscious this was, but in trying to stop myself doing my little duty, we all had to have a rest after lunch, so we lay down on our bed, and by a kind of physical manipulation of stopping myself doing a little duty, I invented masturbation. I discovered masturbation.

*And how old do you think you were?*

I would think I was about seven, yes. And, so that we were quite wise about this, and had our own communication about this between...

*But would you have told your brothers at the time, or would it have been private?*

Oh yes, being... This...the word 'ex' meant to pee, but the phrase being 'exy' meant to have what was then, at that age, an orgasm you see. So being exy was part of the language, yes.

*And did you all have separate rooms, or not?*

And it was...it was rather naughty, I mean being exy was rather naughty. It was something that one was supposed to be controlling. But that was a self-imposed kind of law. One felt a bit guilty about this, one knew that there was something not quite allowed.

*But your father never talked to you about it?*

Never, never, never, no.

*But there must have been quite a lot of trust between the three of you then, that there was no feeling that one of you might betray the other, or whatever, I mean it was...*

I think there was, there was a lot of trust, yes. Which was partly a sense that one would never talk about such things with parents. I mean I think my mother was, was a genuinely unworldly person. I think she was deeply involved in, in hating strife, in thoughts of, of pretty things, of beauty, of poetry, of Wordsworth, of daffodils. I think she was totally unworldly. And I think she wouldn't have thought about rape, having sex with eleven-year-old girls, of these kind of horrific worldly things. She was deeply, deeply disturbed by the First World War, and maybe... I mean, curiously Galsworthy wrote a wonderful play called *Strife*; it had nothing to do with what we're talking about,

but it had to do with the strife between the social classes, between working class and aristocracy. But my mother, my mother's favourite brother, younger brother, Alfred, was killed very early on in the World War I; I think that absolutely slew her. I think she never never recovered from it. And in general the idea of not just family strife but international strife was deeply disturbing to her. I think she was that kind of person. She was a kind of fairy queen in a way.

*We're going to stop quite shortly, so, I would like to pick up next time on your parents. Just to use these last few minutes, because I know I'm going to forget next time, and this is making a quite absurd leap. We were talking by chance while we had lunch, and the name of Penelope Lively came up.*

Yes.

*And, she is in some curious way related to you.*

Yes. My first wife was one of about eight children I think, and profoundly affected, because her mother had wanted all her children to be boys, and I have a theory that one of the reasons why she developed this horrible cancer was that she was rejected very much by her mother. But that's by the way. Of these eight boys, there was one particular one who was Penelope's father who was called Roger, so he, his name was Roger Lowe, and he married the daughter of the Reckitt family, Reckitt's Blue, and I think Colman's mustard and so on, who was very wealthy I think. And together they produced Penelope, who was therefore the favourite niece of my first wife. And I remember meeting her quite a lot as a, as a blonde little girl, and thinking of... My... That this man Roger Lowe was a real hearty who was a blue, a rowing blue, at Oxford, and who it is said, although I've never known it proved, was one of a team of hearties who purely by coincidence wrecked Stephen's room, Stephen being known as an aesthete at Oxford, who wrecked Stephen's rooms in Oxford. So it was very curious sort of connections building up there. Well Roger subsequently got tired of Penelope's mother, Vee[ph], who was known as Vee[ph], and left her for a lady called Daphne, whom I remember as being rather pretty.

Whereas Vee[ph] was becoming I suppose a bit creaky. And Roger divorced Vee[ph] and married Daphne. So that Daphne would be Penelope's stepmother.

*And what do you remember of Penelope's little girl?*

Oh only that she was pretty, and just very very, seemed to me extremely sort of ordinary. And it came...her subsequent development came quite, as quite a surprise, and I'm slightly ashamed of the fact that I found myself thinking with that father, hearty father, who was totally a businessman and an ex-rowing blue with crossed oars on his mantelpiece, and, over his mantelpiece, and Athena prints of that green lady on his walls, and a totally un, unintellectual type really, inclined to hoot at Stephen type intellectuals, I was very surprised at her development. But of course she may have developed in that way by a reaction to her father.

*Do you remember the two of them together at all?*

Not...not to make any confident comment about, no.

*And what about her mother?*

Vee[ph]? Oh she was, she was more intellectual in terms of appreciating painting and so on. I think she, she led Roger into any sudden spurt of aestheticism which he might have had, it would have been Vee's doing, yes. And she went, eventually she went to live in Malta, and has quite, had quite a lot of, of arty friends, including Victor Pasmore.

*Oh of course, because that's where he went isn't it.*

Because he lived in Malta, yes.

*And did you know Victor?*

Hardly at all, no.

*Mm. We'd better stop for today.*

[break in recording]

*You were just saying that you had remembered the photographer in the National Gallery.*

That's right.

*What's the name again?*

The photographer who was a great friend of my parents, who took lots of photographs of us as children, and one of whose photographs is in the National Portrait Gallery, and that's Olive Edis. And I think, though I'm by no means certain, that she might have, that might have been the maiden name of Mrs John Galsworthy.

*Aha.*

I think.

*I can check that one out.*

[end of session]

[End of F7809 Side A]

[Side B is blank]

[F8793 Side A]

*So I can test the sound levels, could you tell me, do you know what date it is today?*

I should think it's about the 19<sup>th</sup>, but it could be the 20<sup>th</sup>.

*Or even the 21<sup>st</sup>.*

Or even the 21<sup>st</sup>, yes.

*And, what month and which year?*

It's December 1999.

*And what's your name?*

Humphrey Spender.

[break in recording]

*If I can just begin by asking, there was something I wanted to pick up on from our last recording, that, incidentally almost Eileen Agar got mentioned, and I wondered if you could tell me when you first knew her, and what she was like.*

Eileen Agar I didn't know at all, apart from thinking that I knew her, and liking her paintings, and finding that her paintings seemed to me to be going along the same lines as mine wanted to. And that became very complicated, because in that sense I had to avoid doing what she was doing. And I didn't meet her until she was a very old lady, in a wheelchair, sitting around at some private view. And I was with my friend Rachel who is quite young, thirties, thirty-four, and is very much in the habit of going up to people and chatting them up. And has always, she, Rachel has also always admired Eileen Agar very



much. So she went up to Eileen Agar, who started chatting in a very friendly way, and eventually I joined the party and I started chatting too. And that's really the only contact I've had with her.

*What was she like?*

At that, on that particular occasion? She seemed to me frail, but very very much on the mark. She didn't seem to me frail in her mind at all. Seemed to me to like having someone pay attention to her. She liked people saying that they were a fan, which both Rachel and I did say. But otherwise, just a remarkable...well in the sense that she was totally coherent and said very interesting things, unexpectedly for her age.

*Can you remember any of the things she did say?*

No. Not really.

*And do you remember when you first saw her painting? Because she wasn't widely shown, was she?*

I think I probably... She is older than me isn't she?

Yes.

She...she's alive?

*No, she died relatively recently, but well into her nineties.*

Well into her nineties. I must have heard of her through my friend John Banting. Because he was with a group of Surrealist painters who produced a little book called *Salvo to Russia*, have you ever met that?

*No I haven't. What was it?*

And it's a book of etchings done, each artist was asked to produce one etching, and I can remember names like Ithel Colquhoun who was probably a friend of Eileen Agar's, and I think Eileen Agar herself and John Banting himself and John Piper in those days, and several artists who have disappeared from the scene; it was a very interesting little book. Remind me to show you.

*Mm, I'd love to see it.*

Julian Trevelyan. And I think Julian Trevelyan, since he was a very social person, he must have had her on his list of invitees so to speak.

*And when do you remember sort of absorbing the paintings? I mean when you say she was doing similar things to you, what do you actually mean?*

Well there's a process called 'painting out', which means that you... To define it in its most, in the most exaggerated way, if you were to do a kind of Gillian Ayers slap and dash, and just throw some colour at a canvas, and allow serendipitous accident to dictate what happens, you then look at it a long time and realise that if you painted out a lot of it, in other words you...yes, eliminated a lot of it, you could bring it into recognisable patterns, part of it like looking into a fire, and imagining the fire to take, to be realistic, or in Leonardo da Vinci's way, definition, looking at a flaking plaster wall which then takes the form of recognisable objects, you can suddenly find that there's a shape of a jug, or a bird or something coming out of these purely accidental things. And so you paint out, and reveal the shape that your imagination has found in it. And that was a very sympathetic process and one which I had done myself, or tried to do myself, and one which I am still very much involved with. And also I think one just, one just sees something where you can say, oh I wish I'd done that myself; my ideas are running along very much the same lines, and that is enough to make one feel that one is painting on the

same lines. I think I could describe her as quite a considerable influence on my work. And I'm very easily influenced.

*Do you remember particular paintings of hers that were...?*

Well there's one which has been reproduced recently where the shape of a bird comes out, and I can see that inside the shape of the bird, the patterning of colour and line at one stage extended far beyond the shape of the bird, so that she has seen that shape in a rather random collection of marks, and then brought it out, and then emphasised the shape by adding lines and things. So, I mean all those probably purely sort of technical things which made her painting very sympathetic.

*Does this notion of seeing shapes in the plaster or whatever, does that relate also to textiles? I think, I think I know the Eileen Agar painting you're talking about, and it does have a sort of woven quality to it almost, because of layering.*

Yes, well people have said both about Eileen Agar and paintings like mine and Eileen Agar's, that, they said rather pejoratively that they are decorative, meaning that they enter the world purely of decoration, textiles, carpets, wallpapers, plastics, and that's a criticism. I don't accept it really as a criticism, because I think, I see no reason why a painting can't be decorative, and in that sense enjoyable. But there are plenty of painters who very consciously try and avoid being decorative, and possibly to the detriment of their painting. I mean, my painting has gone through stages of being so, sort of, attached to textile design, because I was doing it at the same time, that they have actually been used. One of the very first textiles that Edinburgh Weavers produced of mine, and Edinburgh Weavers produced a lot of my textile designs, one of them was a painting, which Alistair Morton, not to be confused with the one connected with the Channel Tunnel, Alistair Morton who is a very good artist himself and who was running Edinburgh Weavers, he bought it, he bought the painting and then turned it into a textile.

*What was that of, can you describe it?*

It was a Horrocks, do you remember? No, you're too young I think to remember Horrocks dresses, dress fabrics, which were produced by Morton Sundour, Alistair Morton was obviously attached to the firm of Morton Sundour. And it was a flower painting, but very textural and very much exploiting the veins of leaves and petals, and it was shown in the Redfern Gallery and bought by Alistair Morton, and turned, with my permission, turned into a textile.

*Do you remember the title of it?*

I can never remember titles. I can find out, because it's, there's a sample of it in the studio, in a chest which we could see.

*And again, because I'd like it to be vivid for someone listening to the tape, who won't be able to see anything necessarily, was it... Presumably it wasn't botanical. How would you describe it?*

Oh yes, it was very botanical, yes, it was very recognisably flower and leaf and veins on the flowers and leaves. I don't think it referred to any specific flower; perhaps it referred as I remember it to a clematis. But that leads me into all kinds of theorising about design and focal points and so on, and once you get involved in the kind of focused central point of a petalled flower, you then get into all kinds of problems of design in textiles. So I think I tried to avoid that by not making the flower heads symmetrical and centred.

*So it wasn't abstracted in any way?*

No, it... It probably fell between two stools of being neither realistic nor abstract, and it probably was very decorative. But again, I have to say I don't see any reason why a painting shouldn't be decorative.

*Can you expand on the problems you were hinting at to do with symmetry and textiles and focus?*

Yes, there was a kind of design which I used to describe to my students as 'Lazy Daisy' design, where you take a flower head, like a daisy, and you approach it as a child would in drawing, let's say the principal façade of a house where a child puts a front door and a window on each side of it, and then three windows on the first floor, and then a roof and a centrally placed chimney. So that you have a, an axis of symmetry, you have a central axis. Well, the immediate response of any young person to doing a floral textile design is to start by drawing a flower head with a centre and petals radiating from the centre, and in doing that you are creating a focal point. The eye is led into the centre, because it's symmetrical and it is a centre. Now, if you're going to lead the eye to any particular point in a design, textile design, you are contradicting the flow of the design. A good textile design should flow over the surface and shouldn't lead the eye to any point at which the eye wants to rest. And that applies to wallpaper, and to carpets and so on, partly because they have to be put into repeat, which means that the design has got to be repeated again and again, in various simple forms or complicated forms. I mean there's side to side repeats, and there's half drop repeats, and quarter drop repeats and so on. But you've always got to be careful that in doing, in organising the repetition of the motif, that you aren't stopping the design, and a focal point stops the flow of the design. That's the basic theory. Immediately one pronounces that theory, of course any self-respecting student is going to say, 'Oh, but that's what I want to do, I want to create a focal point.' But, one...there's no answer to that of course, it's just, except to say, 'OK, well if you want to do it, then you've done it very successfully, but you're not going to sell it.' And that was probably true, probably had quite an effect.

*Can you just explain to me, because it's not my world at all, what the half repeat and the quarter, whatever?*

Ah, well, if you... When you're putting something into repeat, you can simply pick up the whole design and place it to the right and to the left, and then study it, and then force

that there is a connection from side to side. You've got to have a side to side connection. So in simple terms, if you have a line coming out of the right-hand side, on a dropping curve, that line has got to come through the side and become part of a line on the left-hand side of the design. So that's a straightforward side to side repeat. But you can make it much more complicated, at your own risk of producing all kinds of side effects which you aren't prepared for. The line which comes away from, let's say the top right-hand quarter of the design, has got to enter the bottom left-hand quarter of its similarity. Do you follow? So, in other words you're not putting the repeat side to side, you're putting it to the side and then dropping it, so the top edge of your repeat is half-way down. And then of course you could elaborate that by doing a quarter drop, you're simply dropping the repeat down a quarter of the dimension of the side. And, these things are now all done, they used to take a lot of time, and you had to do a lot of traces and lift them and then put them to the side, and adjust the thing, but nowadays, lucky students, they've got computers and they've only got to press a button and the thing goes into half drop or quarter drop, or third drop, and so on. But you had to be very careful because in doing these things you then create what the textile trade calls a diagonal, an unintended diagonal, where things line up on a diagonal line. Well if you're going to do that, then it's best to do it very intentionally, and make it appear very positive, and not to allow it to emerge accidentally. The most dangerous thing that happens is, you produce what the trade calls a 'lazy diagonal' where, when you've covered a whole wall with the new wallpaper, you find that the designer, when the design was put into repeat, the designer has not put enough units of repeat together to observe the fact that somehow things line up on a very gradual slope, which is very uncomfortable to the eye, because it means that you, there are a whole... You are constantly trying to make it truly horizontal rather than sloping, because the eye reacts in that kind of way, it demands frames of reference like horizontality or verticality, and anything which is vaguely not vertical or vaguely not horizontal but nearly so is very uncomfortable to the eye. Similarly, designs can do very unintended associative things. When I was living in the big house across the hedge, I re-wallpapered one of the seven bedrooms with a Graham Sutherland design, thinking, ah, I'm being very modern. I saw a small sample from Sanderson's, and it looked very nice, but when I'd got it up on the wall, I put someone, someone who came

to stay and slept in the room, and woke up in the morning to see it and they said, 'Why have you got 'oxo' written all over your bedroom wall?' And true enough, there was a circle and a cross and a circle, which simply came together in repeat to read 'oxo' all over the place. So I had to take it down, and in fact Sanderson's had to have the whole design altered at great expense.

*And did you tell them?*

Yes, I did, yes.

*What was the design?*

It was an abstract, purely abstract design, simply a little, little accidental marks. I mean Sutherland had, had just flicked a brush, and then taken the brush and whirled it around, and on one whirl he'd made a little 'o', and on the next application of the brush he'd just made a cross, like a multiplication sign, an x. And the o and the x came together to make oxo. Nobody would have noticed it if you'd seen just one unrepeated thing.

*But do the wallpaper companies not make up a wall then each time? I mean they just risk it?*

Subsequently they did. And they may well have, but... And they used to get their staff... They had it at the mezzanine where people had to come onto a landing and then turn a right-angle, so people came down the steps with this design facing them, and the staff was invited to make comments about the design, which could be, I mean they could be, 'oh, it reminds me of spiders', or 'it's prickly', or 'it's sharp', you know. Or it's...'it's got snakes in it'. And that was very important, I mean these associative things which are very important.

*And that was before the wallpaper would have gone into proper production?*

Yes. And the staff must have failed to notice this, or, they hadn't put enough up perhaps, or maybe they didn't put it up at all. I mean I was...I devised a purely practical technique for putting things into repeat, which is called quartering, which was a development of a commercial process called quartering, I devised the method of doing it with a scalpel and Sellotape. And I then, I quickly realised that you couldn't tell what was going on until you've got nine elements of repeat close together, and that's absolute minimum. It's got to be three by three square of design. And then, applying that to my own work, often compelled me to change the design a lot. Once I... John Piper was asked to do a design, and he simply presented a piece of marble, a piece of marbled paper, because he loved that kind of, architectural qualities of marble and so on. And Sanderson's asked me to put it into repeat, and I applied my own process to that. And in doing so I had to be very careful that it didn't do lazy diagonals or lazy verticals, leaning verticals and things. Formica once produced a design, a famous optical illusion, where parallel lines are made to bulge, so that where your eye rests at any particular place, there's a bulge in the two parallel lines, and very... If you move your eye, you get the sensation of a, a snake having swallowed a rabbit, and the rabbit moving down the snake's body. Very disturbing. It's a famous optical illusion. You have to, in between two parallel lines, if you draw a lot of diagonals, followed by, between the next pair of lines, a diagonal going the other way, so that you've got a kind of herringbone thing going on, that's a very uncomfortable optical illusion. They put this, they actually went very far in the manufacture of it, and they put it up at a private view I went to, where I saw it at once, and talked to one of the managers, and took it there and showed it to him and he said, 'Oh, thank goodness, yes,' it's not me that's had enough, had too much to drink, that is in the design.

*So it was a mistake?*

And that was a mistake, and they had to withdraw it. And that was, that, that tended to happen quite a lot, yes.

*When did you first become involved with Formica?*



Oh, oh, I should think about 1960 or so. You see I...I didn't start textile design until 1946 when I won this competition, I was waiting to be demobbed. Have we talked about that?

*No, but I wanted to pick it up. Because it was almost an accident wasn't it?*

Yes. I got so bored waiting to be demobbed, although I was with a very interesting journalist called Douglas Stuart who had more or less lost an arm at some, one of the campaigns, I went in for a textile competition just to have something to do. I had been kind of designing, but with not very much success, simply because English design was lagging behind very much the, what was going on on the Continent. English design seemed never to have heard of the Bauhaus and modern design at all, and so it was hopeless sort of going round Manchester trying to sell rather abstract and modern designs. And also designs which were difficult to print. Anyhow, I won this competition which was judged by Henry Moore and a very interesting man called Hans Juda, who started a textile and fashion magazine called *Ambassador*. To my surprise I won it, £50, and the design was produced and seemed to me rather nice. And then I had a letter from Robin Darwin who was head of the Royal College of Art; I think it wasn't called head, it was called, oh I forget now. Anyway he was principal of the Royal College of Art. It's called something different now. Who said that the textile school had become very commercial, and he wanted a painter who was also designing and interested in design, would I come in as a tutor? And I said, well I would come in but I didn't want to do more than, at the very most, I didn't want to do more than two days a week. So he said that's fine, because he believed that all the teachers at the Royal College should actually be practising what they were, what they were preaching. And he insisted that I should go on designing. And so I did that, and I accepted the tutorship. And of course, feeling responsible, and not, really not knowing enough about all the problems of designing, I had to really pull myself together and try and learn myself.

*When you said you'd been doing a bit before you won the competition in 1946, what had you been doing, why... Because you'd trained, I know you didn't study very hard but you'd trained as an architect. When did the designing of fabrics or whatever begin?*

I think when I came out... Again I'm not quite, I'm bad at chronology, but when I emerged from the AA in 1934 I was, even as an architectural student I was playing around with designing, and I think in the years between 1934 and 1939 I did take designs to Manchester, and...because that was the big textile design, textile producing area, and the only manufacturers who showed any interest at all were all middle European, with names like Zeidler and Ziedler and, and...can't think, Studheim and that kind of thing. And they were based probably in Bern and, where there was a lot of experimental printing being done. You see one of the great difficulties was that since my work tended to be rather textural, there were difficulties in printing, they just said, 'Oh well, we can't print...' The English firms said, 'We can't print it.' Apart from the fact they didn't like it anyway. But the Continental firms were very much more advanced in printing techniques, and were not daunted by gradations of colour and so on. Curious thing is that Victorian block printing did the most incredible things, or even earlier – no those are Victorian actually – and did produce gradations by the placing of the heads of nails close together, which then got wider and wider apart, and became a kind of optical illusion of gradation. So all these manufacturers were really not trying in a way.

*Why do you think that was?*

Because they could very easily sell endless, miles, and literally miles and miles of easily printed floral patterns, which had no texture and...no texture of a small scale; they had sort of large-scale texture, sort of cretonne, and sort of Morris type things which were very flat in colour, simply because they were very basic block printing. I mean it is, it was partly to do with the expense of production of course, because if you're taking a lot of trouble employing someone to bang nails into a piece of wood in a very precise, expanding, sort of next to each other-ness, then you're paying for the labour, and the fabric becomes very expensive.

[End of F8793 Side A]

[F8793 Side B]

*.....what the designs were that you were taking up to Manchester pre-war?*

Yes, they tended to be, I mean quite consciously they tended to be... Is that...

*Yes, it's fine.*

Like...meant to be like that?

*Yes.*

Yes. I mean, quite consciously I was being modern. I was in line with thinking in the Bauhaus, and I was doing, I suppose sort of Mondrian type things, and textural things. And I realised that they wouldn't be popular in the sense that floral patterns are popular. I mean floral became for me and for a whole generation of students, the word floral became a kind of term of abuse, because they found it so boring and so conventional, and so sellable. So we were...we were trying to revolutionise design, we were trying to make people conscious of modern design, which was in a way, it was happening in Scandinavia, it was happening in Finland, and in Denmark, and it wasn't happening in the English market. I once won a Council of Industrial Design award for a fabric which was a purely abstract pattern, but one which wasn't outrageous at all. I mean it imitated it. There was a kind of suggestion of petals and so on. And it was produced by a firm called Calico[??] Printers Association, known as Cepea, spelt c-e-p-e-a[??]. And they were quite pleased to have that publicity. But they wrote to me and they said, 'Perhaps you would care to come up to Manchester and see what we're up to, and we'd like to entertain you.' And I went up to Manchester and they gave me a small glass of whisky and they said, 'Come into our warehouses.' And they showed me into a huge, huge great warehouses, and they said, 'You see, your design is going to sell about a mile.' And I said, oh that's...amazing it seemed to me, to sell a mile of fabric. And they said, 'But, these designs,' and they then pointed to roses round a cottage door type designs, 'these

are going to sell forty or fifty miles. So you can see that we have problems about producing, modernistical' I think was the word they used, if not futurist, 'designs.' And that was the attitude of the trade for a long time, until people like Terence Conran came along. Terence Conran incidentally was very influenced by the students that he was teaching, and... Well I'd better not go into that.

*No, do.*

Well I'm liable to be slanderous you see, this is the thing.

[break in recording]

*Terence Conran was teaching students?*

Conran was teaching in my department, I can't remember exactly when, and I mean he was...

*At the College?*

At the College, yes. And quite possibly in other colleges, like the Central, other. And he was a man of advanced ideas, very much Bauhaus kind of ideas, very conscious of the... And, the word 'passion' is over-used, very...very keen that modern design should be pushed, design should be simplified, and, in all fields, in fields of things one uses in the kitchen, in the house, furnishing, in furnishing, in fabrics, in...carpets and wallpapers and so on. And therefore he was very interested in the policy of the textile school which was quite positively to pull it out of commercialism. I mean, Robin Darwin specifically talked about this, because he thought that an exhibition which, it was proposed should be sent to Manchester by the then professor of textiles, Robin said, absolutely that exhibition will not go to Manchester, it is very very boring and commercial, and clichéd and conventional, and does not do the College any credit. So the professor was sacked. Now...

*Who was the professor?*

He was called De Holden Stone[ph]. And he had the sense to not allow...he had the sense not to resign but to force Robin to sack him, which meant that he could keep his contract going, which was another three years, and he had a little office from which he emerged with his stack of golf clubs every day for the next three years, on full pay.

*And what was he like?*

I didn't ever meet him. I turned up after he had been sacked. And the textile school was under the professorship of the professor of ceramics...no, of...yes, ceramics, Baker, he was called Baker, I can't remember his Christian name. Anyway, Conran was teaching, and I think sympathetic in ideas to what the students wanted to do, and to what I and other members of the staff wanted the students to do. But, the students themselves accused him of taking their ideas and then selling them to industry. Well now, how justified they were with that, I don't know. I found myself sympathising with the students, but I can't say that, that it was actually true. And for that reason, Conran eventually did stop teaching. But there could have been other reasons for him stopping teaching, and he might have been starting his own businesses at that time, I don't know.

*I mean, he's known now as a very independent person; I would have thought he potentially was rather ungovernable in a department if you were leading it. Was he a good team worker, or not?*

I worked...I was by no means leading the department, I was two-day-a-week tutor. The department was led by a glass designer called Williamson, and, there was a lot of very traditional boring conventional stuff still going on. I mean it took ages to get rid of the endless compulsion to do floral designs, and in order to do floral designs people were insisting that students should do plant drawing, endless, endless plant drawing. Alec Hunter who ran the Warner Brothers weaving in Braintree used to come down and talk

endlessly about the need for students to do flower drawing, and the students simply got bored out of their minds with doing flower drawing. They were really, they were really looking into modern art and wanting to be part of the development of modern art. And so... In the end the whole thing went too far in the abstract, modern direction, in such a way that the designs that were produced in the textile school were not...were simply not bought by industry. And then, there had to be a pendulum swing reaction about that, and it went back, because students wanted to sell their designs of course. So, design went slightly back towards the floral patterns and so on. But it had been pushed so far that they couldn't go back as far as, as... No I'm getting mixed up with that sentence. It went only half way back, and then it...then the pendulum swung again towards unusable, very avant-garde stuff, and then it went back again. And it's still doing that. And the textile school, which is now part of the fashion school, likes to be seen as leader, as leaders of design ideas, and there's some marvellous work being done.

*What was Conran like as a member of a team then, was he...?*

I think I had...I didn't...I have to admit I didn't like him as a person.

*Why?*

I just thought... I maybe listen too much to the students, and I assumed that their accusations were correct, and maybe I was wrong in assuming that. But I didn't like the idea of him doing that. And therefore I kept my distance.

*Mm. And...*

I recognised an enthusiasm, which I admired, and I recognised an appreciation of the ideas which I appreciated, so I should really have liked him, but I didn't...I didn't really like him.

*And, going back to you taking your early designs up to Manchester, and we've talked about things like the Indian miniatures and the jewels of your mother...*

Yes. Yes.

*...being very intriguing to you as a child. It's still quite rare for somebody of that age to be tuned into the idea of textiles and designing in that way. What do you think led you to that, to actually... It's one thing to be interested in pattern and painting or visual things, but not necessarily with an application like that.*

I think a very simple answer to that was that my eyesight, which was...I was very short-sighted, and I had the ability to focus very close. In other words I could enjoy myself with my eye three inches from the paper surface, and that led to very small-scale designing. Now, there were plenty of students whose eyesight was similar, and I recognised what was going on, and they were doing very small-scale work, which, when you put the thing at a distance from the eye, completely lost its point really, because the eye of the observer was not able to appreciate the detail. So that's quite a problem. Do you go up to someone and say what you're doing is microscopic, is knitting, give it up, to take a broad brush and thrash around with a broad brush? If you say that, you're at risk of dislodging someone from a really important possibility of development. In other words, developing, like Richard Daird[ph] for instance, developing on a very small scale, becoming a kind of, possibly becoming a kind of genius on that kind of level, which I consider Richard Daird[ph] to have been. Wonderful, wonderful detail. He, his paintings, you...somehow or other he managed to impose on them a large-scale organisation which meant that they won on two levels, of large-scale organisation and a very exquisite detail. But because of my eyesight and because of this close focus thing, I did tend, I think probably, to get involved in, in very picky kind of work, and I had very consciously to try and get myself out of it. But I didn't ever dare risk... I think some members of staff took big risks in telling students that their natural bent was a dangerous thing to follow, because...mm, I mean one can go on discussing this for ages.



*But that... So, is part of what you are saying that because you like to draw on a small scale, the obvious application was an overall pattern in wallpaper or something, is that the line you're following? What I was trying to find out was why you started thinking of your drawings as having a practical application for fabrics or whatever.*

Ah, for designing?

*Mm. Which was early, it predates anything to do with the College.*

Yes, I mean I think people very frequently said, 'Oh wouldn't that make a lovely textile,' 'wouldn't that make a lovely Christmas paper,' or 'wouldn't that make a lovely wallpaper.'

*And when you were growing up, were you in contact at all with anybody whose job it was to print Christmas paper or wallpaper or fabrics, did you know anything about the manufacture end of it?*

No. No, not when I was growing up, not at all, no.

*And would that aspect have begun to interest you, or was it just a necessary part of getting a piece of work done?*

It started to interest me only when I went to the Architectural Association and we, part of what we had to do was to do with interior design, I mean some of the projects were simply[??] interior design, for applying pattern where we thought it was needed, applying colour where we thought it was needed, and so on. So, I realised that this was a potential, for me, yes, at that stage.

*So that was a part of the AA course you might quite have enjoyed?*

Yes. Yes, it was, yes.

*Who taught it?*

There was a colour, quite a well known colour man called Holmes, who very much taught theory. Very important that that word is underlined. I came to believe that any theory which claimed to produce good colour was invalid, there couldn't be such a thing as a theory. I then thought further than that and thought, well, it is very necessary to know what's going on in one's eye, and the behaviour of colour against colour (contrast is the word there), and one can use knowledge but one can't use theory. I've jumped a whole number of years of this, because, I came to this conclusion when I was teaching in the Royal College, when students used to arrive knowing nothing about colour at all, and I decided that they should know about colour. And students would then say, 'But we don't believe that there is any theory which can automatically produce colour,' and I could then say, 'Well I absolutely agree with you, there is no theory which can produce, but there is knowledge about colour, and it's just as well that you should know what you are doing, to avoid certain pitfalls about colour, and to avoid colours which literally are uncomfortable to the eye, and produce visual wobbles and so on which are uncomfortable to the eye.' And there are certain juxtapositions of wavelengths of colour which do cause physical wobble to the eye, and students must be taught about that, and must know about it. And they must know, further than their natural instinct, they must know what they are actually doing, how it is liable to affect other people's eyes. Now these were all thoughts because I decided I should read an enormous, that I should teach myself about colour.

*We did last time talk in quite a lot of depth about the day-long lecture that you did.*

Yes. Yes. So, lead me back to...

*Can you just carry on telling me more details about the interior design at the AA, and who was teaching it, and how, what you remember.*

The only name I remember was this bloke Holmes, John M Holmes, who did produce a book, which he made us all have, and basically his theory was the purely traditional, conventional theory about the colour circle, about harmony, and discord, and the fact that if you are being really subtle about colour, you will place...fully saturated, brilliant colours are made to look more saturated and more brilliant if they are placed in a field of neutral grey. And this became quite a joke amongst the students, we always used to kind of, sing a kind of theme song which contained the words 'neutral grey', put it into neutral grey. Well now, that's, even at that time I thought this was a formula and an unsatisfactory one. It worked in a way in which you can't go wrong; if you put very bright colours into fields of neutral grey they do look very bright, and marvellous, but the neutral grey can take over and be a rather depressing factor in the whole scheme. Now that was entirely the colour thing. I can't remember the names of anyone...I can remember the names of staff but I can't remember them... There was Roland Pierce, who had won the competition for the Norwich town hall.

*He's the one you made cry.*

Which I made cry. There was somebody called Jarratt[ph], who was, who looked rather like a builder, and was in fact mainly interested in the handling of bricks and plaster and stucco and that kind of thing.

*And were you ever interested in that?*

Yes, I found the... I found things like drainage and bricks and the various patterns and the mixtures of mortar, yes I found all that side of it more interesting, much more interesting than the people, there was someone called Atkin Berry[ph], who was a remarkably handsome man, with whom all the girls fell madly in love, who used a very soft pencil, and always drew a central axis, and then a flight of steps and the portico, and the wings on each side of the portico, so it was Beaux-Arts. The Beaux-Arts convention of designing which we, the three of us, Bill Edmoston[ph], Andrew Carden and myself rebelled against, and caused me to be so rude to Roland Pierce. But I can't remember

any...I think Atkin Berry[ph] was involved in the interior design. It wasn't considered as important as the major features of designing.

*What were you actually taught about interior design, were you given projects, were you...*

Yes, we were given...

*...taken to interiors? How did it work?*

We were given projects which sometimes we thought ridiculous, like for instance, a small naval museum on a rocky promontory, that was one clearly remembered project, and we sort of thought in, in very modern... I mean we objected to in a sense that it seemed to us a very unlikely commission, to be asked to design a small naval museum on a rocky promontory, and it would be far more useful if we'd been asked to design in general for the replacement of the slums in Stepney. And incidentally that was a project which came much later to the AA. And we wanted architecture to be linked much more to social and sociological problems, and to be given really practical projects. And so we tended to rather send up the unpractical things, the sort of orangerie, there might be another one which was an orangerie to a stately home and that kind of thing, where elegance was demanded. There was one range of projects which came from, I'm trying to remember, which came from a rather more sympathetic member of staff, which was to design a shop front for instance which was inoffensive to the surrounding architecture. I remember at the time there was a, a gramophone record shop called Alfred Imhof[ph] in Tottenham Court Road area, where the... At that stage you were allowed to go into little separated booths like telephone boxes, and actually play a record, and this was the wax discs, you could actually play it to see if you wanted it. That's all been abolished and you can't listen to things now. And one of the staff called Atkinson, I can't remember his Christian name, quite distinguished in his day, had the, had been commissioned to redesign the interior of Imhof[ph], and he did it in a very chinoiserie constructionist style, with fretwork and so on, and in very positively yellow book kind of Oscar Wilde kind of yellowy greenery colouring. And we... And he gave us I think, he asked us to accept as

it were, accept the commission to redesign Imhof's[ph]. So we did have the occasional interior, with a practical thing, rather than a wholly domestic interior thing to do.

*And can you remember the work you did for these projects?*

No, not really. One rather significant thing was that, there was a competition... The principle was Howard Robertson, and I think we talked about Shell House and...

*No we didn't.*

Didn't we?

*No.*

Howard Robertson, who was a very nice man, and gave a lot of very, I think very important lectures in which he had somehow formulated rules of design, mainly areas of possible error. For instance, if you had a big architectural complex to design, and you decided to have a tower as part of that complex, and you decided to have a long string of horizontally, horizontally emphasised buildings, if you made the tower as high as the horizontal buildings were long, then you created what he defined as a duality. And that was a new word which seemed to me/be[??] quite significant. Another thing, he was very interesting about fenestration, and he quoted very much the fenestration in Renaissance building in towns like Venice and Florence, where he said if you look carefully you will find that in that kind of light situation it's very...fenestration is very much of a wall with voids, walls with voids, rather than voids supported by a structure. And the most important thing in designing is that you never make the area of void equal to the area of solid, because that leads again to a very important duality. Well now the interesting thing is that if you look at one of his most important buildings which is Shell House on the South Bank, you will see that he has exactly done that, he's made the solid area almost exactly equal to the void area, and one can't help wondering why he wasn't aware of his own theories, whether it was some purely practical thing which drove him to

break the rule. Anyway, he was very supportive to me, somehow he took a liking to me. And at one stage there was a kind of student competition for designing a poster at some exhibition which was to take place at the Architectural Association in Bedford Square, and he was the judge, and he chose my design and gave me a kind of winning prize for it. And had me into his... He was at the time running a practise called Easton & Robertson, which I think still exists, in Bedford Square, and he had me into his study or office or whatever it was and said that when I got my diploma and so on, at any time he would employ me and so on. But actually by the time I emerged from the AA there was such unemployment in the architect...there was so little going on in the world of architecture, that we didn't need to do six months work in an office, which was normally laid down as part of the diploma. So he didn't in the end give me a job in his office. I doubt whether I would have taken it anyway.

*What was your design?*

Oh, very Bauhaus, very...I think I can stop there, absolutely Bauhaus, like... Not in a Paul Klee sense, but in the sense of the architecture that was going on, the architecture that was...Gropius, Mies van der Rohe. Very sort of Brutal and Cubist, my design was.

*And why do you think you wouldn't have gone into his office even if it had been offered?*

Because I think that I had become intolerably arrogant and...and revolutionary, and thought that his designs were stuffy, and that he was liable to kowtow to safety. I think that was my attitude, very revolutionary and, rather stupid in a way, but, one is when one was young.

[End of F8793 Side B]

[F8794 Side A]

*What do you feel about the Shell building then, do you feel that his rule about fenestration was correct, and that he should have stuck to it, or do you feel it works on that sort of scale?*

No, I think the Shell building is a really uncomfortable building. I don't like it at all, in any kind of way. The only thing I, I've suddenly remembered, that, Howard Robertson acquired a commission for me to do a huge seventy-foot long mural in the downstream[??] restaurant, and I often wonder whether it's there still. I daren't go in case it isn't still there. And that was done on a new process, Formica, done in four foot by eight foot panels, about...how many panels would take seventy feet? Four goes into seventy. Just about twenty. Less, slightly less than twenty. And, this was a new process of sandwiching a design which was done on a special material called melamine paper and then hot, under a hot press, in a huge hot press, this was made the centre of a sandwich, one part of which was plywood, the centre of which was one, so to speak paper design, and the other layer was a transparent plastic, and that made a smooth surfaced picture really. But of course the smooth surface in some kind of way was rather unattractive. But after that the whole thing developed rather more. And I then did a similar Formica mural in, I think the very first coffee bar in London, which was called the Gondola, near Baker Street, where it meets Oxford Street, which was started by the brother of a friend of mine, and which took, my designs took the...played on the word 'gondola', and was very much to do with ships and rigging and boats. And incidentally, was very, very much depended on the close focus thing we were talking about, because part of the design was the table tops, and I realised that people sitting in café tables would very happily appreciate detail, very intricate detail, on the table top. And so that played very much into my hands with small-scale design.

*When you say it played on the word 'gondola', you don't mean you actually used text; you meant the idea...?*

No, no, the visual ideas. Obviously I had to actually incorporate a gondola, because that was almost demanded by the client. No. Was he my client? Yes. By the person who commissioned this. And, so a big gondola, which in itself was very rich in kind of detail, that happened on the counter top, where again the eye could be very close, people sitting at stools, sipping their coffee, their eyes were only about two feet away from the surface. And I used, subsequently I used to notice people kind of fingering the pattern and tracing, pointing to their friends, and so on. There was a lot of writing, a lot of words became involved in it. I was pleased, I was still pleased... When I see press cuttings illustrating that I'm still pleased with that.

*But again, words about it, rather than words within the design?*

There were...there were words within design, but words which, like for instance the names on ships, the names, and perhaps initials on sails, and flags, words on flags and things, incorporated in the design, yes. I mean there weren't any long quotes from poetry and so on in type, in typography, no.

*And there was no text for the sake of text, even if it was just a single word, it was always something that might genuinely have been found on a boat, or a flag?*

Yes, it was entirely to do with the world of gondolas, and to that extent Venice and...and ships' clocks and compasses, and... I'm trying... There are...I'm trying to visualise it now. That kind of idiom of design. And, drawing very much on earlier centuries, going right back to the early diagrams, the early typography on compasses and on boats and, sextants and things like that.

*So where would you have gone to research all that?*

Probably...probably libraries. I had always collected books which had absolutely beautiful engravings in them, which in those days one could get really very cheaply, and I'd bought... When I was working for the *Daily Mirror*, and I found myself in places like



Newcastle, Preston, Blackburn, places like that, the strange thing was that there were lots of junk shops, which weren't equivalent to the present-day junk shops, because they contained not only totally accidental collections of old books, bits of Hoovers, old standard lamps, old flour bins, cake tins and things, and suddenly you would find a book which had the most beautiful engravings of, let's say astronomy, or scientific instruments, particularly scientific instruments. I have a copy of a magazine called *The Penny Mechanic*, and this has (which I still have), and, although I've cut a lot of it out rather stupidly, literally cut it out with scissors and scalpels and things. But this has the most beautiful steel engravings of early pumps and cross-sections of steam engines. Those were a sheer delight to me, and I incorporated these into, certainly into the gondola mural, and into other murals that I had to do, because they were automatically enlarged you see.

*So, in the coffee house there was a counter which would have had a gondola going the length of it, or is this repeated designs?*

Oh no no no. No. This allowed for, let's say, it wasn't a very big area, but the counter was probably twenty-five feet long, and it allowed for, let's say ten, ten people, ten stools, so that there can be ten people, so that each of the ten people would have a separate little bit to appreciate. It was...it was a sequence of different kinds of boats, and compasses and sextants and that kind of thing.

*And it made a whole?*

And it made...it flowed, yes, it made a whole. Then there was a mural on the wall behind the bar, which I remember as having the same gondola very much enlarged. I can't remember much about the mural, but it would have been in the same style, yes.

*And is this pen and ink drawing, I mean how is it?*

No, mainly these were collages of things that I cut out of very valuable books, destroying the value of the book, not realising that these, eventually these books were going to be valuable. I remember cutting out individual letters from typography, the title pages had the most marvellous typographical, type fonts and things in them, and I actually cut these out and stuck them on so that they made complete words. I also remember that on the table tops, I'm remembering more and more, I made them drift into classical architecture, the Orders, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian columns, these all came in, partly because I found these in the old books that I was buying. So, very probably there was very little of my own actual design in these, that, my designing took the form of putting things together in a, in a happy-making way.

*But would the gondola itself have been drawn?*

No, if I am really honest, I think the gondola itself was largely cut out and maybe enlarged.

*And, were the table tops, were they sections of the wider design, or were they designed each one themselves, or was there...?*

Each one very separate, each one with different kind of motifs. I think there were only about seven or eight. They were round table tops. So that in certain cases... I can remember one of the classical architectural ones, there was a focal point, a centre to the table top, because it didn't need to flow outwards, and the columns radiated, the classical columns radiated from the centre, the capitals being in the centre and the foot of the column being on the outside edge, so that if there were three people sitting round that table, each person would have a little columnar composition to contemplate.

*And, sorry I'm probably being dim. Is this column the length of the table?*

Working, working inwards from the circumference, these being round tables, working inwards from the outside, the capital of the column would be on the inside and then there

would be some kind of floral decoration in the dead centre of the circle, and the columns would be made perhaps to touch it or just to keep clear of it. I can't quite remember.

*But you didn't design the stools and the tables yourself?*

No no.

*Somebody else.*

No, those were designed... I believe that when he broke the whole place up, because he...he was a very, business person who moved from project to project, and he then sold up the Gondola, I believe the tables and the counter top were all auctioned. I know I tried to get some and found they were fetching prices far too high. So let's hope that they're still in private collections somewhere.

*Who was the person who owned the business?*

A person, his name was Brian Gibb, and he was the brother of a great friend of mine, Hugh Gibb, and he's moved away from the coffee thing. I may say that, he was a businessman in the sense that, he started this Gondola café off with extremely good coffee, he created a clientele appreciative of the coffee, and then proceeded, quite consciously and with a laugh, to dilute the coffee, so that the quality didn't remain nearly as good. But because it had started good, everybody took it for granted that it was good, and so they, they liked it. And he is quite, quite funny about that, he says, 'That's just good business.' He then went into boats, and started exhibiting and producing... Oh that horrible dog. A dog just walked through the garden, just to explain that remark. He then started going into boats. And then he started the first launderettes in London, and became a millionaire, and then, and went to live in Jersey, which is a tax haven I think isn't it? And presumably is enjoying himself. He's a good deal younger than me, so presumably he's enjoying himself in Jersey.

*And how did Hugh Gibb come into your life?*

Hugh Gibb became my greatest, greatest friend. He was the brother of one of the, a girl, architectural student in my year called Helen Gibb, and Hugh simply was her brother and I got to know him through her.

*And why was he such a close friend, what were his qualities?*

(laughs) Because he was very attractive physically, and, we started to love each other. And he became, it became just a very great friendship.

*And is he still alive?*

No. He, he became kind of, megalomaniac in a way. He went into films. We went on bicycling tours in Europe, I remember going, riding a bicycle through Austria, and going over what was then called the Adolf Hitler Pass, and making rude noises as we went over. And eventually he went into films, and in fact made some very good films which were shown on telly.

*What kind of films?*

Films like, *The Boat People of Hong Kong*, wonderful shots of throwing the nets out, and... He controlled a film unit. His father had owned an insurance firm called Bray Gibb, which was eventually absorbed into another big firm. He was a Name at Lloyds, he was extremely rich, at that point he was extremely, at that stage he was extremely rich. And, he had enough money, because it takes a lot of money to make films, he had a lot of, enough money to make films. And he became very attached to the Far East, partly because the people there are so attractive. And lived for a time in Hong Kong, where I used to go and stay with him and be with him. And, then he gradually... It was a mental process. One has to say it was a kind of mental decline where he became incredibly self-important, and megalomaniac about money, and talked in terms of £40,000; where I was

talking in terms of £40 he would be talking in terms of £40,000. And he would hire an editing, film editing studio in Wardour Street for £1,000 a week, and hire an editing, editor for another £1,000 a week. And in the end he, he simply over-did it, and when he died, he died £100,000 in debt, having reached the stage of actually borrowing money from some of his boyfriends. Because he became very much active, sexually active with Asiatic youths. Well that's really the story of Hugh Gibb.

*Did you stay fond of him, or did you just...?*

No, no I didn't, because he, he became very intolerant and know-all, very arrogant and critical, and liable to say in public, 'Humphrey, you just don't know anything. You haven't a clue of what you're talking about, and you simply don't know how to behave,' and that kind of thing, which I didn't find sympathetic.

*Not surprising. And when you were together at the AA or afterwards, I mean, could you be openly together, or did it...?*

Well, in those days nobody...there was... To be having a gay relationship, one had to conceal it rather, because it would have been very unacceptable. I mean nowadays it's taken for granted more or less that everybody is partly gay, and so one doesn't have to conceal it. But in those days, my friends of course knew, my brother knew, his sister knew. But certainly his parents didn't know. My parents weren't alive. My grandmother, my uncles and so on didn't know. My grandmother used to say, 'Oh what a delightful, delightful person your friend Hugh Gibb is, and do please go...I will pay, I will pay you a lot to...I will give you a lot of money so that your trip to Austria is much more enjoyable,' and that kind of thing. So... The other generation didn't know of course at all.

*And was that uncomfortable for you, or did you feel all right about it?*

It was uncomfortable in the sense... Yes, whenever I was with a very respectable uncle, it was difficult. I mean my wife knew all about it, and didn't seem to mind. There were people who disapproved.

*Such as?*

Sort of uncles and... They would... Now, when I say they disapproved, they would have disapproved if they'd known. And there was one uncle I was very fond of who, I contemplated kind of telling him and discussing it, but in the end decided that it was so beyond his comprehension that I wouldn't, and that it also wasn't very necessary to do so.

*But did it mean that you had to be quite conscious of not saying certain things all the time, was it something that was perpetually there, that you put a break on communication with people, or did it just become second nature, that you curbed what you said almost without realising you were?*

Became second nature, that there was a certain generation which one wouldn't discuss it with. I mean for instance, the very remarkable woman my grandmother acquired for being our kind of foster mother, Winifred Payne, I think she probably knew, but it wasn't a thing that I would ever have discussed with her. I mean looking back on it, I think that she, quite possibly she was partly gay herself, but it was not a thing that one would have discussed with her. I have a feeling that she...that there were three boys, Michael, Stephen and myself, and my sister Christine, I have a feeling that she was in love with all of us, more or less equally, both with my sister and with all of us boys. Michael made himself very scarce from...I mean Michael was always very independent, and wasn't in the least homosexual, so he just opted out of it. But he was a very fascinating person and I think Winifred was quite possibly quite a lot in love with him. Certainly she was quite a lot in love with Stephen, and with me, but one didn't discuss it. It was odd in those days, whereas nowadays one would.

*And what happened to Helen Gibb?*

Helen Gibb married my first wife's brother, Oliver, who then... Ah, now, how do I go on? Oliver was a lovely, laughy person, rather like his sister, my first wife, who was very honest and laughy, and would have known all about everything, and very, very sexy, and mad about girls, couldn't keep away from them. Totally un-homosexual. Oliver borrowed one of Stephen's books, and when he returned it, the door was opened by a German au pair girl called Renata, and Oliver looked, gave her one look, stepped back and gave her a second look, and thought, goodness, that is going to be my wife. In spite of the fact that he was married to Helen. And no doubt it went through a lot of stages, but eventually he left Helen and married this Renata, who resisted, I'm told afterwards, resisted quite a lot, but nevertheless caved in. Did I show you the William Nicholson portraits of, both of my wife's sister and brother?

*No. Can you tell me about them for the tape? Because the tape won't be able to see. How did they come about?*

Sorry, repeat that, tell you about what?

*About the Nicholsons.*

The Nicholson. My wife's father and mother, who were of course Oliver's father and mother...

*And what were they called?*

They were called Low, and he was a surgeon, and, eventually quite an important surgeon called Vincent Warren Low who worked for St Mary's Hospital in Paddington. Married to somebody, a lady whose Christian name, whose maiden name was I think Burton, and who had been an art student in Paris. So you've got these two elements of a very practical, un-artistic, un-aesthetic-minded surgeon, and this slightly fey, arty, I think

slightly mad woman who was my mother-in-law. They were great friends with Sir William Nicholson, really great friends, to the extent that their young and very pretty daughter was told that nothing was better for her than to go and have lessons in painting from William Nicholson. I need hardly go on, need I? William Nicholson, who was an extremely sexy man, who looked very sort of monkeyish, immediately fell in love with Di, and when she, when he was sixty-eight, and she was seventeen, maybe he was sixty-four, let's say he was sixty-four, and seventeen, bewitched Di and they started an affair. Well who am I to start disapproving of that? It seems to me an excellent idea. The parents never knew, and went on loving William Nicholson, and loving their daughter. It was incredible that they didn't ever know. I mean if it...again if it had been nowadays, they would probably have jumped to it. So, William Nicholson painted these portraits, both of Di, making her look very pretty, very seduceable, and of the brother, Oliver, making him look very attractive too. A curious thing happened. Oliver, who was completely heterosexual, came to the marriage party of, between myself and my first wife, and to which Christopher Isherwood was invited, because he was, by that time he was quite a friend, and Christopher seduced Oliver on the night after the marriage party. Which I think is hilarious.

*Was it easy?*

I wonder, yes. Well Christopher was such a sort of, seductive person, a fascinating mind, I mean, such a, such a...absolutely magical person to be with. Yes I think it was probably fairly easy, yes.

*And do you think that was Oliver's only homosexual evening?*

I've often wondered. I would think very probably, yes, very probably.

*And you know about it through Christopher rather than Oliver?*



Yes. And I think it was probably flattery. I think... I wonder how famous was Christopher in 1936. Beginning to be famous. Certainly amongst intellectuals he was an up-and-coming thing, John Lehmann was producing his work, and he was getting known. And so I think Oliver would have been flattered by it. Also he was liable not to take things very seriously, I think he just found it a big joke.

*Oliver?*

Oliver, would have found it a big joke, yes.

*And, would Christopher have just been very casual about it, or would he have thought it was funny, or would he just have been in a place with a man and found him attractive and that would have been it?*

No, I think Christopher found him attractive, and I think Christopher was very very promiscuous. I think he just took any chance that he could find. I mean he did, he, Christopher tried, Christopher in a sense seduced me, was very cross because I didn't really respond as much as he would have liked, because, Christopher at that age and stage appeared to me to be older than the kind of person that I was interested in, and didn't meet, and wasn't as sort of physically attractive as... One is...demands... When one's young I think one rejects far too easily, one is...at least, I have to say speaking for myself, I was always very critical, or, to put it in a slightly absurd sense, I would look at somebody and say, 'That person is attractive; if they had something slightly different to their nose...' or something like that. Which is slightly absurd really. As one gets older one learns to accept what one considers to be faults when, f-a-u-l-t-s, when one is young. Because one realises that is a part of the person which one is hoping to love.

*So in other words, somewhere there was a kind of ideal that you had in a way?*

You had...you had a...yes, you've hit it exactly. When I was fourteen...between ten, or nine or eight and fourteen, I was in the usual sort of inquisitive state about genitalia and

that kind of thing, and my parents had a collection of books of classical sculpture, particularly Greek sculpture. My father was very much involved with Greece, because he wrote...he was writing a book called *Byron and Greece*, in seven volumes. And, I was constantly looking through these books. So, unconsciously establishing a kind of physical idea of beauty, which I then applied to the people I saw around me, and they had to meet up with certain standards of physical beauty, and one became far too critical of course.

[End of F8794 Side A]

[F8794 Side B]

*But it's interesting that you absorbed ideas of classical beauty about the human figure, and at the same time were rejecting it in architectural terms.*

Do you find that, that odd? I think the two things are hardly connected. This seemed to me to...the classical beauty in sculpture, which was to do with bodies and proportion, and very much to do with sort of sex and physique, I didn't make any connection between the two things, no.

*And what about in writing terms? I mean you were presumably able to appreciate the balance of a line of formal verse, but you must also have been very involved with very new forms of writing that were happening. Did you see any friction in that?*

I think, the answer to that is a purely practical one, which was, I think I've told you, I wasn't allowed to read after four o'clock you see. So my education is sadly lacking in the sort of groundwork of serious reading.

*So would your father not have read poetry to you and recited to you?*

No, my father used to...yes, he used to read Dickens, lots and lots of Dickens. He used to read Tennyson, Wordsworth aloud to us. He read aloud to my mother, which we used to overhear. He embarrassed me enormously because he was very emotional, he was very...he was a sort of actor in a way, and he put what I thought was very embarrassing and rather bogus tear-jerking kind of emotional qualities into his reading. So I reacted in that kind of way against sentimentality and... For instance he, he himself used to burst into tears when he was reading about Little Nell, I forget which Dickens, is it *The Tale of Two Cities*? One of Dickens' novels, there's a character called Little Nell, who goes through all kinds of dramatic suffering, and one is bound to cry about her sufferings, and he did, publicly, cry about things. So that made me very restrained, and determined not to show any emotion about things.

*And, just going back into what you were talking about. With the sister and brother of Pauline having their paintings done by, or contact with...*

Sister and brother of Lolly, not of Pauline.

*Oh sorry. Yes, I'm getting confused. Sorry.*

Yes.

*Did she know them, did she know Nicholson, Lolly?*

Oh yes, yes she, she knew exactly what was going on, and she just used to laugh about it.

*But did you learn anything about Nicholson from...did you ever meet Nicholson yourself?*

I didn't meet... No, I didn't. I met Ben, his son, in the sense that I was in the same room, and just passed a casual word. And also of course I took what is now known, quite a well-known photograph of Ben which is in the National Portrait Gallery.

*How did you come to take that?*

Because, one of the magazines, I think it was probably John Lehmann who was publishing some article about Ben, and he asked me to go up to Hampstead and take his picture. And I took a very good picture of him.

*What was he like to meet?*

He...he was in a hurry. He wanted to get rid of me. He was very obedient, he did exactly what I told him. I think he was probably quite vain, and wanted to be – who wouldn't be actually? – who wanted to appear at his best. And he was very pleased with the result.

But I...it was a purely professional meeting, I mean I was there to take his photograph and he was short of time, and that was the relationship.

*Do you like his work?*

Very much, yes. Yes. I've always...I still continue to like his work. And was very keen on it from the very earliest, early age, yes, very early stage.

*And did you like William's work?*

No. I think, he was a very very tricky and talented technician, and he knew a lot about paint and the quality...the quality of his paint is very delectable, seductive. But I didn't like his subject matter, and I, I just thought he was a sort of boring cliché kind of painter. There are exceptions, as there must be, to everything. He was very slick too. And I think he ruined Di as a painter, because she, because she was having an affair with him, she was almost bound to worship his work, and she never really recovered from the Nicholson influence.

*What was her name as a painter?*

Diana Low.

*And, did it...was it a very long affair, did it have a great impact on the rest of her life, or not?*

I honestly don't know the answer to that. I would think, when...she married one of our architectural student group, a very strange man called Tuely, t-u-e-l-y, Clissold Tuely, who was what her father called a ne'er-do-well, and about whom he said, 'If you marry that man, that layabout, ne'er-do-well, I will never talk to you again.' And he didn't. He never talked to her again. Quite extraordinary. And even when this bloke, who was a very very witty man, who invented the delightful pun, 'better violate than never', when

Clissold Tuely rang the front doorbell of Harley Street where Vincent Warren Low lived, at that time with such bad arthritis that he came very very slowly down a flight of stairs which was visible the whole of its height through the front door, he saw Clissold from the...when he got to the top of the stairs he saw Clissold standing in the hallway, he came all the way down the stairs on his stick, turned round, never said a word to him. So he kept his word, he never talked either to him or to his daughter again.

*Why did Clissold go, to try and make peace?*

He, Clissold got on rather well with his wife, his mother-in-law, because she enjoyed his humour, she liked his puns. I think she even liked that pun, 'better violate than never'. But he... I mean the whole thing became a kind of ridiculous farce, and was...if it had been written up in a short story, in a play or something, nobody...you would have thought it was an exaggeration. They never talked ever again.

*But the daughter, Di, and her husband could still go to the house, or not?*

It had to be... They tried to arrange it that the old boy wasn't there, yes. I mean Di, Di found it embarrassing, Di found it regrettable, and I think slightly emotionally disturbing, that he absolutely refused to talk. Because of course when the children came, and they were his grandchildren, he extended the ban onto their children, so he never talked to the grandchildren. Extraordinary.

*And the marriage worked? Was he a ne'er-do-well?*

He was a ne'er-do-well, but he...that's to say he had enough money to play around, so that he, he...he needed never to seriously... He could play around with business. He started apple farming. He...he was liable to get very cross with things like tractors, and it was said that he got so annoyed with a tractor which wasn't starting or something that he actually went and fetched an axe and hacked it to pieces, and that was the kind... One can really believe that that was kind of true, I mean he was...that he was consciously being

funny. He started writing a book about one of the famous illustrators of children's books, whose name I can't remember, who did a famous edition of John Gilpin. But he, this went on and on and on, until in the end one couldn't dare say, 'Clissold, how is the book going?' because, one knew that it hadn't made any progress at all. So he did never need to do anything. I think they were a quite loving couple. Di was, was very much in love with Eric Ravilious, those two mugs up there. I never quite knew whether that was an affair.

*Was that after she was married?*

Yes, after she was married, yes.

*So do you think if Ravilious had lived, she might have gone off with him?*

Impossible to say, no. I mean Ravilious after all was married to Tirzah. Impossible to say. Might have, yes.

*But, so if Clissold had money, it didn't really matter if he was a ne'er-do-well or not, so it seems as though there wasn't really any grounds, so there must have been something else that the father didn't like, surely. Was there something unspoken?*

Yes, well I think the father's... It was the father who said to Oliver, 'You are...' what was the phrase? 'You are sailing down the river...' 'You are sailing down the river of idleness, into the sea of unemployment,' he said to his son. So obviously his god, the father's god was kind of, professional success, which involved making a lot of money. So that you were a negligible person if you failed in that kind of respect.

*And what did Oliver do?*

Oliver did all kinds of things. He became a representative salesman more or less for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He, during the war, somehow or other he joined the Field

Security Police, and considering he had no languages, I mean, it was absolutely ridiculous. I could speak very good German, and yet I was called into the Tank Corps. Oliver, who could speak no more than schoolboy French and schoolboy German was put into the Field Security Police and sent to Brussels where he promptly had a very serious affair with a lady whose name I don't think I ever knew, who ran an art gallery, who was dealing with the paintings of a very, marvellous artist called Paul Delvaux. And Oliver was given several paintings by Paul Delvaux, and of course they are now worth hundreds of thousands of pounds. I'd very much like to know who's got them and where they are now.

*Is Oliver still alive?*

No. Oliver was a bon viveur and he drank too much and ate too much and, in general was a hedonist, and he ignored signs of heart problems, and he died actually while he was driving a car with his son by Renata sitting next to him, who had the presence of mind to take the steering wheel and put the handbrake on. And Oliver simply died of a heart attack, quite young.

*And what had he done professionally after the war?*

It was after the war I think he, he did the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* thing. He then became very great friends, on the basis of a common appreciation of pornography, with a writer called John Hayward, who was in a wheelchair with muscular dystrophy I think. Did you know about John Hayward?

*Not at all.*

A very clever and authoritative man, a writer. And Oliver sort of became the amanuensis to John Hayward, and sort of wheeled him around in sort of gales of laughter. And together they, they went...they collected pornographic literature and laughed about it, and... It was a nice relationship.



*And it earned him some money, or not?*

Certainly the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* earned him some money, yes, I mean this was a paid job. And I think he was paid on commission and he... And being the kind, a sort of jolly kind of laughy person, he was quite, possibly quite a persuasive salesman, yes. I think he made some money by that.

*But did the pornography make any money, or were they just...?*

Oh no, no, no. No, John Hayward collected it, and, and because he couldn't get about, Oliver was under orders to go and research, and since Oliver was, loved pornography anyway, it was very happy job for him to do. I don't know whether John Hayward paid him, I don't know.

*When did you first see anything pornographic?*

Oh Lord! Oh yes, I've just written in fact part of my autobiography, although, it probably wasn't the first time, but it was one of the first times. Lolly and Helen, Lolly being my first wife, and Helen who was, both of them architectural students of the same year that I was in...

*This is Helen Gibb?*

Helen Gibb. Had a mutual friend called Olwyn Crawshay Williams, who was related to all the Crawshay Williamses, Rupert... Oh, lots of Crawshay, fairly well known Crawshay Williams. And she...she was a very sort of classic blonde, a sort of, everybody's taste, every...every normal man's taste, a rather bouncy, slightly overweight, jolly kind of blonde. And she married eventually a lawyer, part of whose job was to go through the possessions of people for whom he was trying to get probate to their wills. So they were necessarily dead. And he quite frequently came across the concealed vices

of apparently respectable people, which were collections of pornographic things, and one such collection he was so intrigued by that he asked me to photograph them for him. And these were very delightful kind of, not photographs, but drawings, because they were created in round about sort of 1840-ish or so I would think, of...of girls sort of lying around on beds with their legs apart, and young men coming into the room with their trilby hats tilted to the back of their heads, and with enormous erections...(laughs)...which they were about to insert where necessary. And, I did, I photographed these for this bloke, Olwyn's husband. And, that was in a way my most serious introduction to pornography.

*Do you know whose collection they'd been in, and who had [inaudible]?*

No. I think he was acting confidentially, and he wouldn't tell me that. I was very intrigued by that. But I made, I did photograph these, and I kept copies for myself, until I left... (laughs) I left them at a very... It's a very sort of emotional time of my life, in fact when Lolly was dying, and this is strange how these kind of things happen. I was in such a daze of grief and so on, that I left these drawings, which I was quite honestly appreciating as, as much as drawings as pornography, because they were delightful drawings. And I left them in a suitcase on the platform of Salisbury station. And, I can't remember what happened. I think I never got them back. I got the suitcase back but I think someone had rifled them and taken them.

*These are the drawings, or the photographs?*

These are the drawings. My photographs of the drawings. You see I copied them for this bloke. But the question is an important one. I became very very interested at a very early age in what in my mind was pornography, in other words simply genitalia, and of course, that would have meant I would have been remarkably excited if I'd come across... I mean pornography wasn't available, as available in those days. I often think to myself, supposing I'd been born into this age, where pornography is so available, worryingly. I mean, I'm thinking of my grandchildren, worryingly available. Though why should I be

worried? I would have been at it like mad, I mean I would have been groping around. As it was, I was simply groping around for the, for any book which illustrated a nude figure, either male or female, and one, one might call that pornography of course. And that started from the age of six I suppose.

*And did you later, when pornography became available, did that become part of life, or not?*

Yes, I've never seen any great harm in pornography. Unless, and these are now very important qualifications, unless it's to do with children, unless it's to do with violence. And also, very...very way-out behaviour, I mean, need I describe it? I mean things which are literally sort of physically disgusting, which I, I can't take.

*Are we thinking only of pictorial things rather than film?*

No, I'm thinking of film, I'm thinking... Oh, quite an early, early experience, although I was what, 1935, I was twenty-five, was to...when I was sent to Morocco by the *Daily Mirror*, I was picked up by an Arab who I think fancied me a lot, and who simply wouldn't let go, and who followed me around all over the place, and he, without being very direct about it, he said, 'There's something I want to show you,' and in fact he said it was a...(laughs)...he said it was a rose garden. And he would take me along one afternoon to this rose garden, which he said was a very important thing in Morocco, and I should photograph it for my newspaper and so on. Instead of which he took me to a kind of brothel. And the...the method they had applied for exciting males who were visiting that brothel was to show pornographic films. And so together with a young man, a Swede who I think he was also trying to seduce, this Arab, we sat through the most extraordinary, almost comic old-fashioned kind of pornography, where, the sort of iron bedsteads were sort of rocking around, and ladies in the most extraordinary petticoats and things. And I just round this rather funny. That was certainly an attempt to introduce me to pornography, and to excite me by pornography. But yes, I have no objection to

pornography, and, I have to admit that I find it quite turning on and... And if it's not disgusting, or violent, or abusive to young people, then I think fine, yes.

*Mm. And, just going back into where we were. You told me about Helen Gibb up to a certain point, but when her husband left her for the woman in Germany, what happened, what became of Helen?*

She fell...she was very much in love with Stephen, which became pointless, because Stephen was...what dates are we talking about? We're talking about, about late Thirties. When did...Stephen was, had two wives. I mean I'm sure he was unavailable to her anyway. And in any case, Stephen began to find Helen's attention rather unwelcome, and I think possibly, quite possibly was rather unkind to her. And, she then fell very violently in love with a bomber pilot during the Battle of Britain, and inevitably he was killed. I remember he was called Peter, otherwise I, I can't remember. Inevitably he was killed, and there was great grief about that. And, she...she remained a very kind of lovable person, never very...obviously broken up by grief. She remained kind of cheerful, but I think she was sad.

*Was she childless?*

You've raised another quite important thing. These three, Helen Gibb, Margaret Low, Lolly, my wife, and Olwyn Crawshay Williams, they were all seduced by one of Vincent Warren Low's students, whose Christian name was George, and I think his surname was Barber but I wouldn't be too sure about that, they were all seduced by him, he was a very attractive young doctor. And, from that, I think Helen became pregnant, because the doctor wasn't...the doctor in fact was very stupid, and didn't take precautions. And they then, the only thing for her to do in those days was to have an abortion, which she had, and as a result of the abortion she became infertile, and eventually developed an ectopic pregnancy, which increased the infertility, so that in the end it was absolutely positive that she couldn't have children. So she decided to have, to adopt. And at the same time my wife, who I think had also been seduced by this man, but was perfectly capable of

having children, of course she didn't have an abortion, but she got this fatal Hodgkin's disease, and she was treated with deep X-ray and made infertile, or made partly infertile, because in fact she did give birth to a stillborn child. But Helen had, was unable to have children so she adopted. And my wife by this time, after the stillbirth, was not able to have children any more. Anyhow she weighed about four and a half stone, so she couldn't have. And... Where am I? I've lost track now.

[break in recording]

Also became I think infertile through an abortion. So she never had children.

*But when they were seduced by the student of the father, were they all very young, was this pre-marriage?*

Yes. Yes, they were twenty-three-ish, that kind of thing, yes.

*And where did they go for abortions in those days?*

They were very very secretive, and very expensive, and very back-door, yes.

*In London?*

I think so, yes.

*And, just picking up threads of things that have been mentioned this morning. Did you know Kit Nicholson?*

No, I didn't. I knew of him. I knew someone called E Q Nicholson, who married...who married Kit I think. And she became a very great friend, and that led me to be friendly with John Craxton who of course fell in love with her. As a very strange departure from homosexuality, John Craxton and EQ, very strange.

*Did they actually have a love affair?*

I don't know. I don't know.

*What was she like?*

Oh she was a lovely person. She was really nice. And she was a talented designer, designed a lot for Alistair Morton, Edinburgh Weavers. No, I got on very well with her. During the war...

*Where did you meet her?*

Ah, goodness. Yes. I took Lolly, who by this time was seriously ill, in 1940, and we were in the Blitz in London, and I came to the conclusion that the strain of a serious illness and being bed-bound to a certain extent, and the doctors agreed with me, that she should be taken out of, out of being bombed. And so we went to a place called Sutton Veny, which was discovered by Lolly's sister Di, because it had been the original studio of William Nicholson. And it was called the Old School House in Sutton Veny. So this was William Nicholson's house, a tiny little house with one big room which was his studio, and an early painting by Ben on the wall. And that's how we got...that was the connection.

[End of F8794 Side B]

[F8795 Side A]

Well going back to Sutton Veny, where Di, Lolly's sister, had found this little house called The Old School House, which was William Nicholson's studio. Nancy Nicholson, again I'm in quite a muddle about the relationship of Nancy Nicholson to all that, but Nancy Nicholson ran a little private printing press called the Poulk Press, p-o-u-l-k press, in Sutton Veny. So we got to know Nancy. And Nancy was a friend of EQ's, because EQ had married Kit, and that's the connection.

*And what was she actually like, EQ? Because she's rather one of the hidden figures. You're always hearing about the personalities of the others, and much less about EQ.*

Yes, well, she was laughey, and elegant, and, I think I could have accused her at the time of good taste. Her designs were floral, and she was devoted to natural form, and at the time I was critical of them because I felt that she should have gone beyond purely floral things, and I felt she was being a bit stuffy. But on the whole she was on our side, I mean she was into Shostakovitch and she was into John Craxton and into Picasso and so on, it was rather incomprehensible that she herself lagged behind in her art work. But in spite of that, I liked what she did, and she was very generous, and she was a very good cook. And, she was living somewhere near. And I had the job of official photographer, official War Office photographer to Southern Command, and I had a car and a driver, and when fate, circumstances played into my hands, I arranged that I should stay the night, not in any relationship with her, but just as a matter of her hospitality. And she was very nice to my driver, and put him up too, and fed us and so on. And she was a very sort of generous-minded person.

*What was her home like?*

Elegant, and full of the kind of...elegant sort of antiques. Very good taste, very good taste kind of antiques. But I mean everyone in those days, including Di, collected a kind

of thing which is illustrated by a mug which I see has been taken away, and I know who took it. (laughs) But...

*What does it look like?*

It was one of those mugs where a fern pattern... Oh there it is.

*I was hoping you wouldn't see it. I want you to describe it for the tape.*

Where a fern pattern has been allowed to develop by dropping into the wet glaze a darker tone of an incompatible diluent, so that the, the drop spreads into a kind of fan, because you put the mug upside-down and allow the fan shape to develop what is ultimately upwards, but when it's developing it's downwards of course. And they have a name, and they normally, it's a black ferny pattern against a light buff ground, and there's normally a blue stripe at the top and, a couple of lines at the top. They're very collectible, together with a kind of, like that marbled Staffordshire teapot up there. I mean, the Victorian jug up there was given to me by Di, who knew that, because of my friendship with Bill Edmostone[ph], who in advance of his time was very into Victorian stuff, she knew that I would like it, but she herself hated it as being very sort of vulgar and over the top in decoration.

*Could you just describe it for the tape?*

The jug is in fact made for the 1851 Great Exhibition, and is very...it's Wedgwood, and is very much the Wedgwood blue and white colouring, but it's encrusted with a very high relief pattern of a human, kind of little boy climbing up a kind of growth, a kind of foliage situation. So it's a highly elaborated, typical high Victorian art which a lot of people would absolutely hate, but which I take to more and more. So that would not in those days have been considered a collectible, because Victorian was rather out. But...

*What was your childhood china like, was it...?*



Oh my mother and father were very into...into art nouveau.

*So can you remember the actual cups and saucers?*

Yes, they had William de Morgan vases; they had beaten copper cupboard doors; they had a beaten copper coal scuttle; a William Morris carpet; a lot of William Morris curtains and upholstery, cretonnes. I think, considering they were married in 1904 I think, it must have, William Morris must...art nouveau and William Morris must have been very modern in those days of course, so they were being sort of avant-garde in a way.

*But can you remember the actual china you used to have, to use?*

China was, because of four children being rather rumbustious and liable to break things, what was called the best china was generally put away, but it was...it was traditional rather than art nouveau, it was probably Crown Derby, that kind of thing. I remember a lot of sort of gold rims and, and things.

*And what did you use day to day, if that wasn't around?*

I can't remember quite honestly.

*And since we're talking about the mugs, what is the, and perhaps you'd describe it for the tape, the cherry mug?*

It's a kind of china of which the name escapes me, it's a very well known kind of china. Oh damn. The name escapes me. But it's valuable and it's quite well known. And is very collectable.

*What sort of period is it?*

It would be about 1900, that particular one.

*And how do you come to have it?*

Because I collected, and I used to... When I was travelling around for the *Mirror*, and for *Picture Post*, I was always on the alert for junk, and I made a rule never to spend more than a shilling on one item, particularly ceramic items. Of course that would have been absurd as far as furniture was concerned. And I made collections of mugs, particularly Coronation mugs, the remnants of that are up there. And white china swans, and, white china for some reason or other, white china in particular, hence those candlestick columns which came into the category of white china. And I was a great collector. And when we left the vicarage over the hedge, which was sort of seven times as big as this house, I had to sell most of it, I sold four-fifths of it, which Christie's catalogued and took away. So that, that's... That always puzzled my brother, Stephen, who, who took the line that he hated possessions, and he slightly joked with me about how much more I'd acquired, and I became the acquisitive member of the family, the collector.

*And what about the two mugs in the centre there, can you describe them for the tape and talk about how you got them?*

The Ravilious mugs? Well, because Di was very friendly, if not the mistress of, Eric Ravilious, I was very appreciative both of his painting and of his work for Wedgwood, and so, somehow I managed...I think I probably bought that, simply from a shop. There was a marvellous shop called Dunbar Hay, which dealt very much in our kind of, our intellectual kind of taste, sold beautiful salad bowls, and glasses and ceramic mugs, and china. And they had an arrangement by which you could give people wedding presents by giving them a token to spend at Dunbar Hay; you gave them a kind of price limit, and they could go to Dunbar Hay and choose what they like. And if they wanted something more expensive, then they paid extra for it you see. And so a lot of stuff originally I had, like wooden salad bowls and things, came from Dunbar Hay.

*Where would the salad bowls and the china tend to come from? Presumably most of it wasn't English.*

No, they came from Sweden, they dealt a lot with Swedish stuff, and Swedish glass of course was very much in demand in England.

*What was it like then?*

Simple. I think that describes it. Beautiful, simple shapes. Sometimes very chunky and thick, which I always liked very much. I have a sample of it in a cupboard there, if you would want a more, want actually to see one.

*I need you always to put things into words I'm afraid. And what was your salad bowl like?*

Salad bowl, again, we were very much into simplicity, so it was simply a very simple bowl which showed the grain and quality of a very beautiful wood. Probably something like laburnum which is a marvellous grain. Just some beautiful wood.

*And would that have been unavailable before?*

It certainly wouldn't have been in any shop like Waring & Gillow. It possibly would be available at Heal's, which again was one of our resorts for advanced stuff, particularly fabrics and plain colours and furniture. Heal's was one of the places that we very much went to. Dunbar Hay and Heal's. We were very much into, possibly slight, verging on arty-crafty occasionally, onto beautifully woven rugs, and that kind of thing.

*And did you go to the Mansard Gallery at Heal's, was that important?*

Yes. I think I tried to get them to give me a show and probably failed. And in the end was quite sour grapey, pleased, that I had failed. Yes, we were very much into Heal's.

*And did you like EQ's fabric?*

I think I...I found it a bit conventional, and wished that she would be, she would break out of the floral pattern. But I liked it, yes, it was on the right lines, yes. Very large-scale. You see she was doing something which was difficult to sell, which was very large-scale patterns. Textile producers always claimed that they could not sell large-scale patterns because it involved a lot of waste. The larger the scale of the design, the more you have to waste, because elements of the pattern which are cut away simply don't make sense, I mean you get a, a small detail of something which doesn't make sense.

*And did you stay in touch with her all her life, EQ, or not?*

No. No, it was...it was never more than a, an infrequent meeting.

[break in recording]

*.....just talking about things that are happening to you in the new year.*

I had a letter from Sussex University saying, would I be prepared to accept an Honorary Doctorate of Literature at Sussex? And I thought to myself, if that letter had said, 'Would you be prepared to accept an OBE?' I would have said no, but I would have let all my friends know that I had been offered it.

[break in recording]

*.....want to test this microphone, and it seems to be all right.*

[break in recording]

*.....this microphone, is it working? It seems not to be.*

[break in recording]

*.....mind repeating about the offer from Sussex University?*

No. I must just clear my mouth of crumbs, biscuits. Take a sip of coffee. So hang on a moment. Swallow swallow.

[break in recording]

.....you were last here, I've had a letter from Sussex University asking me if I was willing to accept an Honorary Doctorate of Literature in Sussex, and after realising that I would have refused an OBE, but let all my friends know that I was refusing it, I decided there was nothing to stop me accepting a Doctorate of Literature, and it was very acceptable, in fact I was very pleased. So, I shall be going down to Sussex on January the 28<sup>th</sup>, very happy if you could come too, and, receiving this little bit of paper I suppose it is. And being forced to wear a silly hat and a silly gown.

*Why would you turn down an OBE?*

Because they're two a penny, and the range of people who get them, gets it, seems to me totally lacking in... It's no longer a distinction in a way, it's something that too many people get.

*Was Stephen knighted? I can't remember.*

Stephen received a, to start with a CBE, and he wrote to me and said that he was now a Commander of the Bad Egg, and I was quite amused by that. And then he was knighted, and I, I must have written something which was vaguely disapproving, writing to him

something like, ‘What a surprise, you having once been a strong left, so left that you were a Communist, actually a member of the Communist Party, and now to have you accepting a knighthood. Do you not remember that your distinguished uncle Alfred, editor of the *Westminster Gazette*, refused a baronetcy’ – maybe Stephen didn’t know that he had – ‘because he thought that creative people, writers and poets and people, should not accept such things.’ And in fact he quoted me a certain writer called Philip Gibbs, and said how ridiculous it is that he is now Sir Philip Gibbs, it just doesn’t go. It wouldn’t be right for instance if it was Sir H G Wells, or Sir Arnold Bennett, would it? And, I’ve always somehow thought that, and I thought that Stephen shouldn’t have accepted a knighthood. He then wrote back to me and said, ‘You seem slightly bemused about my knighthood, but there are certain advantages.’ I can’t see any advantages, except that Hugh Casson once told me that all it did was to, you had to increase your tip to the man at the door at the Savoy Hotel, or something like that.

*You were quite close to Hugh and Moggie, weren’t you?*

Yes, Hugh was Quentin’s godfather.

*How did all that happen, was that College, or what?*

Ah, no, that goes right back. When Pauline’s mother became involved with the Gayer-Anderson twins, homosexual twins, became involved as being the, I forget the right word, something mother, the real mother but the, taken over so to speak, mother, temporary mother, temporary mother, to a child, Pauline was shunted out of the family life, shunted out of the house. Which by coincidence happened to be the house that Stephen and I subsequently bought, but that’s just fate, a sort of Irish Murdoch thing. And she was shunted into the care of a family called Salomon, one of whose daughters married Guinness, Alec Guinness, one of whose sons, Eusty[ph], was an architectural student with me, and when she was with the Salomons as a teenager, a sort of, thirteen, fourteen, they took her for a holiday in the south of France, and who should turn up but the young Hugh Casson. And he found her very attractive, and, I don’t know whether

they actually had a physical affair, but certainly they loved each other for the rest of their lives.

*What sort of year would that have been?*

Now, Pauline was eight years younger than me. This would have been in, let's say '33, so I would have been twenty-three, and she would have been twenty-three minus eight, what's that? Maybe that makes it a bit young. No I think that was about right. What's twenty-three minus eight? Fifteen, sixteen? Fifteen, sixteen. And she spent a lot of her time with the Salomons. He was a, Mishel[ph] Salomon was a collector, a great friend of Augustus John, a very intellectual, artistic family. So Pauline actually grew up with that kind of background, which was in fact more interesting than her mother's background, which was rather county and army. Because her mother had been one of those strange ladies who had gone out to India, there is a collective name for them, gone out to India to find a husband who was pining as a member of the armed forces in India, presumably having sort of coloured mistresses, but available to any white girl who wanted to marry him. And that's how she met her husband, who subsequently abandoned her in favour of another, rather younger lady.

*Yes, I'd like to talk about them some other time. But, so when did...when did you first meet Hugh?*

I first met Hugh when I married Pauline in 1947 I think it was. And, Hugh then had known about, had liked my painting before I actually met him, and proceeded to buy a painting of mine, and also then to commission me to do a mural in the Festival of Britain, and in general to encourage my designing and... He was a very good friend in that respect. Well I think he genuinely liked what I did, and he was a man who, whose whole life consisted of making aesthetic judgements, and as President of the Royal Academy he was very much in that position.

*Did you like him?*

Very much, yes, he was an enchanting man, yes. Very very understanding, marvellous sort of listener. Always appearing to be very interested. Very very witty, very good public speaker. Yes, I liked everything about him, yes.

*What was he like as a tutor at the Royal College?*

I think he was a bit distant, and I think here a bit of class distinction came in, because, by this time he was what the students called Sir Casson, always omitting... Whether they did it on purpose or not, I don't know. And I think he seemed a bit sort of grand to them, and maybe slightly patronising. One of Hugh's problems was very much my problem, which is indecision, and he once told me that he was, a lot of his life he was in agonies of indecision. You arrive at a certain point and there are two ways in which to go. God! Awful. Which one do you choose? You've almost got to just to toss up for it. And I think he couldn't bear to be, and again this rather reflects me, he couldn't bear to castigate, he couldn't bear to be brutally critical. And always went out of his way to see something good in every bit of work. He would never tell a student that they were no good, he would always see something... And I think he genuinely always saw potential.

*And, if you met him at the stage when you got married, he was obviously married to Margaret at that point.*

Yes.

*How did you get on with her?*

She always seemed to me at that stage rather aloof and difficult. Until, we went to, I remember going to a fancy dress party with the Cassons, it could have been at Glyndebourne I think, he had an old Rolls Royce and we all, we had a really interesting sort of drive down.



*Interesting in what sense?*

In the sense that, I realised that one of our shared interests was cars, and that I least suspected, and he was absolutely devoted to this Rolls Royce. And I had actually been offered a Rolls Royce by somebody called Tony Goldschmidt[ph], for about £400, which was a lot of money then, and turned it down because I thought it would be too much trouble, and in a way I...I didn't trust it. Anyway, I realised, at that party I was dancing with Rita, and I suddenly realised that, she was a lovely person, and was shy, that her main problem was being desperately shy. And dancing somehow released a conversation, opened a conversational tap, and we got on very well. And after that, I think she was rather attracted to me, and that's always nice, and I think after that we, we got on very well. But she, again I mean she could be accused of being almost ghastly good taste, almost being Osbert Lancaster kind of joke of good taste, that she was eminently a tasteful person who quite... I mean the students' criticism of, of both of them was that they, they never committed themselves absolutely wholeheartedly to kind of, blaring colour; extremes of any kind were always rejected. And that he was, he tended to sit on both sides of the fence, and... I think that was a general criticism of, of the, sometimes of the Festival, of what went on in the Festival of Britain.

*And what about the balance of their relationship? I mean he always had the limelight really. Do you think she had hidden talents that weren't properly looked at?*

Yes, but I think, I think it's part...that's partly guesswork. Quite honestly I don't know to what extent she, she did suppress her own talents in favour of his. She was always very much the partner, and when they were at, when they ran the interior design school at the Royal College, she was very much shared principal, shared head of department, and I suspect that students would have turned to her rather than to him, I think. Oh she was lovely, a lovely, sensitive person. But again, there are always people who will kind of hate what they stood for, and one can see there's a certain justification in saying that they were too sitting on the fence, they were too tasteful, too keen to see the good in

everything. Compromise is the fatal word, that they tended to compromise. Is that running still?

*Yes. I'm going to turn.....*

[End of F8795 Side A]

[F8795 Side B]

*.....have quite an influence on Robin Darwin didn't she?*

Very much I think.

*Do you know how? Because he was obviously a very strong person.*

He was a very love-hate character. My reactions to him were very much love-hate. I saw in him fascist kind of tendencies, certainly anti-Semitism. But, as far as teaching policy, and taste and so on were concerned, Robin was very, very pro Rita, yes. In fact he gave her the job of redesigning the décor of, the interior décor of the senior common room. And again this was criticised very much by students, as being very very tasteful and elitist and so on.

*What did you think of it?*

To a certain extent I agreed with the students. I'd have, I'd have liked a more positive statement of colour. She tended to be rather muted, rather neutral, rather following the principles I was describing earlier of, of John Holmes, the teacher of colour at the Architectural Association, that, what is unapprovingly called strident colour, which I would call fully saturated and bold colour, is best seen in small quantities, and is most effective in a setting of neutral, muted colours all around them. I think she followed that principle rather.

*For someone who won't ever see it, could you describe the senior common room? What was it like before for example? I never saw it before.*

Well it was...it was always... When I first joined the College, the senior...we were in Cromwell Road, the common room was simply a big room in one of those late Victorian stucco houses in Cromwell Road, and it was very sort of undistinguished, but fairly

opulent and...yes, undistinguished is the right word. It was just a comfortable place to sit. Much smaller than the subsequent senior common room, and therefore rather crowded. And Robin kept going a rather ridiculous kind of, a sort of very 'you' kind of establishment, of a steward in a white coat, and, hovering around with, taking orders for drinks, and Robin made it absolutely compulsory to wear a tie, and... In a way it was absurdly kind of conservative and respectable. And a lot of the staff who wanted to be arty and wear open-necked shirts and so on, simply avoided the senior common room and went out to the nearest pub. Gradually it became less conservative, and less particular, and Robin was simply talked out of this ridiculous thing about having to wear a tie and so on. I once had a conversation with him which was conducted via the steward, who rather ridiculously carried a note from Robin to me and then carried a note from me to Robin, and then another note from Robin to me and so on, which was ridiculous of course. And this was all about wearing a tie, which I had refused to do. And also about wearing a jacket too. But in a way I, I quite...I... He was a really great character.

[break in recording]

*.....going to tell me something more about Robin.*

Well slightly elaborating on this story. He sent me, he summoned the white-coated steward who was called Mr George, and he wrote a note which said, 'Humphrey, you seem to have forgotten that you are required to wear a jacket in the senior common room, otherwise would you kindly leave.' And I wrote a note saying, 'Robin, my metabolic reaction to cigarette smoke and heat makes it absolutely impossible for me to wear a jacket. Humphrey.' Back comes a note, 'Very good reply. Good for you. For today you can continue to wear no jacket.' And that was the end of the correspondence. But that's very sort of old style isn't it. I mean it could come into a novel.

*And would it mean that the next time you went in you wore a jacket, or did that mean he was giving in?*

Well, that was a good question, because, I was faced with that problem, and I, I decided that I would continue not to wear a jacket, and he didn't make any further comment, no.

*So gradually all standards fell.*

Yes. On one occasion David Sylvester came in without a tie, and a note was passed to him, and he, he just scrunched it up and threw it away. But the next time he came to College he had bought himself an absurdly flamboyant tie with a huge bow to it, which he put on, and went straight up to Robin and said, 'Nice to see you again.' Didn't say anything about the tie you see. (laughs)

*Did you have anything to do with David Sylvester?*

Only that I once shared a taxi with him and he jumped out and very quickly got away before there was any chance of his paying any part of the fare. (laughs)

*But, when you say Robin showed signs of anti-Semitism, what do you mean?*

Well, I took a, a sabbatical, because I had some kind of job I wanted to be uninterrupted with, so I took a sabbatical term. And Robin said, 'Would you name somebody who would like to step into your place?' So I immediately said, 'Michael Rothenstein.' And his reaction was amazing. He just sort of said, 'No.' And I said, 'Well, why?' And I...I think I'm guessing in a way. I told this to Sam Rothenstein the other day, and she thought it was absolutely incredible that he should have done that on account of being anti-Semitic. But I think he was anti-Semitic, and I think that was a sign of it. And I think he assumed, although it wasn't...I mean Michael wasn't a practising Jew, but I'm sure the Rothensteins, the Rothenstein clan, was originally Jewish, I mean they look very Jewish, John Rothenstein looked very Jewish. and William Rothenstein did too.

*Would John Rothenstein have been a rival of Robin Darwin? Would it have been to do with perhaps previous generations?*

I wonder whether you're right. Maybe he was in to be rector of the College. Rector's the right word by then? Yes, maybe you're right.

*Or would Robin have ever been in line to be head of the Tate?*

Don't know. I just...I just don't know. I wouldn't have thought so, no.

*And I heard that Robin tended to have love affairs with his women staff and then fire them. Is that true?*

The great affair was with Janey Ironside, and she was ravishing, I mean she... No doubt you have heard Virginia speaking on, telling the whole story of how Janey was a, was an alcoholic nymphomaniac, drug addict, and how, her marriage to Christopher Ironside, which appeared to be blissful, because they were both so gorgeously handsome. Robin fell madly in love with Janey I think, and that became a political issue, because Robin had a secret contempt for anything other than fine art, and this I think really interfered with his term as rector, because, he displayed this favouritism so much that every single day he had lunch in...when he had lunch in the senior common room, he always sat at a table with only the painting school staff, and one really wasn't allowed to intervene. I mean quite often I would, I would go to take an empty chair at the table and I would be told that I wasn't a painter, that I had to go back to my...that this was for... Or...he put it more tactfully, he'd say, 'That chair is Bobby Buhler's' or something, 'and he'll turn up any minute, so you can't sit there.' He wasn't as direct as I've just suggested. But, since Janey was head of fashion, she was fighting very much for the recognition of the fashion school as an independent entity, after the College had been given university status, and, I mean I don't know the complications of the politic, political issue, but Robin put it down, I mean he didn't...he didn't like fashion, it was commercial. He didn't like textiles really, because they were commercial. Fine art was for him. So, Janey, I remember once when I was on senate or, or the academic board I think, and she...he and Janey were absolutely at loggerheads, but at the same time I could see that he was in love with her very much,

but he...he simply put her down, politically put her down. And, I think she became absolutely...I think that pushed her into alcoholism and, and a kind of despair. Have you...have you heard Virginia talking?

*I heard her do Desert Island Discs, is that what you mean?*

Well she may have come up with the same story. Did she come up with the story about Janey?

*She certainly talked about her mother's alcoholism, but I don't think... I can't now remember who told me that Robin Darwin tended to have affairs with women staff and then rather have contempt for them, and then sooner or later they'd be fired. But I didn't know whether it was true or not.*

Well certainly, the only one I know about was Janey, and that was somehow made very public, but whether he... I'd be very interested if you could quote any other female member of staff.

*Did you like her, Janey, was she...? If that hadn't gone wrong, might she have had a very different future do you think?*

My feelings towards her were so mixed up with finding her madly attractive, I mean she was...she was the ideal androgynous type. She was a boy and a girl all mixed up. And I think that had very much to do with Robin's feeling, because after all he'd been to Eton and he'd been art master in Eton, and I think he quite often showed signs of latent kind of homosexuality. He had very strange relationships with students, who became, to whom he became rather...he made rather endearing remarks to them. There was one occasion when the students were in rebellion, and very sensibly Robin called for a staff-student meeting in the senior common room, and, Robin started the meeting by a huff[???], and putting up his hand, and then going off into some rather verbose thing. And one of the students interrupted him and said, 'Oh, God! there you go again Robin.' And it was an

eye-opener that a student should be on 'Robin' terms with Darwin. And Robin took it absolutely as accepted that he should stop and allow the students... 'There you go again, can't we have a chance to speak? It's you that want to hear our point of view, not, we don't want...we know your point of view, we don't want to hear your pint of view.' And Robin said, 'Yes, you're right, OK.' I was also very much aware of his feelings about Janey, partly because I had the same feelings myself and I recognised it, thing.

*Did you know Virginia?*

Janey used to, used to bring Virginia in to the senior common room, to lunch, and she was a very attractive adolescent girl, and I used to sit there feeling alarmingly attracted to her, and to her mother at the same time. And I realised that both of them were very short-sighted, I mean I think Janey, I think Janey had contact lenses very early in the history of contact lenses, and I think Virginia did. But I remember thinking that Virginia, both Virginia and Janey were extremely attractive.

*And, did the Casson children come into the College much?*

No. One of them eventually had a staff post didn't they.

*Dinah.*

Dinah had a staff post. And there was another daughter, Robert Gooden's daughter, Henrietta, came in occasionally. And eventually, she has a staff post I think.

*And just picking up on something that got mentioned very briefly just now. Tell the story on tape of the twins and how they came into your life, and into Pauline's life.*

Oh the Gayer-Andersons?

*How do you spell Gayer-Anderson?*



g-a-y-e-r hyphen Anderson.

*Right.*

And one was called Pum, and he lived in Egypt, and the other was called JG, John Gayer-Anderson. And they were identical twins, and they claimed that however far apart they lived, they were always aware of each other's goings-on and illnesses and felt the same symptoms. And they had an incredible story of how one of them, Pum, was buying...because he was a buyer of antiques to King Farrukh in Cairo and he lived in Cairo, and the other one lived in Lavenham, which was where all the other half of the story went on. One of them was buying the body of an androgynous Greek sculpture of Aphrodite or something which looked like a boy and looked like a girl at the same time, which was missing a foot. And the other was actually buying the foot in Italy. And they swore that this story was true. I didn't quite believe it myself; it may have been true. Anyway, that was the relationship between them and they were very close, in spite of the fact that they lived apart. Well, I don't know whether it's true to say that, quite a lot of homosexuals want the family name to carry on, while at the same time admitting that they dislike ladies so much that they don't want to personally be involved in actually the physical act. But they decided that they wanted the name of Gayer-Anderson to be carried on, but only on the male line. And so they decided that it was perfectly in order that they should ask a lady friend if they were prepared to mother one of their children. And they tried it out, one lady whose name I think was Skeem[ph][inaudible] said OK, and proceeded to go through the physical contortions, and produced a child, but unfortunately the child was a girl. 'Not on,' said the Gayer-Andersons, and so the girl was rejected. And they said, 'Oh well, all's fair in love and war, we start again.' So, they cast around in their friendships, and one of their greatest friends had been a First World War colleague called Wynn, w-y-n-n. Gosh is there an e on the end of it? How awful, I genuinely don't know. Could be an e on the end of it. And he had been at the famous disaster of Gallipoli, on a hospital ship with the father of Margaret Low, Lolly, my first wife. So there was one connection, which had nothing to do with knowing the

wife of Wynn, if you see, have I made that clear? So they cast around for another lady, who was the wife of Wynn and the Gallipoli colleague, and it could be that they knew what...Pauline obviously didn't know, they knew that they were not getting on too well, and that there was another woman in the background. But anyway, they persuaded Pauline's mother, Mrs Wynn, that she would mother their child. So, being very gentlemanly in their behaviour they said, 'Well you must have a house, and what about the house next door to us?' which was The Great House in Market Square in Lavenham, which Stephen and I subsequently bought, purely coincidentally. 'We'll establish you there, and you have the baby, and you will bring up the baby, and we, one of us,' mostly John, as opposed to Pum, 'will live in the house next door,' which was called The Little Hall. Now they were antiquarians in the sense that they always restored, they had, if ever they went into a house they would...it had to be an old house, and they would restore it to its original antiquity. So they stripped The Little Hall of a stucco facing and exposed a lot of timber. The Great House was beyond stripping, because The Great House had originally been half timbered Tudor but was altered in Georgian times with a Georgian front with sash windows, so they had to leave The Great House alone. Anyhow, Evelyn, which was her name, Evelyn Wynn, was established there, and she duly had a child, who was called John, and since there was an older John he was known as Little John, and at that stage Pauline was told to leave, because her mother couldn't bring up this baby and at the same time give enough attention to Pauline. And of course this was a very bad blow to Pauline's psychology in the sense that, it made her very resentful of her mother whom she disliked from the word, from that time. And one can understand that, and it gave her a sense of insecurity of course. Well Little John developed from year to year, and became, in the eyes of the Gayer-Andersons Little John became the budding genius, and, I can remember that he, he was made to, or maybe he himself suggested, I don't know, he was constructing a village, a model village out of mud which was called Mudbury, and every, every visitor to The Little Hall or to The Great House was conducted to see Mudbury, which was a kind of miracle of childish intelligence and so on. Meanwhile the two elder Gayer-Andersons, the two identical twins, continued to practise fairly obvious homosexual activities in the sense that, by this time Pum had acquired a lovely house which is now a visitable museum in Cairo called the Bayt al-

Kritliyya, which is part of a mosque, and in that house he had swarms of little boys serving coffee and working in the kitchen and in the gardens and so on, and obviously working full-time in his bed. And that seemed to be fairly accepted in Cairo at that time. And there are in fact very revealing photographs hidden away in those cupboards in that room somewhere of these little boys, which could get...oh, come to think of it, they could get me into serious trouble. And, the one in England did things which now simply couldn't be done, because, all the little boys in the village were asked to pose for his drawings, because he was by way of being quite a competent artist, and with no kind of...with...what...I can't think of the right word. With no hesitation. He simply suggested that it would be nice if they took their clothes off, and he'd like them to sit there and keep quite still, and so on. Well now, in 1999, every mother of any of those children would have been immediately suspicious, and simply accused him of, of child abuse. In fact he wasn't abusing the children, he was simply very interested. And he would do incredible drawings, amongst which were some incredibly interesting, psychologically interesting, semi-pornographic drawings which were of little boys riding bicycles, and quite often with visible erections and so on. And when he died, I was asked...he had asked me to be artistic executor, and I found these drawings, and I found them very interesting, and in fact I think, in the end we decided that they should go to the Bodleian Library, and I think they are in the Bodleian now.

[break in recording]

In the end of course they, they are both now dead, and they, since they were gourmets and they drank and ate too much, there were natural heart conditions brought about by over-indulgence, and so they died, in modern terms they died comparatively young, full stop.

*Did they die very close to each other in terms of time?*

No. No, there was about a year. Yes, about a year between them I think.

[end of session]

[End of F8795 Side B]

[F8796 Side A]

*Recording with Humphrey Spender at his home on the 29<sup>th</sup> of March 2000.*

[break in recording]

*Have you got any idea what today's date is?*

Yes, very rough idea. It's probably about the 28<sup>th</sup> I think.

[break in recording]

*....just having a look at the Galsworthy book, Awakening, which has you as the model child in it, and, I was asking whether you had an opinion about his play Strife.*

I've...*Strife* was one of those plays which we performed at Gresham's, and I remember acting in it, I can't remember what part. That was...we did *The Doctor's Dilemma* as well, or, a very cut version of it. And I think it had very important things to say, yes. And it was a very good play, full of the essential thing about good plays, conflict, people torn to shreds by trying to decide which way to move, having sympathies on both sides of the argument. Very, very interesting. I think, I wish more Galsworthy plays were going to be revived in fact.

*Did you have any real experience at that stage of people who lived in less comfortable circumstances financially than you? Did anyone take you to anybody else's house, or anything?*

Yes, not nearly enough. My father was a very altruistic character, who got deeply involved in the, what...I think the Arnold Toynbee boys' clubs in the East End, and we were constantly talking about the underprivileged. And of course nannies were always saying, 'Eat it up, think of all the people who would love to have it,' and, however much

one said, 'OK, give it to them, I don't like it,' nevertheless the point got home that, we were very much made aware of slums, underprivileged people, poverty. And at Christmas, my father always had someone from the East End called Mr Carter who was originally a coach driver, who was obviously very very poor, and he was invited as part of the family, and he, unfortunate man, was dressed up as Father Christmas, and made to function. And, I mean I'm sure that I realised that this was a kind of charitable act. That was really the only real contact we were made to have. Because on the other hand my parents were very much on guard, I think Stephen wrote a poem about this, how we were told to, not to make friends with what they called street urchins, in other words, rough stuff. And that, forbid, obviously created a kind of forbidden fruit attitude towards people of that quality and class, and in fact made them quite possibly physically attractive. Quite an important thing I think. And it was a very definite policy of theirs to keep us away from rough behaviour, and to make real little gentlemen of us.

*And was there a degree of being afraid of these rough children?*

Yes. The image which was put across was that they were throwing stones, and...and involved in really getting thoroughly dirty from the point of view of playing around in mud, and maybe in a very insanitary kind of way, peeing all over the place and so on. Yes, that was rather stressed. And curiously, at one point I remember when we were living in Sheringham, there was some kind of interchange of children, one of us was sent to stay with a family called King, and their son, Philip King, who might well be the present professor of sculpture at the Royal College, I've always meant to ask him, was sent to stay with us in Sheringham, and the first thing he did was to pick up a big stone in a field and throw it at me. And it did in fact hit me and quite hurt. So, my parents were justified. But I'm not sure whether the King family was what my parents would have called working class, no, I'd forgotten about that. I know that the King family was involved in India, so probably they were exactly the opposite, but the boy himself, because his parents were in India, might have come into contact with what they would have called less desirable companions. (laughs)

*And, was their attitude that, poor people were stuck there because of an economic system, that could be changed, or was it also that they were morally redeemable or irredeemable? I mean how were the two sides slotted together?*

Well my father was a Liberal, following in the footsteps of his distinguished brother JA who edited the *Westminster Gazette* and had Asquith's ear to talk into, and, he was very realistic about it, and I think in a sense rather despairing about it. I think he looked around him and thought, things in fact are so bad in areas like the East End and in the really distressed areas, that it's going to be extremely difficult to improve them, and it's very unlikely it would happen entirely during his lifetime.

*But were you supposed to be separated from them in terms of morality as well as the fun?*

Yes, well, whether my parents intended that or not, but certainly I grew up thinking of a totally separate world, people who didn't have enough to eat, people who really lived a physically very dirty, materially dirty and unkempt kind of life. And the word, the word 'slums' suggested images of throwing slops out of the window and that kind of thing, where there was bad sanitation and outside lavatories, and I think I was very aware of that, and in a way very aware of being privileged in the sense that it was quite obvious that our parents were rich enough to give us a very good life. Part of which I hated, I think we've maybe been into this, stop me if we had, because, the well brought up, rich life, which in fact was an illusion, because it was all supported by my grandfather who paid – my mother's father, who paid my father's overdraft, because he never made any money really, but his overdraft was always paid by my grandfather. I don't know whether he knew that. I've forgotten where, what I was going to say now.

*I think you were talking about a sort of life of privilege...*

Yes. I was aware of the life... Oh yes, it led to very unlikeable aspects of life, because we were put into quite ridiculous clothes, sort of Little Lord Fauntleroy and Kate Greenaway kind of clothes. My mother absolutely loved to see us dressed up in satin and

looking as pretty as she knew us to be, and I absolutely hated that. Because part of that dress thing was physically extremely painful and uncomfortable. For instance gaiters and things which were tied, britches which were tied under the knee, I'm sure probably gave me in the end the very bad varicose veins which I now have. And, I think back to the way... I look at my grandchildren now in their extremely comfortable and very attractive clothes, and think back to the way in which we were forced to dress and think, my goodness, how lucky they are. We were really very uncomfortable.

*When it became the Sixties and Seventies, did you have a very interesting wardrobe? I mean you were obviously interested in textiles and in pattern, and that was a great freeing of costume at that point.*

Mhm.

*Did you participate in that a lot?*

I don't quite follow your question. Did I myself change... I mean obviously by the, in the Sixties and Seventies I myself was sort of fifty, and, and obviously indulging in what is now called casual and enjoying being comfortable. Certainly the whole thing about exaggeratedly fancy-dressed kind of clothing for children stopped after going to school I suppose. My father did the most extraordinary thing. He insisted that every Sunday, because he appeared to be a very religious man, every Sunday he made us dress in Eton, what was called an Eton suit, and that consisted of a stiff collar and a ridiculous little double-breasted, I think a sort of double-breasted waistcoat. And, absolutely...well I felt so embarrassed to be wearing these, I absolutely hated it, and in fact, put around all kinds of policies, behaviour policies, which I hoped would annoy and irritate my father, as a kind of punishment to him for making us do this. I mean, the policies which I put around are a long story, which maybe take too much time to tell.

*I think that that might have been one of the things, you know there's a parallel recording about you, with you on your photography...*



Yes.

*...that is done at the Sound Archive, I think it's on that.*

Yes. Maybe.

*But, I mean in adult life, what had been your favourite clothes? Did you have clothes you were very attached to?*

Oh, yes, comfort has to be the main thing. Informality. I hate having to dress up, as I did recently to receive my doctorate in a dark suit, and a white bowtie, I absolutely hate all that. And in a way still, any aspect of being smart, somehow relates to being uncomfortable, because, the whole thing about starched collar really made it physically, almost impossible, distasteful, painful, for me to have to put on a stiff shirt. Thank goodness now all that has been relaxed, and you needn't, if you are asked to put on a black tie or something, you needn't wear a stiff shirt. But in the days when I had to go to respectable functions, I absolutely dreaded the moment when the starched thing made contact with my skin. And that's a feeling I still get.

*Mm.*

I don't know how psychological that is.

*But did you ever have any clothes that you absolutely loved?*

Yes. In the days when the male attire was sort of grey flannel bags, went through the stage of being Oxford bags which were sort of wide flappy things, I and my friends tried to avoid the normal kind of convention, and since we were privileged enough to travel more in Europe we would buy things which were not the standard grey flannel; we would buy trousers which were different colours, and, if fashion said, OK they've got to be

wide, then we had them wide and so on. But... And we would buy...whereas most of the students at the Architectural Association, most of the male students would wear very boring kind of respectable, neutral, mud-coloured shirts and things, possibly white or beige and cream and powdery blue and that kind of thing, we made a point of buying very colourful, sort of bright red shirts and that kind of thing, dark, dark shirts, possibly up to the stage of fascism, black shirts, but of course black shirts and brown shirts then carried a, a message of their own which we weren't prepared to accept, so that had to be got rid of.

*But did you go through a stage where you wore flowery shirts and flowery ties or Afghan coats, or whatever?*

Yes, but that came rather late. I would think that was probably when I was about, between sixty and seventy, yes. Gradually one realised that you weren't considered to be totally arty, and, and pansy was the word then, and you could wear colourful shirts, yes. I liked... And of course I liked wearing as few clothes as I possibly could. A lot of my young days were spent almost naked I suppose, because, I remember...maybe I've described this. I and about four fellow students from the architectural college bicycled from Bordeaux to Genoa along the then unspoilt south coast of France, and we were practically naked the whole, the whole way. Very unwisely, because we got burnt until we were almost coloured, and subsequently I've had very bad skin cancer, and I'm horrified nowadays to see that people... Because the situation is now even more dangerous, I'm horrified to see how people disregard all the warnings, and still rush madly at the first sight of the English summer, start lying around in the sun, which is going to give them skin cancer. I regret very much all the time...I now regret when I am short of time to work, very much all the time that I wasted doing that. In fact, looking back on it, I didn't really enjoy that lying around, turning round so that one's back and...it was a kind of, the back of your legs got browned and so on. I wish I hadn't wasted all that time.

*But presumably it was quite important at that time how you looked [inaudible].*

Very important, yes. Yes, nothing was more happy-making than to have someone, when you came back to England, someone has got to say, 'My goodness, you're brown, you're almost Negro.' And then of course what...how the hell did you show it? Because your whole body was like that. And I can remember having to go to a swimming bath in order to show people, this one-upness, that you were pretty black all over.

*Mentioning of swimming baths makes me think of Alan Hollingsworth or whatever he's called. I mean were swimming baths part of meeting people, and was there a sort of social side to the swimming bath, or was it literally just going in for a swim?*

Oh, no, the swimming bath was very much a sort of pick-up area, partly I suppose sexual and partly simply getting, talking to people. And, and very exhibitionist, yes. Not just the brown thing, but the whole kind of physical thing. I was...I was always a very physical person, I was very... I've just been reading Stephen Fry, *Moab...Washpot...* What is it called? *Moab's Washpot*[ph]. And his description of, of how he hated games at school, and I realise really that I was one of the people that he would have absolutely most been frightened of, and probably disliked, because I was very good at games at school, and subsequently always good at things like squash and tennis and swimming, and made a point of learning how to do proper stylish swimming, crawl, back crawl, and how to properly dive, and to keep your legs straight and all that kind of thing. I was, yes, very exhibitionist about that, and very conceited, intolerably conceited I think.

*And presumably also competitive.*

Competitive? Very, yes. It was very important to me to win. Needless to say I didn't often win. I think the whole thing... I think I've told you about Stephen being very bad at games, and that when I was playing those kind of childhood, rather elementary games like ping-pong, table-tennis and, what's the thing where you hit a feathered thing backwards and forwards?

*Badminton.*

Bad... Well, there's another one isn't there where you actually have to keep the, the thing up, not let it hit the ground, and there's no net. Yes it is a form of badminton. And I used to have to play this with Stephen, and I used to hate winning, and was so sorry for him that he always lost, and my father was always telling him that he was completely incompetent, and round-shouldered, and physically inept, that I used to intentionally lose. And I was very...I think that attitude lingered on, and I found later on that when I was playing squash, at which I was pretty good, I could get up...I could get a lead, but I could never finally win. And so I, I had to accept that fact, that I just wasn't going to win.

*And, going back to the swimming pool, since it's cropped up, I mean where was the swimming pool to go to, where was the in place?*

Well, you mean from...from young days up till, more or less the present day? We, when we, my father at a stage in the family history, after my mother died, my mother died when I was twelve, and my father took us all away from the prep school, which I think we've described, in Worthing, and had us back to support himself, whom he looked on as a frail, suffering man, needing the family support, and he sent us, Stephen and me, to a school in Hampstead called The Hall. And at that time there was a, a swimming pool in Swiss Cottage, I don't think it's there any longer, in Finchley Road, near Swiss Cottage, and we were taken there regularly, two, even three times a week, and I can remember very clearly what went on there. There was a boy called Fuente who must have been South American, Spanish, a Spaniard or something, who was an absolutely wonderful diver. I fell madly in love with him, from a distance, there was never any, any physical contact. But he was my hero. And because he dived so well, I determined that I also must eventually be able to dive well. And, I remember also that, the headmaster who perhaps I'd better not name took a particular... Oh, we were never...there was a group of about ten or a dozen of us went at a time, and we were never allowed to go into the cabins; we were always spread along a line of seats. The swimming pool had raked seats at each side, on a slope, and we were made to undress along a fairly high level on this

sloping platform. And the headmaster took a particular interest in the undressing and redressing process, for very obvious reasons. Eventually he...he invited Stephen to go to look at Humperdinck's opera *Hansel and Gretel*, where...I don't...one can only guess at his motivation, poor man. And he, he was a very nice man. And I used to at that time regret very much being short-sighted, because on the other, across the swimming bath there was a young man who was clearly some kind of deviant exhibitionist who used to display himself very clearly to us across the pool. And I was absolutely furious that I, that I was so short-sighted that I couldn't see what I would really like to have seen. (laughs) OK, that would be the first well-remembered swimming pool episode. And after that I used to go to public baths for the reasons I've already described to you, to show off how brown I was. Eventually I hit on the, the Highgate ponds, which were very interesting in all kinds of ways, and a very interesting swim, a naked area which was, I found very interesting. Also from exhibitionistic and voyeur point of view. That meant that...when we were abroad, we used to go... When I say 'we', who do I mean? Colleagues from the AA, that included my future first wife, we used to go to a place in the Austrian Tyrol near Innsbruck in the Stubaital, called Mieders, and although this was a very unsophisticated little village, it had first signs of tourist exploitation, it had a little swimming pool, and so we used to spend, oh, spend, I should say waste, an awful lot of time lying around and diving in that pool. We... Then there was another village called Telfers[ph], which I and friends, and one particular friend, Bill Edmostone[ph], used to go and stay at. And from Telfers[ph] we would go to Mieders and swim at Mieders. So that's a very, that was a very memorable pool, and I still have photographs of that. Then, wherever I went, I just had to swim. I really loved swimming. I remember a holiday with Stephen on Lake Garda at a place called Malcesine, where Stephen's friend, Tony Heinman[ph], was, my first wife before we married were, and, that holiday was very much based on swimming, and regrettably sunbathing too, and fishing, and walking and so on. And then, all over London there are swimming pools. I don't about now, I mean I don't do it now, because...

*There wasn't one place, I mean in the swimming pool party or whatever it's called, there's the sort of YMCA one where everybody goes as a pick-up place as well as swimming. I mean was there one that was the trendy place really?*

Well the same could apply to Highgate Ponds, I mean that was very much a pick-up place, I think Keith Vaughan went there a lot. And I must have been there at the same time as Keith Vaughan was, we didn't ever recognise each other, although subsequently I did get to know him. So I think... I didn't like, on the whole I didn't like indoor pools; the YMCA place, which I think I went to two or three times, was indoors, and that I didn't really go for.

*But was the atmosphere, if it was one of the pick-up pools, was it a fairly celebratory exuberant place, or would it have been rather furtive because of the illegality?*

Both. It was clearly a sort of exhibitionist area where people wanted to show off their bodies, and their skills at swimming. And they were always very noisy because swimming pools are very echoey, and people kind of shouting, shouting at each other and, and jumping in, and giving a kind of automatic yell as they hit the water. No, very noisy places. But there was a furtive area where the, undressing cabinets of course. Well, one doesn't need to go on, I mean the...you didn't want to be seen to be, two people going into a cabinet made for one, but it happened of course.

*But there wasn't the sense of anybody betraying anyone else, it was a sense of support?*

No, I don't think so. No, there was...no, on... No, there was very much a sense of sport, because, everyone was aware of the, the legal dangers, and everyone was aware of the fact that there might be spies, agents provocateurs around, which indeed there were, and so it was... It was almost made furtive by public opinion and legal policy, governmental, legal policy I suppose. Until the Wolfenden Report, I mean it was a very dangerous set-up.

[End of F8796 Side A]

[F8796 Side B]

*Were you part of any political pressure groups to do with trying to change the law, did you get involved at all?*

I wish I could say yes, quite positively. I don't think I actively... I mean, in ordinary social life, friendship and sort of ordinary intellectual type conversation, we were constantly harping on this, yes, and constantly wishing that the law... But I don't think I ever did as much about that as I did about what appeared to me in a way to be more important things, about disarmament and kind of, Left Book Club kind of attitude, of reading John Strachey and his book about the armaments industry. Where was I reading only two days ago...? Oh, John Sutherland's manuscript about my brother, how in a way ineffective the Left book Club eventually was. I wonder whether he's right about that, because in those days it seemed to me quite powerful, and we all bought, we all supported Victor Gollancz and the Left Book Club. And of course Victor Gollancz was very powerfully involved in the Mass Observation, in Tom Harrison and publication of the Mass Observation things.

*What was he like?*

Gollancz? I never had very much to do with Gollancz. I remember him as a bearded, black-haired, very obviously Jewish, powerful person, otherwise I...I mean that's my image of him, but I didn't really know him very much. You see as opposed to Stephen who had very active friendships and contacts with the Bloomsbury Group and publishers and T S Eliot and Auden and so on, I found really clever people daunting, and I could never...my lips became sealed, I just didn't dare talk. So on the whole I didn't really meet them.

*So if you were...*

Incidentally, as a parenthesis, maybe you.....



[break in recording]

*For somebody who might listen a long time hence, can you just say what the Left Book Club was?*

Well, it was like-minded people who were politically anti, strongly anti fascism. Its attitude towards communism was more complicated because of course, people like Stephen who wrote for the Left book Club and John Strachey who wrote for the Left Book Club were at certain stages of their life, belonged to the Communist Party. Eventually, I think it lasted long enough to be able to comment on the worst aspects of communism, but it was...it was...its aim, its objective was to show up the ills of world society, such as the armaments industry and profiteering, and it dealt with that kind of issue. And if it had existed after the nuclear bomb it would have been violently anti-nuclear, anti-nuclear everything, having seen... It was out to expose social dangers, I think that's, that covers it in general. The only books I can remember are, I think Stephen's book *Forward From Liberalism* was published by Gollancz, as part of the Left book Club publication, and John Strachey's very strong and statistically supported book about the armaments industry. Clearly it did no good, because the armaments industry still thrives on death really, that was the theme of the Strachey books, that the profits came from death.

*And how did the Left...*

And of course anti-fascism.

*How did the Left book Club promote itself, how would somebody have discovered that it existed?*

It did...it had a...it had a uniform, it had a standard bright orange cover with black type, I think I can probably show you an original Left Book Club thing, book, in the studio. It

was physically very recognisable, it was a standard size. And somehow Gollancz managed to get it a lot of publicity in the press. But I read yesterday that he published 40,000 copies of Stephen's *Forward From Liberalism*, which is a very large quantity, I mean, publishers now, I don't know enough about publishers, but I don't think they launch a book with a 40,000 edition, do they? I think it's more like 1,000. So it shows that it was...that he had...Gollancz had powerful expectations of people reading it, and I think it... Amongst people, amongst people like me, I mean, thinking back to the AA and the students there, most of the intelligent students would be reading Left Book Club books.

*And they presumably were not distributed in bookshops, it was by subscription?*

You're... Well, it was certainly by subscription, but I think equally they were put up in bookshops. But I think bookshops in those days didn't do what they do now, which was to put all the sort of best, books they hoped would be bestsellers on one stand, and publicise them in the window. You didn't get a whole bookshop window saying, 'Buy the latest Left Book Club thing'. I think not.

*And were there meetings, or any kind of social side to the Left book Club, or was it purely the books?*

Well, there may have been meetings of the authors; certainly I wasn't involved, no, I don't know about that. But I mean, on themes, of course from 1934-ish, 3-ish, even early, late Twenties, people were aware of the development of Germany's fascism, and anti-fascism was one of the main themes of the book club, of the Left Book Club.

*And did you later go on things like the Aldermaston marches?*

Yes, I did. And we did a lot of flag-waving. And, at this point you see you arrive at my involvement with this little magazine called *Left Review*, which Stephen had contact with also, and I covered the Jarrow hunger marchers for *Left Review*, unpaid for *Left Review*.

And I got into trouble because at the same time I was working for the *Daily Mirror*, and they wouldn't allow me to take free time. Whether their not allowing me was politically motivated, I don't know, but they said, you can't take...you can have only a limited time, let's say one day. So that I could...I joined the march about ten miles from London, somewhere like Rickmansworth or somewhere like that, and of course I was not at all popular with people who had actually marched from Jarrow. Here's...here's an upstart young man, obviously privileged person, joining us at the last stages and pretending that he's done the whole march, which I wasn't pretending at all, but that was their interpretation. So it was a tricky situation for me. But since then the hunger marcher photographs have become more and more historically interesting, and, let's hope they've been useful. And then the other thing, again I might have talked about this, was the, the Stepney set of photographs, was done with my father's altruism as a background, in order to prove the point that bad housing, slum housing was one of the sources of juvenile crime. And I was working at that time with this very liberal-minded magistrate called Clarke Hall, William Clarke Hall, who wanted photographs of bad housing, of slum life in Stepney, actually to produce in court, to prove the point, and therefore make the punishment for juvenile crime, which was nothing like it is today of course, make the punishment less severe.

*And what did you feel, going in and taking those photographs?*

I felt all the things one would predict. I felt, here I am, potentially exploiting poverty, and that's why I wasn't paid, because I didn't want to exploit poverty for my own profit. I mean the whole sort of profit thing was, profiteering was a very suspect word. So I didn't want to be paid for that. And I knew that these people were going to be...the Stepney family were going to be suspicious, and so I had the probation officer who knew them introduce me to them and tell them that I was OK. But it did take some time to convince them that I was to be trusted, and that I wasn't in fact exploiting them. And in the end they were very much on my side, and when it was explained what the motivation of the photography was, then they were very sympathetic. But I felt all those, those things, the speaking posh and obviously being by their, by comparison with their

standards, rich and privileged and public school and all that, that was inhibiting. And that...that reaction haunted my photography, photographic dealings with Mass Observation of course, added to the fact that the north country accent was completely incomprehensible to me. And my accent completely incomprehensible to them. So those kind of social differentiations and distinctions were very active, yes, and quite painful.

*Were the Stepney photographs effective, did it...?*

At the time they were...I think they were produced in court. Whether they helped Clarke Hall... He was very kind, I mean he, he thanked me a lot for them, and of course he said that they were going to be... I don't know that there was any proof.

*Did you know him at all well?*

I didn't know him well at all, no. I knew...the probation officer was a lady called Clamance Payne[ph], who in fact was the sister of the, Winifred Payne who was appointed by my grandmother to act as foster mother to us children, or, children is the wrong word, to us growing up family. Winifred Payne came onto the scene when I was about sixteen, and I was the youngest, so... But her sister got to know, her sister, Clamance[ph], who was a probation officer, got to know that I was professionally a good photographer, and so it was she who persuaded me to do this you see. And she was always very complimentary and very grateful to the help the photographs gave. And certainly since then, they have been historically very interesting, and they do sell well. I mean they're showing now in, this very moment they're showing in New York, and, I think people are very interested to, to have this moment of history illustrated in America.

*Do you think that they understand the context?*

Who, the Americans? No, I'm almost certain that they don't. I think they look at it very superficially. They look at it purely as a kind of, candid camera stuff. They inevitably

compare it to Cartier-Bresson and his... But I think we all had the same attitude, we all wanted to help in a way, and certainly with Mass Observation we were trying to help.

*And did you actually join CND?*

Yes. I think I do still subscribe to it, as far as I know. Certainly I get all the literature.

*What do you remember about the early days of that?*

I remember the, the gathering together before the march, and, and the march, as being very exhilarating, and a sense of, of being a movement which might be effective. I think it was exhilarating was the best word, yes.

*And, did you take part in the sit-in in Trafalgar Square?*

I don't think I did, no, I don't think I did. I get confused at that point, because there was a sit-in for the Jarrow marchers you see, and at that stage I was photographing the sit-in, and the sit-in made for some very powerful photographs.

*Mm.*

But I don't think I can claim to have been on that sit-in, no.

*And, what did you feel about people like Bertrand Russell, I mean he was very involved wasn't he?*

Those feelings are utterly entangled with hindsight, because, I'm sure at the time, in fact I think I'm fairly confident, at the time, Bertrand Russell was very much a sort of role model figure. He was a conscientious objector, which was a very brave thing to be; he was in support of, all the things that oneself was in support of, including a totally wrong and idealistic conception of communism, because, although I was never a member of the

party, I always thought of communism well applied and without the dictatorial element (which I didn't know about of course), as being the answer to the world. And so, Bertrand Russell was a hero. Now I of course read about Russell and two other people who went to Russia, I think it was someone, a very important member of the Labour Party wasn't it, who went with Russell, maybe, maybe Gollancz himself, thinking that communism was going to be, must be supported as the ideal solution to the world's problems, and actually hiding from themselves the unacceptable persecution and so on that they did in fact discover, but they wouldn't admit to having discovered. And so, gradually one begins to think of Bertrand Russell as having been a... Oh the Webbs, Beatrice and, Beatrice Webb and, what was the man's name?

*Sidney.*

Sidney Webb. And they all came back... Again curiously I was reading about this yesterday in John Sutherland's manuscript about my brother. And they all came back from Russia, hiding from themselves aspects of communism which they didn't want to make public. Eventually, I don't know, what happened, what...did Bernard Shaw ever retract, did he ever...?

*Shaw, or Russell?*

Well Shaw of course was involved too wasn't he. Did Russell and Shaw and the Webbs ever admit that they were wrong, and see the...?

*I'm not sure.*

And take against Stalin and his persecution? I wonder.

*I can't remember. Did you meet Russell?*

I think I probably was in the same room, but I never talked to him, no.

*And since he's cropped up, I mean did Bernard Shaw figure for you?*

I didn't get the question.

*Did Bernard Shaw matter to you, was he a figure?*

Yes. But for rather egotistical reasons, that I acted in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, a much cut version of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, at school, and I almost learnt by heart Dubedat's Creed, 'I believe in the power of design, Michelangelo...' 'I believe in Michelangelo and the power of design,' and I can't remember how it goes on. So that I was deeply affected by that play, and consequently and subsequently by other plays which I thought were, well I think they were marvellous, some of them. In modern terms they're long-winded aren't they, and flog, and flog intellectual theories perhaps too much for modern audiences, but they are wonderful plays. Only the other, only about four weeks ago, the BBC came up with a version of *The Doctor's Dilemma*, which I found very very interesting. He's a wonderful playwright, yes.

*When did you start going to plays as an adult? I mean you obviously got taken to pantomimes and things.*

We were taken as children, again a curiously topical subject at the moment, as children we were taken to *Where the Rainbow Ends*, and that was music by Roger Quilter, which I only discovered last, two nights ago, because Roger Quilter's godson, who is a neighbour of mine, came to supper and told me for the first time that he was Roger Quilter's godson. Roger Quilter also wrote a very important piece of music for us as children which was called *The Children's Overture*, and my eldest brother Michael was very musical and played piano and violin and organ a lot. And so, *The Children's Overture* became part of a cabaret. I forget, what was your question now? I've drifted.

*I was asking when you started to go to the theatre as an adult really, but...*

Well, well... *Where the Rainbow Ends*, we must have been to four or five times, because we always absolutely adored it. And then for some extraordinary reason, when I was asked what I would like for my birthday, this was an annual question, I would always choose the variety show at the London Coliseum. And I absolutely adored Maskelyne and Divant, the conjurers, the trapeze people. I was taken there by sort of pseudo nannies just to see I didn't get into trouble, but this became a regular birthday outing which I absolutely loved, and looked forward to. I hated what...the person I went with, who was one of...who was that curious, one of the curious, a composite character called Berth Ella[ph], whom I think we've talked about, who, in fact servants to my mother and father, but they became sort of intimate, much loved friends, and who absolutely doted on all of us. And Bertha, who always took me, hated what she called 'squawkers', and these were ladies who came onto the stage with the grand piano being wheeled on, and a pianist in a sort of, moiré or satin dress, who squawked. So I hated that. But that didn't take up very much of the time.

*What do you remember of the acts?*

I remember mainly the trapeze people, the trick cyclists, the conjuring, Maskelyne and Devant, the lady who gets sawn in half. Absolutely gasping with amazement at all this, and completely taken in by it of course. I absolutely loved it. And I loved the visual part of it, the sort of glitter, the, the sequins and the ladies who...who jumped around wearing minimal kind of pants and glitter, sort of sequins all over, leaping on trapezes.

Marvellous. I still would go to that. In fact it's funny that the London Coliseum exists as, more or less with the same interior décor, and whenever I go to ENO operas at the London Coliseum I can imagine myself back, these marvellous variety shows they were called. Well, then after that, we went to, under the influence of Winifred Payne, our foster mother, who was an intellectual lady, we went to the ballet, I remember Serge Lifar in Stravinsky's *Apollo Muzagetez*[ph] I think, we should say *Musagète* I think. We went to highbrow stuff. I remember going to as much Galsworthy as I could see. There must have been some put on. I think *Strife* was one of them. Rutland Boughton's



*Immortal Hour*, which was a sort of magic thing which we were... I remember Stephen wandering about, trying to sing, 'how beautiful they are, the lonely ones,' is it the lonely ones or the lovely ones? I can't remember. Rutland Boughton's music, which I think has died rather. We loved *The Immortal Hour*. We went to see Peggy Ashcroft doing *Saint Joan*. *Saint Joan*, yes, we went to a lot. Peggy Ashcroft's *Saint Joan* was a real high spot. Yes, we went to the theatre quite a lot.

*What do you remember about Peggy's performance?*

Oh, just being absolutely bowled over by... Partly because it was androgynous, wasn't it, and she appeared really looking like a handsome young man, and, well it's such a wonderful...it's such a wonderful truth, wonderful reality, wonderful...therefore, wonderful historical plot. Yes, absolutely gripping, loved it.

*Sybil Thorndike played Saint Joan as well, did you see her in it?*

And Sybil...oh, maybe I'm confusing Sybil Thorndike with Peggy Ashcroft. Certainly they both did it, didn't they? So I think both of them. Yes, Sybil Thorndike must have been before Peggy Ashcroft. So yes, we went to see Sybil Thorndike. And we went to see...she was one of the people we went to see as much as we could, and there was one occasion when one particular line in one particular play, which I can't remember, she is made to say, 'Take in both hands as much of good English earth as you can clutch.' God knows where that, which play that comes from, but we went around, Stephen and I went around saying that for months I think. Much to the annoyance of my father.

*And did your world overlap the Ashcroft, Thorndike world, did you know them at all?*

Yes. Peggy Ashcroft was a great friend of, of Stephen's, and she, she did the readings of poetry on the sort of memorial, service is the wrong word, memorial thing about my first wife, and she came and did it. So I knew her a bit. I was always rather alarmed of her,

because she was such a sort of, when I knew her she was such a sort of star, and stars always alarmed me.

*Did she behave like a star?*

No, not at all. Very modest. I remember, Peter Watson's...the ICA when it was originally in Dover Street, that was, must have been about 1940...48 I suppose, it was in Dover Street, and, there was a party there at which.....

[End of F8796 Side B]

[F8797 Side A]

There was a party there at which Stephen and Peggy Ashcroft were present together with, with people like Isaiah Berlin and a lot of distinguished people, and Stephen suddenly said, 'Humphrey, come and meet and dance with Peggy Ashcroft.' And after all, I was, 1948 we're talking about, I was thirty-eight, and, I almost collapsed with embarrassment, and the thought, what ever am I going to say to such a famous person? And I, I can remember sort of stumbling around the room. And eventually Stephen came up to me and said, 'You did realise that you were dancing with Peggy Ashcroft?' And I said, 'Indeed I did, and I was terrified.' He said, 'Well why were you terrified?' 'Oh, well, I can't go into that.' So, those are the, yes I suppose that's fairly...

*And did you know Jeremy Hutchison?*

No, not at all, no.

*And, you then became involved to a certain extent presumably with the Unity Theatre and the Group Theatre, did you?*

Well, only because, Robert Medley and Rupert Doone, whom we called Boopy-Doop, they were...and Stephen, and Christopher and Wystan, were involved in the Group Theatre rehearsals of the various plays they put on, in particular *The Trial of a Judge*. And in fact I have just been asked to support an Imperial War Museum exhibition of John Piper's work, and John Pipe did the set, and I've sent the photographs only two days ago to the Imperial War Museum, because they want to illustrate him as a war artist, but as a background to his ordinary work. And so... Again I've forgotten the thread.

*I was just asking about the Group Theatre and Unity.*

Yes. So I was involved as a professional photographer in photographing at dress rehearsals. So inevitably I got to know Boopy-Doop and Robert Medley, who turns out,

according to the Auden film, turns out to have been Auden's first lover. And, all the people who were involved in the Group Theatre. Yes...

*Can you remember anything about the rehearsals and the atmosphere?*

I can remember rather unkindly laughing at Boopy-Doop, because he was a very mannered and camp character, and made the kind of gestures which people who are caricaturing gays are inclined, and I mean he... Boopy-Doop must have provided those, that kind of actor and writer and person, material which was, they thought of as absolutely ideal, but in fact is totally wrong, portrayal of gay people. And he was like that. I mean whether he was doing it on purpose, there was an awful lot of sort of, 'my dear'-ing and that kind of thing. Rather like the famous Bunny Roger and Eddie Sackville-West and my friend Eddie Gaythorne Hardie, I mean they, they were almost intentionally caricaturing the [inaudible]. Damaging in fact, eventually rather damaging thing to do, because nobody knew whether it was real or, or an act.

*And was his acting equally stylised? I mean...*

He was a dancer, and I imagine not up to star standards. I mean I think he did, he was a member of a ballet group, I'm pretty sure, and I think probably reasonably successful. But then he had ideas about production, about stage production. And I think, I think Robert Medley and Christopher and Wystan respected him quite a lot, yes he must have been, he must have been good.

*So there was substance beneath the...?*

Oh yes, yes. I think, I and my friends who met him were rather unkind to him, I think he was... I mean we didn't mock him to his face, but we slightly mocked him in private.

*And did you think it was a balance of power between him and Robert, was one more dominant than the other?*

I think, inevitably I think it led to a quite strange relationship, yes. But again, I think I observed that but I don't have any evidence of it. It will all be written up I imagine one day.

*And what about Robert, did he become an important friend?*

Robert Medley? No, not at all, no. I met him from time to time and we...I liked his painting, and we discussed painting, and... No, he wasn't a friend at all, no.

*And have you got quite vivid memories of Stephen's plays?*

I have a vivid memory of *Trial of a Judge*, and I think I was immensely impressed. Again curious, coincidentally, because of John Sutherland's book, it appears that Wystan and Christopher were sent the text to read, and they wrote back to Stephen saying, 'This is the greatest event in English drama since Shakespeare.' Well... And that's a quote. Well now, whether they were...whether they really believed that or whether they were really rather unkindly pulling Stephen's leg, I don't know. You see it could be parallel to... The most awful thing happened to me on one occasion. I had an exhibition, probably my third or even fourth exhibition at the Redfern Gallery, and the day after the private view I walked in to find red tabs on every single picture. And I went into the office and said, 'My, that's absolutely marvellous.' And they looked at me and said, 'What's marvellous Humphrey?' And I said, 'It's a sell out.' And they said, 'What ever do you mean?' Somebody, some kind friend, had walked in and done this as a trick, just walked in with self-adhesive tabs and put them on every painting. And it's possible that Wystan and Christopher, who had a kind of...Christopher was quite a malicious person, and it might have been a leg-pull, but I don't know. I shall be asking John Sutherland whether he thinks, and Peter Parker who's writing Christopher's biography, about that.

*What do you remember of the production?*

I remember it as being very very moving. And, I mean it reflected our feelings about dictators and the gun and the, and the political murder, and the injustice, which was relevant in those times, which was going on all round us, and which people, in our opinion people were not taking nearly seriously enough. No, I think in a way it was rather a great play, and maybe it will come to be regarded, I mean maybe it will be put on again.

*Did you have any desire to go and design in the theatre, were you interested?*

Yes, at the end of kind of, other sequence of desires, John Grierson was the, was leading the Crown Film Unit, and he was working I knew with Wystan Auden on this sequence about the Post Office, and eventually about the GPO – well about the GPO, and what else? There was another Auden-Grierson film but I can't remember what it was. Auden wrote a brilliant, a kind of rhythmical text designed to go with the background music. And Grierson implied that he wanted a still photographer. Well I immediately went crazy thinking, my God! there's a chance here that I might become still photographer of the Crown Film Unit, which I saw was a very important thing. And in fact there was about two or three months when this was seriously considered. And Grierson was very keen that I should be. And Basil Wright was involved in it too. And, I got really worked up about this, until something happened in the Government support to the Crown Film Unit and Grierson wrote to me, or told, rang me up and told me, 'I'm afraid we can't have a still photographer at all,' apart from himself, Grierson himself carried a Leica around, and became the still photographer. That was my sort of parallel ambition, rather equivalent to being involved in the theatre. Yes, I, certainly I thought of stage setting, I would love to have been asked to do a stage setting.

*Were there designers whose work you particularly admired?*

Goncharova, who was designing for the ballet, in the style of this kind of Russian folk art, and really very colourful, wonderful costumes. Yes, and we were all aware of the involvement of major artists like Picasso and Derain for, for Diaghilev. Those would

have been my styles and my ambitions, it would have been very sort of avant-garde. And certainly we were mocking, me and my friends were mocking the, what would now be called the patio door, the door onto the balcony and the sun coming through, and the stage with the table and four chairs, and flocked wallpaper and...

*Do you remember seeing any of the ballets that Edward Burra designed?*

Loved his...yes, yes very much, yes, loved those, yes. Burra was one of my heroes, I think from fairly early days, yes. And that was partly due to the photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer, who was a great friend of mine, and she was commissioned to, when she had...she had started up being a professional photographer without adequate technical know-how, and a very good vision of photography, a very, liable to produce marvellous photographs, but technically liable to fail. I mean, the phrase, 'will it come out?' which doesn't exist any more, 'will it come out?' was an important thing to Barbara. But she was asked to photograph a ballet, the sets of which were designed by my friend John Banting. Have we discussed John Banting?

*No, we haven't got there yet. We're not being very chronological.*

Well, John Banting had designed rather marvellous sets, I've still got the photographs, and costumes, and Barbara said, 'Humphrey, please, take my camera and stand in for me because I'm sure to get it wrong.' So I did do that for her, and I became one of her best friends, and she to me. And... Again my drift has gone.

*We were talking really about Burra, but...*

And Burra, yes. She was a great friend of...John Banting was a great friend of Ed Burra, Barbara was a great friend of Ed Burra, and literally to the extent that she gave him physical space to work in, because there were occasions when he, he was very short of money and he had no space. And so he used to work in Barbara's flat, and in her studio sometimes, and so, I got to know his work, and really loved it, and realised that he was a

great...well, it would be conceited to say realise that he was going to become great, but just thought, this is one of the better artists around, yes.

*What was it that you liked about the work?*

Absolutely personal oddity. His vision couldn't have been anyone else's except his own. And it always made one feel rather, discredibly, oh goodness, I wish I had seen things in that light, but I didn't. And so he was an eye-opener, I mean he saw...he saw the low life of nightclubs, brothels, the sort of unspeakable oddity of professional prostitution and, mixed up with Spanish nightclubs and flamenco and... And I knew that he and Barbara used to go to Barcelona together, and stay up till three o'clock in the morning with Ed sitting in a café sort of bent double, drawing away like mad, and his drawings were always so personal and witty and caricatured. And then, he shifted that onto phenomena like, like Jumbo-sized lorries and things, and to a certain extent on landscape, he could inject into a perfectly ordinary, possibly even slightly boring landscape, he could inject some kind of magical quality, slightly sinister, magical quality. It just somehow absolutely appealed to me. I think probably influenced me very much. My colleague and lover and friend, Bill Edmostone[ph], took to the same style of drawing, quite independently, not having seen Ed Burra's drawings, and he drew a whole series, I've got, I've still got a set of them, which he, he made kind of reproducible by using architectural trace. There was a machine then which converted a drawing which was on architectural transparent paper, it was a kind of linen, and you could reproduce the drawings. It was the early method of photocopying. And Eddie used to do these drawings and then make an edition of about twenty-four or so of them. I still have one. Well they were very much like Ed Burra's, very laugh-making, and very observant and witty and, slightly like Osbert Lancaster.

*Did you and Eddie ever share work spaces, were you ever drawing in the same room?*

Well we shared a flat, yes, and, certainly, yes, we were working in the same room, yes.



*So do you think you influenced each other in that sense, in a fairly...because it was so close physically that you were so aware of the drawings developing, do you think it had that kind of communication in it?*

Our work never showed...his work never showed my influence, and I think my work never showed his. I didn't want to get into his territory, I wasn't into caricature. I was trying to do something which I thought was much more avant-garde, and, I think rather regrettably, because it was a slightly prissy kind of highbrow attitude which I rather regret.

*And, going back to Burra just briefly, did you actually meet him, did you...?*

Yes, I met him with Barbara, and was aware of a very dry humour, an uninterrupted flow of drawing, because he practically never looked up. I was also aware that he was a very sick man, which he always was. I was aware that he was a chain-smoker, literally lighting one from the other. I wasn't aware that he was thereby killing himself, because none of us were of course, we were all smoking away like mad. And I just thought, what a marvellous person. He had a brother Peter didn't he who wrote a book about Van Gogh which I, because I knew Ed I bought that book and was very impressed with that.

Whatever happened to Peter? I don't know.

*What did you smoke?*

What did Ed smoke?

*What did you smoke?*

Oh, I...I'm not quite sure how soon... Oh I, I started at a very early age, about, about eleven in fact, and it was a real sexual turn-on. In fact I...I started on, I think on something ghastly like brown paper which I started smoking in the loo. (laughs) And, I would be very interested to know whether other people found this, but it was a real sexual

turn-on, and that was possibly to do with the forbidden nature of it, just a mental connection. I then, skipping over a lot of illegal kind of childhood smoking, I started serious kind of grown-up smoking, buying Gold Flake and Three Castles, and the brand was important. And I remember one rather panic-making situation where I...I found one of the machines, slot machines where you put a shilling in, and pulled a sort of drawer out, and you got twenty Gold Flake for a shilling, and I always used to push the drawer in and then pull it out again in case it came out again with another packet. And I found a machine which went on and on just producing endless packets for one shilling you see. And I got to about the tenth packet, and I then thought, this is really quite frightening, I mean I...how do I hide all this? And so I stopped at about the tenth packet, and ran away. But that, that's just a coincidental story. Oh I was a dedicated smoker of, getting attached to the brands, of Three Castles, and it had to do with the design on the packet, and I liked the design of Three Castles and I liked the actual act of smoking. Eventually, I went through a stage of smoking a pipe, and eventually I went, got to the stage of economising, because the whole thing became very much, very quickly very expensive, and buying a cigarette rolling machine with Rizla paper, and at that stage I moved on to Phillips Virgin Gold I think it was, and became extremely skilful about rolling my own cigarettes, which must have annoyed, I think annoyed a lot of people very much. I think certainly it annoyed my wife, who was trying to get me to stop, realising perhaps, because her father was a surgeon, realising perhaps that it was a dangerous thing to do. And part of the act of rolling a cigarette was that one could save tobacco, and here my Jewish, my ninety-eight per cent Jewish background comes in, one could save tobacco by making a tip, which I made out of tearing little bits of newspaper off the edge of the *Guardian* or whatever it was that I took, and folding them very skilfully and rolling them up and shoving them into the, the mouth end of the cigarette. And so, I became extremely skilful at that, and smoked I suppose about twenty, thirty cigarettes a day. Well then my son was born, and Pauline was constantly asking me not to smoke where he was, because he didn't, he didn't like it and he used to say, 'Oh get away, stop it.' And eventually, when he was about seven, he started being sick in the car, and he told me that he, that it was because I smoked. And he was right I think. And that, because I loved him very much, and was acting in, towards his good health, I thought, this is serious, and I'm going to

stop. Well then I went through, oh, agonising ways of stopping, which I could go into if you wanted, but, I'll stop of you think that's enough about smoking.

*Tell me a bit.*

A bit? I managed to cut it out up to the level of telling myself the most extraordinary lies, and really believing the lies that I was telling myself, very strange situation. As far as the family was concerned, my son and Pauline, I had stopped smoking, but when I went as two-day-a-week tutor to the College, there was a cigarette machine about 200 yards from the flat which I had, we had in London, where I used to stay when I was doing my stint at the College, and I used, as I approached this machine, I used to feel in my pocket for the milled edge of a half crown piece, it was then a half crown for twenty instead of the original shilling, and I used to find this half crown, and looking the other way I used to feel for the slot and pull out a packet of cigarettes, which I think were Woodbines. I then went up to the flat and smoked the whole lot, about...I bought packets of ten. And when I got back next day, Pauline would say, 'You've been smoking, I can smell it in your clothes.' And I said, 'Well, I wasn't smoking, I got into a...I had to get into a smoking carriage,' which was allowed in those days, 'because the rest of the train was so crowded.' And I, I really believed this you see. At the back of my mind I knew this was the most extraordinary self-deception. Well eventually, going through lots of torment, I did... I took a bet with one of the staff at College that we would each of us, who was a heavy smoker, wanting to stop...

*Who was this?*

John Drummond, who was a lovely man. The handsomest man in the world. And we, we knew that we were killing ourselves. In fact my chest was beginning to be quite painful. And we would pay each other £10 whoever first started smoking. And we kept to this, and we passed a few £10 notes between us, until eventually we thought, this is ridiculous, we really must stop. And I did manage to stop, up to the point where, during the war I was attached to the American Army, and there was a free cigarette issue. My

ninety-eight per cent Jewish background came into operation again, and I thought, well I simply can't refuse these free cigarettes, which were a lovely cigarette called Camel. So I accepted, I got these free cigarettes, masses of them, I mean it was a very generous allowance. And started smoking again. So I went through the same battle with the same, lying and self-deception, and eventually managed to ditch that. Short-cutting a lot, I was then... I've got the thing the wrong way round. The first thing that happened before the American Army thing was that *Picture Post* sent me on to a destroyer, this was after the war, this was a dangerous thing, and we were hunting submarines in the Irish Sea; I was frightened, and seasick, and, there was a free issue of cigarettes, Navy, naval, and I couldn't resist that. So I started smoking again. Well then, I managed to ditch that, and then I came up onto the American episode, which I've talked about, American free stuff, and I managed to eventually ditch that. And then there was...there was one more which I can't quite remember the details, where free, where there was free issue of cigarettes, and I couldn't resist it. But eventually I did give it up, and haven't looked back. I gave it up I suppose when I was about forty-five perhaps. No, much later than that, must have been about fifty. And I would be dead now without doubt.

[End of F8797 Side A]

[F8797 Side B]

*.....College itself, could you smoke in the College?*

Yes. We could smoke really in... I mean there were certain places like the photographic darkroom where the technicians would, themselves longing to, for their break, in which they could smoke, but they, quite rightly they objected to smoking in the darkroom, because there was inadequate ventilation and they started coughing and sneezing and so on. But yes, alarmingly and dangerously, we were liable to walk around smoking, walking through masses of paper and, really quite dangerous.

*And there was no problem about smoking with the students when you were teaching them?*

They were all themselves smoking. No there was no problem, no. They would have regarded it as rather prissy not to smoke, I suppose.

*And what was the pipe episode, was that imitating somebody? Why did you suddenly smoke a pipe?*

I think I... Mm. I loved the feel of pipes, I loved the design of pipes, I loved the wood. And I think possibly, yes, there was some kind of... It was partly to do with skiing, yes, people who skied. I'm talking with a background of a photograph of myself in a rather fetching skiing outfit, and with a pipe, and I think I must have thought it looked rather good, yes, and got myself the right kind of skier's pipe.

*And this rather wonderful story about the self-deception, about being on the smoking carriage and everything, do you think that's been a part of you a lot of life, are there are other examples of that, is it something you associate with yourself?*

Yes, I think...I think during my life, and maybe during a lot of people's lives, there was much more self-deception than one realises. I mean certainly Pauline was a victim of quite amazing self-deception. I realised, and maybe it helped me to realising my own self-deception, that I realised the extent of Pauline's self-deception when our son used to say something like, 'Have you read a...' Sartre or something like that? And Pauline would say, always say, 'Yes, but, a very long time ago.' And I realised that she was lying. So I was very careful to avoid that particular trap. But I've no doubt that I...I have no doubt that I did deceive myself. Yes, I can remember. In telling...I mean how...how self-deceptive is it, to tell a story which does not disclose some feature of yourself which you are very ashamed of? I think that is self-deception. Yes, for instance, in telling the story of the commando raid which eventually the War Office sent me on, where I was absolutely scared to such an extent, frightened to such an extent that I ran a high temperature, in the end it was my choice, because my commanding officer offered me an absolutely impossible position on that raid, he told me that, because I, us lot, photographers, and there was another army film unit there, he said, 'You're...you lot are just a bloody nuisance. Where you can go, Lieutenant Spender, is sitting on the bow of the command craft.' Well clearly that was absolutely impossible, I mean, the command craft was armour-plated, and everybody was in it in order to resist, to avoid being shot at, so what he was saying was, 'You can be the first to be killed.' And I, I just thought, well he can't be serious, and repeated the question, said, 'You're not serious,' and he said, 'Yes I am. You are not coming in any assault craft where you might interfere with the operation itself.' Now, I therefore said, 'OK, well I'm not coming in that case.' Well now, in telling that story to other people, and I'm asked about it several times, I have always said, I have always evaded saying, whether or not I was on the assault craft, and I have implied that I was on the assault craft. It makes no difference, but I've always concealed the fact that I was absolutely terrified, and did not go on the final launch of the assault craft and entered Bayonne Harbour. When in fact the whole thing was abortive, because the assault craft couldn't get across the sand bar in front of Bayonne. But yes, that's a good example of how one can conceal a very important aspect of one's own nature of which one is ashamed, and in a sense concealment is, is a lie.

*It's quite interesting, I mean you've used the word 'shame' and 'ashamed' in a way that, I would think somebody young today almost doesn't think about those things; it's a big change isn't it?*

Do you imply that somebody today would have no hesitation in admitting...who would have no hesitation in going on the assault craft when they needn't?

*No, I'm not implying that. What I'm thinking about is the way society has changed, and on some levels is as prejudiced as it ever was, and as harsh; and on other levels there's been a certain loosening up. That the whole idea of shame, social shame, is one we don't hear about very much.*

Well maybe you're right, yes. I mean if... Can one apply that to sort of concrete example? I occasionally ask young people who are groaning and saying they're unfairly treated, and I occasionally get fed up with this, because, after all they haven't been called up, and they haven't been through a war, and they haven't been bombed and they haven't been shot at, and, I say, 'Well what would you do if tomorrow morning a buff envelope drops through your post-box, and it tells you to report at 0800 hours, at such-and-such a station, railway station, and you know that you are being pushed into the Army, what would you do?' And they say something like, 'Well it's not going to happen, is it?' And I say, 'Well why not? I mean the world is full of... I mean it does, it just does happen.' And I then...the conversation comes to a sort of dead end, because they haven't in fact given up an answer, given an answer. They sometimes say, 'Well I should be a conscientious objector,' to which one says, 'Well you do realise that, in the first place that's a very brave thing to do, because you are going to be very badly treated, and you might be imprisoned.' And they then say, 'Oh I hadn't thought about that. Oh.' 'Would you go to prison?' And, this interrogation very seldom ends up with satisfactory answers at all. So I just don't know whether they are ashamed, ultimately are they ashamed of having been groaning about something very minor in comparison with what happened to me and my friends? I mean we were... At that point, I knew my wife was dying; I knew I was pushed into some ridiculous training unit on Salisbury Plain. By sheer luck I had

the most wond...have we been into this? I had the most marvellous commanding officer, who was totally sympathetic, and knew the whole background. And I was very lucky in that sense, but nevertheless the thing happened. And we had what most sort of young groaners today would regard as an extremely tough time. I mean we had bloody awful food, we had absolutely monstrous regimental sergeant-majors, we were pushed into activities which we thought were immoral, unspeakable connection with death and guns and so on. How would they react? They don't realise this. And then the other thing is, one can say to people, 'You're really very lucky, I mean if you think you...you have two arms and two legs, and you can breathe without collapsing; you aren't lying in a pool of blood, you haven't had your wife and your brothers and father killed in front of you. And, doesn't that make your lot better? The whole thing is, unanswerable really. I mean, are they ashamed at that? I don't know.

*Mm. But the idea of shame sort of came in to childhood. I mean the other side of shame is duty presumably.*

Is duty? We were, as children we were made to, yes, my father was... The phrase, 'you ought to be ashamed of yourself', yes, very frequent, yes, we...we were given enormous quantities, we were made to feel enormously guilty, both from a sort of sexual point of view, the sort of ultimate sin was masturbation, and, all those sort of, terrible sort of guilt-making things. They can't have had any idea what they were doing. And of course, however much...the whole sort of nanny situation, the nanny attitude was very much to do with dirty thoughts and things. I remember once my father said to one of these domestic characters, Michael, that's my oldest brother, 'Michael's neck is very dirty,' and she said, 'Better to have a dirty neck than a dirty mind.' Well, that attitude was entirely, the whole of our background was, dirty mind, yes, we know, we know that potentially you've got a dirty mind; you ought to be ashamed of yourself. It's interesting to know what that is based on, whether it's based on the suppression of their own dirty minds, is interesting. There's a good play to be written about it.



*But having that kind of value drummed into you, and guilt, it's very hard to shake those things off isn't it.*

Very hard.

*I mean is there still the residue?*

Yes, very hard, I mean it's a thing that my life is very much affected by, by guilt, by guilt at not doing things one ought to be doing. In fact that's part of the church service isn't it, how does it go? Doing things which you ought not and not doing things which you ought. I mean, I'm sure that's a religious, I'm sure...

*Actually we got into all this through talking about Edward Burra smoking.*

Yes.

*Did you know Billy Chappell and Frederick Ashton and people like that?*

Only because Barbara Ker-Seymer knew Billy Chappell. I knew Frederick Ashton because, in fact he picked me up at one of Barbara's parties, made me, or maybe it was Barbara who then made me extremely drunk on, having laced the drinks with absinthe, I got on to... I started to hear a very fortissimo brass band in my ears, decided that it was time I should leave the party before I literally fell over. Went out, got on top of an open-top bus, and found, I didn't know who he was, but found Freddie Ashton sitting next to me, who said, 'You're coming to bed with me.' And I said, 'Ah, I'm not.' And, but eventually he had his way. It's actually written up in one of his, in a biography of Frederick Ashton. And I think the brass bands then became so loud that I actually fell out of bed. And I think, I think Freddie Ashton was fairly sloshed himself. And, that episode continued in a mild kind of way, not for very long. But that was my knowledge of Freddie Ashton. I've always been very aware of hair, largely because at a very early age I started to lose my own, and I've always been absolutely obsessed by hair, and he had

the most marvellous hair. As did in fact Bunny Roger, the other famous homosexual of his time.

*What was Ashton actually like as a person?*

He was a lovely man. He was a very good actor, he, socially he survived a lot on doing acts, on, talking in different kinds of accents, this is how I remember him. And, I mean he...he wasn't physically attractive to me at all; I was flattered by his attraction to me, because he, by him finding me attractive. And... It went along on that kind of basis. If he, if he rang me up and said, 'Come and have a meal,' I was delighted, and I liked his company and I liked him finding me attractive, I think it's...it's that. And the same thing happened, the same kind of relationship happened with John Banting, who was said to have been love with me; that I enjoyed, I enjoyed somebody, people being in love with me. And, who was the other one you mentioned? Chappell I didn't know, didn't meet very well.

*What was Freddie Ashton's home like?*

Oh, goodness. You mean his family home?

*No, his own flat.*

It was elegant. I remember it as elegant. As stagey, yes, elegant. Photographs...lots of photographs around, photographs of actors and people. I wonder, now I'm talking I wonder how, how well known... When did he start to become really famous? We're talking about 1938-ish. He would have been famous by then, wouldn't he? Yes.

*I think so, yes.*

Mm. And I...yes, I liked, I... I enjoyed the element of flattery and so on, yes.

*And did you go to Bunny Roger's parties that were so famous?*

Yes, I went to... Bunny Roger... My friend Bill Edmostone[ph] fell very much for Bunny Roger, and incidentally yesterday I discovered a photograph of him which I could show you if you're interested. Who also had the most marvellous hair, and absolutely marvellous physique, I mean the kind of ballet dancer's physique. And he used to spend the whole year making his outfit for the next year's Chelsea Arts Ball you see. Well he invited me to his box, he always hired a box with all his friends, most of whose names I didn't know, I mean they were a lot of various kind of, what were then called queens, is the word 'queen' still used? Very camp people. And it was, it was a great compliment to be invited to Bunny's box. And the Chelsea Arts Ball was of course a great occasion, and he always looked absolutely marvellous, because after all, his costume had taken a whole year to make. (laughs)

*Can you remember any of them?*

Yes, they were always extremely feminine, and covered with diamante and sequins, and pearls. People, I mean part of his...the work he was doing was to be stitching on trails of pearls and sequins, so that this was the most magnificent dress, with huge kind of flouncy skirts, and huge great sort of shoulders. And he looked absolutely wonderful. He would wear a... It was a real...it was a real drag act he was doing.

*What would you wear?*

Oh I, I rather timidly compromised and looked into one of my books about Dürer and found a fetching, a very fetching kind of Dürer type costume, which did have a skirt I have to admit, but apparently was a great success, and I enjoyed being a great success in Bunny's box, yes. Part of my exhibitionist life was certainly the Chelsea Arts Ball. And Eddie always looked absolutely marvellous, because, he, he became a kind of clown, and made himself look really, not attractive but utterly kind of ridiculous with false noses and things. And he was a brilliant actor, I mean, had he lived, had he not been shot down by

those bloody Germans, he would have been a star, I'm absolutely certain he would have been a star. He was a wonderful voice, and he was a marvellous actor. I did a lot of acting with him. I was always his stooge, and he was a kind of comic. And we took part in a lot of the pantomimes which were run by the Architectural Association. I rather fancied myself as an actor until somebody told me that, 'You are quite the worst actor I've ever met,' and suddenly realised that I wasn't very good.

*Was Anthony and Oliver Cox part of all that?*

Hippisley-Cox, Anthony Hippisley-Cox[ph]?

*Oh right.*

Is that the one you mean?

*No it wasn't, but he's cropped up in other places.*

Yes.

*How did you know him?*

Well only peripherally, because he was... What was he interested in? He was...he was interested in architecture wasn't he. Oh no, he... Oh gosh, I'd have to think a lot about Anthony. He was quite an important part of our friends, yes. Can't remember quite why.

*Well maybe we'll pick up on him again later.*

Yes.

*He had some performing cats, didn't he?*

That's right. Circus. Yes, I met him... You've hit on a clue. When I was, started up the photographic studio in the Strand, Barbara used to, Barbara Ker-Seymer used to pass on things that she didn't feel she'd succeed at, and there came a request from *Harper's Bazaar* to photograph the Bertram Mills circus, and Barbara passed it on to me. And I duly did it for *Harper's*, quite a good set of photographs. And I met while I was doing it, I became...I found myself wanting to know much more about circuses. And, I took a lot of photographs of, not just the acts but the way they lived in their caravans, and how they treated their horses and things outside. And the actual structure, the big top and how they put the big top up. And I found myself wanting to know more about it and so I got to know Anthony Hipsley-Cox[ph], who was an expert on circus. In fact I think he wrote, eventually he wrote a book about it. Yes, that's the connection.

*And had you gone to the circus as a child?*

Yes, we'd...it was one of those things, rather like the variety show at the Coliseum, we absolutely loved going to circuses, yes, we did.

*And where would you go, what...?*

The travelling, travelling circuses which came round to places like Sheringham where we were, I can remember going to. These must have been very sort of minor circuses. But I, but I always absolutely loved trapeze artists. I just...it just was unimaginable ability to be able to leap through the air, and aim at a bar and catch it, and one's heart stopped, and, what happens if they miss? It was absolute magic to that. That and the...there was a sort of physical thing about it, they were always so wonderfully...physically they were always such wonderful shapes and wonderful human beings, I think that affected it a lot.

*And what else do you remember about Hipsley-Cox[ph]?*

Nothing very much.

*What was he like as a person?*

I can't say I remember him at all, no. Why do you ask?

*Well.....*

[End of F8797 Side B]

[F8798 Side A]

*Just looking at some photographs, and one of them has reminded you of a story.*

My first wife's brother was a very hearty rowing blue, member of Oxford University's 'hearties'. In fact one of a team who broke up my brother Stephen's rooms. And he was very predictable, his attitudes were very predictable, very anti homosexual, very conventional, stiff upper lip, proper behaviour at all times. He invited myself and his sister to Henley to see the rowing activities there, and there was a race which was called the Ladies' Plate, and he looked at his programme and he said, 'Oh I see the Ladies' Plate is coming up, I must...we must see that, I've got a friend rowing in it.' And I said, 'Oh do the ladies row well?' And he gave me a withering look, because obviously there weren't any ladies rowing; the Ladies' Plate was just a name of a normal male competition. And I noticed that he made himself physically very distant from me from then on, and walked ten paces ahead, and wouldn't allow me to catch up with him, because he thought, what an utter idiot I was, not to know about the Ladies' Plate. Well then, suddenly, someone came up to me and said, to me, and said, 'May I congratulate you sir?' and I said, 'Of course you can, but what ever for?' And he said, 'Am I not justified in thinking that you are the German sculling champion?' And I said, 'Oh, maybe I look rather like him, but I'm not.' And my brother-in-law, future brother-in-law heard this, and obviously thought to himself, well, if I'm going to be seen walking around with a look-alike to the German sculling champion, that's one up to me. And so he came up to me and said, 'Yes, well I'll show you around a bit.' And we walked together.  
(laughs)

*Why did that photograph remind you?*

Oh, that was the, the photograph which was taken at the time, and on one copy, I'm not sure whether it's on that copy, I inscribed it to my future wife, his sister, 'With much love from the German sculling champion.' I'm not sure whether it's written on that photograph.

[break in recording]

*Doing this interview on a day when, I don't know if you've heard but it's been announced that Anthony Powell has died, the novelist.*

Mm., yes.

*And, given that his books had characters based partly on people like Constant Lambert, I wondered whether his circle was one that overlapped with yours at all.*

No. I was listening to all the radio treatment of that, of his death, and realised not only had I never really read any of his books, but I, apart from hearing about people like Evelyn Waugh, who were either bitter enemies or friends of Stephen's, I think Waugh was quite an enemy of Stephen's, I don't know very much about that circle. Except that I, at one stage I had a lot to do with the Gaythorne Hardie family; I was a great friend of Eddie Gaythorne Hardie who was a kind of rather disgraceful queer as he was then called, gay, branch of the family, as opposed to Bob Gaythorne Hardie who has very much to do with Aldeburgh now and the whole Snape outfit. And I think, Eddie Gaythorne Hardie, I think, since he was a great friend of Eddie Sackville-West, at that point we begin to overlap the Anthony Powell lot I think. But certainly I was never involved with them apart from cruising around with Eddie Gaythorne Hardie at one stage; we went to Antwerp together I think and we...I used to meet him a lot in the Café Royal, where, he was also a great friend of John Banting who was a great friend of mine, and there was a sculptor... There was quite a group, Brian Howard, Stephen Tomlin, Eddie Gaythorne Hardie, John Banting, myself, used to meet very frequently at the Café Royal.

*And what was Eddie like?*



He was a, oh, a sort of outrageous person in his use of, of camp language, constantly saying, 'my dear, my dear.' Lovely person in a way. Alcoholic. Rather idle. Refined taste, very keen on good wine and good food. What I can hear my father calling a, him a ne'er-do-well, who would never do a proper day's work in his life, that kind of attitude, and he was rather like that. He had a job with a publisher, he's quite a well-known publisher whose name I forget, and I think was constantly being absent from work and letting him down and that kind of thing. He was a hedonist, he just wanted to enjoy himself. Very keen on sex, and boys. Disgraceful, nice man.

[break in recording]

*You just, when I had the tape recorder off, said you thought he featured in Iris Murdoch, and I...*

Well he's the kind of person that Iris Murdoch would describe, and he's also... I haven't read Anthony Powell, but from what I gather this morning in the talking about him, he is a kind of Anthony Powell character, rather degenerate character, yes.

*Mm. Is Iris Murdoch someone you read?*

Someone...?

*You read.*

I have, very much so, yes. Particularly the, *The Black Prince*, which deals with something that has occurred fairly frequently in my life, that's to say the love of me as the aged character, for someone very much younger than myself. And *The Black Prince* deals very fascinatingly with old man-young girl kind of situation. And yes, I've read...read... I don't...haven't always found her very easy to read, partly because her plots are so complicated. And I've given you a piece of paper in which an Irish Murdochian episode in my own life is fairly fully described.

*Which is to do with the house.*

Which is to do with Stephen and I buying The Great House in Lavenham, which had previously been the property of two identical gay twins. The rest is written up, if you like I can read it to you, or I can...

*I'd quite like to take that away and talk about it next time.*

You take it away. Yes.

*Because some of it we've covered, and some of it we haven't, so...*

Yes.

*And again, since we last met, somebody else who's died is Elizabeth Collins, widow of Cecil Collins.*

Yes.

*They were part of your life, weren't they?*

No. Oh Cecil, Cecil Collins was. Not Elizabeth. And in fact I have a Cecil Collins picture on the shelf there, which, his version of that is very strange and mysterious, because it had to do with my brother Stephen, and when I bought the painting I didn't know anything about Cecil Collins, and I certainly didn't know that Stephen was the figure in the picture. And Cecil subsequently was fascinated by the idea that this had happened, there was some mysterious spiritual communication going on between myself and him, simply to bring this about you see. So, I have this rather odd, odd relationship with Cecil Collins.

*Can you describe the painting, for people who can't see it?*

The painting is of a character sitting at a round table. Behind him is a once complete brick wall, but which has partially collapsed and left a gap in the wall. There's a tree on the spectator side of the wall, and a field beyond the wall. Well now, it happened that when my first wife, Lolly, was very ill I had to take her out of London, away from the Blitz, London was being bombed, and this wasn't very good for her morale and for her health. And so, her sister found us a cottage in a little village called Sutton Veny near Warminster, and the cottage had been at one point occupied by Sir William Nicholson, the father of Ben Nicholson.

*We talked about that aspect of it.*

Yes. And this little cottage had precisely as its garden setting, precisely what was in the Collins picture, namely a brick wall with a gap in it, a tree, and a little round table. So part of the reason why I bought the picture was that it was so like the garden in Sutton Veny; I hadn't any idea that the character in Cecil Collins's mind, the character sitting at the table, was in fact Stephen Spender, and the picture I think is called, I think he's called it *The Secret* or, maybe even *The Poet*. It's written on the back.

*Where did you find the picture, where did you see it?*

The picture was at the Leicester Galleries branch which was then near St James's Square, and in fact it had been damaged by one of the air raids. And I happened to make just a chance visit. Cecil Collins was not known at all at the time, and I just fell in love with the picture. I mean people of that bend in their minds where coincidence is very important, or, or the word for mutual conversation, what is that? When you're not together. Your minds speak to each other from a distance. What is the word? It's a very ordinary word.

*I know what you mean anyway.*

People who believe in these rather freaky spiritual things do find this story absolutely fascinating, and treat it as an example of...again I'm trying to think of the word. Two minds come into contact without the physical presence. That kind of communication.

*Mm. And, what is it particularly about the painting that you like?*

Ah. There's a kind of mystery in the painting. There's also a lot of texture, and my own painting I'm constantly trying to...I'm showing a constant fascination with texture. That I immediately liked. There may have been some mysterious power pushing me into liking it, I mean who knows? I'm not normally inclined to believe such things.

*And how did you discover it was Stephen and how did it come to be Stephen?*

I discovered it because I, after I'd bought it, and literally a long time after I'd bought it, I met Cecil Collins, I think with Mary Fedden, and I said to him, 'Oh I've got one of your paintings,' and he was the kind of person who immediately perked up and said, 'Oh, tell me, which painting?' So I described it to him. And he said, 'My goodness, this is the most peculiar thing. Mary, just listen to this. This is the most peculiar thing I've heard. Humphrey's bought a painting of his brother without him knowing that it was his brother,' and so on. And that's how... He then proceeded to tell me the whole, his version of why he painted it. And it was part of...he...by then he had known Stephen, he knew Stephen before he had met me, and he somehow made Stephen into one of his sort of mythological characters.

*And did Stephen know it was him?*

No. No he didn't.

*And did you go on knowing Cecil? I mean what sort of person was he?*

Stephen...Stephen was quite a mocker, always seeing the sort of funny side of people.

*Cecil, or Stephen?*

Stephen, was quite a mocker, and always saw the funny side. And indeed Cecil was a very odd character who was permanently, must have permanently felt icy cold, because, he...one couldn't...one never saw him really without a heavy overcoat and a hat, and even on a hot summer day he was clearly not, not hot at all. He needed to wear an overcoat. So Stephen rather stressed that funny side of him. But he was, Stephen was a great admirer of his art, and in fact was one of the first buyers of Cecil Collins, and I think since Stephen was a great picture collector, I think Cecil Collins benefited very much from that, and got a kind of confidence. Cecil then went off onto a stream of, of rather esoteric subject matter. He took up the whole subject of the fool, the fool which he investigated, he researched into historically, the fool in Shakespeare's plays, the fool in courts, royal courts, in past, in mediaeval history; the function of the fool. And he started a whole series of paintings in which the fool features. There's a little drawing my Cecil Collins there. And that intrigued a lot of quite important collectors, like Kenneth Clark I think, and gradually his reputation as a painter built up. I mean he had a very very recognisable...nobody else could ever have painted a Cecil Collins, other than Cecil Collins; just as nobody else could ever have painted a Stanley Spencer, other than Stanley Spencer. He had this absolutely recognisable handwriting, which is a valuable commercial asset.

*How do you come to have the drawing?*

Oh, that I acquired...now, goodness, I think Stephen gave it to me.

*And at the time you bought the painting, were you buying quite a lot of paintings?*

No, no, I...I was not a picture collector. I had by then bought a painting, always on impulse and without knowing much about the artist, I had bought a painting by John

Minton, and I had bought a painting by Robert Colquhoun, of Colquhoun and MacBryde set-up. And...and also by John Craxton. Yes, I suppose you could say I did, I probably bought more paintings than a normal person bought, but I was always hard put... You see, probably that painting cost me £10; £10 in 1943 represents really about £200 I suppose now. And so I was hard put to find the money to buy things like that.

*And, if we just now go back to some of the things we were talking about last time. We talked about what your mural in the Shell building was made from, but we didn't really talk about what the image was.*

The Shell House downstream[??] restaurant mural, was a curious process, then undeveloped really, the beginnings of an important process, in which marks on a special kind of paper which wasn't, which in fact wasn't paper at all, but was made of a certain kind of plastic called melamine, looked like paper, was rather more brittle, and which could be painted on, with certain special kinds of paint. This was put, laid over a coating of resin which was on hardboard. And then, on top of the art work which was the melamine paper, another coat of transparent resin in solid form was placed, and heat and pressure were applied. The thing united, all three surfaces united into a kind of bonded sandwich, and became a solid board, with the design seen through the top transparent resin layer.

*But what was your design?*

My design was a whole...was based on the fact that the restaurant was very long, and clearly from...at any given point, the tables in the restaurant were rather...the furthest table from it were rather, was rather close to the mural, so I realised that at no point would you – at least this was my theory – that at no point while you were in the restaurant, using it as a restaurant, would you be able to see the whole mural. It was impossible to get away. It was something like fifty feet long, maybe even more, I can't remember. So I realised that, it had to be a series of panels which split up into individually perceived units, and to that purpose I shifted, I repeated a vanishing

perspective, seen through a kind of trellis, but for the reasons that I've described. So that wherever you were sitting, you got a kind of focal point on the nearest panel.

*But is it landscape?*

It's natural. It's...it's organic, it's veg...it's flower and vegetable form, yes. I don't think there's any people in it, which is a thing that people are constantly partly complaining about. I'm always being told that as opposed to my photography which is entirely to do with people, there are never people in my paintings, and that's rather true. It's decorative. The worst criticism, the most unkind criticism of it has been that it's purely decorative. Why should that be a criticism? I don't know. And people can damn a painting by saying it's decorative, but for a mural painting I would have thought there is a need to be decorative. I think it's...it tended to be judged as a whole continuous thing, when it shouldn't have been judged as that, because of what I've...because of the limitations, viewpoint, which I've described. People who saw illustrations of it in, let's say the architectural press, criticised it on the level of its repeating itself along its whole length.

*Was it natural vegetation that you had actually seen, or was it imagined?*

I think I...I'm always drawing, and have always been drawing, not as much as I wish I did, I could. And I was always drawing flowers, and it was to do with flowers and leaves and...

*Flowers from life?*

Flowers from life, yes. And maybe from books, I mean I...I have no hesitation in, in copying, not exactly copying but taking a lead from other people's work, from earlier work and so on.

*And, is it sort of formalised or very naturalistic?*

No, it's formalised, and... Again, it has a lot to do with texture. I remember enjoying the use of this paper, particular melamine paper, because it did produce rather interesting textural effects according to how you applied the colouring, and I've always been accused of being a very tricky technician, so that techniques, so that new techniques of this kind always fascinate me very much, and I, I do exploit the technique very much.

*And what sort of colour range is in it?*

There were limitations, technologically there were limitations, because, you were supplied with the colour that could be absorbed by this paper, so, I can remember I think complaining that there were not any very fully saturated, by which I mean bright, colours. There was nothing like that red and the purple that we see in front of us. And I was inclined to, knowing that eventually bright colours fade, or any colours fade, I was inclined to want to start with very bright colours. So I think that was a complaint. But you were supplied with an adequate range of colours, and I simply used what was given.

*And could you have done anything, or was there a brief of some kind?*

No, I was given a, I was given a completely free hand. Howard Robertson was, had been the principal of the Architectural Association school of architecture, and he was very fond of me and he was rather a fan of my work, and as the architect of this building he dished out commissions to his favourite people, and he simply told me to get on with it. And said, 'Well, just study the setting and see what you can make of it.' And I think during the course of doing it, I think I had to do a, a rough on paper, and take it to show him, and he said, 'OK, that's fine,' and I got on with it.

*And were you confident about doing it?*

No, I don't think I... No, I've never been. I am very un-confident about a job which was... I mean one of the reasons why I dropped out of architecture was that I was un-



confident about any building I designed standing up, let alone looking good. There are moments of sort of fear about these things, about... You've got... I'm a very indecisive person, and because there are deadlines you have got to make up your mind, you've got to come and make up, you've got to decide. And of course, there's always the possibility of not having thought it through for long enough, and come to the right decision. That it is never...with that kind of job, it is never possible, never possible to think of the finally perfect solution. You always think there's something, some improvement that could be made, there could have been something completely different. I mean looking back on that mural, I now think, oh I wish I'd treated it in a completely different way.

*What would you have done?*

Ah, I'd have done a wild, a riot of brilliant colour, probably starting by being totally abstract, but ending by making suggestions of reality, so that people's imagination... I mean I now think of the most satisfactory mural as being some...something where you can let people's imagination create, become active, like the famous description I think by Leonardo of looking at the plaster, the accidental cracks in the plaster on a wall, and building a whole picture out of the accidental weathering of this wall. And that I think, a mural can do that, and you can make it very very colourful and unspecific, and allow the imagination to run riot. A kind of mural I...I tend not to like are murals which are illustrative of heroic moments, or of...even the Ribera politically-minded murals of the struggling miner and the struggling manual worker, the sort of nobility of the manual worker, I think in the end becomes rather tiresome. And I, although I admire the talent, Ribera's talent, the drawing and the way he's done it very much, sometimes I think how much better, how much nicer, how much more interesting it would have been if it had left more to the imagination.

*Can you think of a mural that does succeed in that way?*

Oh, that's a very difficult one, because... I'd have to sit sort of silently for half an hour and think.

*Couldn't possibly let you do that.*

There's one by Ivon Hitchens, I simply can't remember where it is. It might be in the Royal College of Surgeons. But I do remember thinking, ah now, that's got the most wonderful suggestive qualities you can imagine yourself. And a lot of Ivon Hitchens' paintings have the same quality, they leave a lot to the imagination. You sort of walk into the grotto, walk into shadow, and there's wonderful sort of suggestions of water and wind, and, without being actually specific. I have a... That it was a favourite mural.

*Did you know him at all?*

I had a very long...I had a long long letter after one of my exhibitions at the Redfern, four pages, signed 'Ivon Hitchens', admiring my paintings, and I thought, oh my goodness, this is really quite something. Ivon Hitchens? Well, famous painter, liking my paintings? Someone, when I was reading it and feeling very pleased with myself, someone looked over, another painter looked over my shoulder and said, 'Looks to me as though you've got one of Hitchens' letters.' And I said, 'What do you mean, one of his?' He said, 'Oh, he writes to everyone.' (laughs) Long appreciative letters. So that took me down a peg or two.

*Did you reply?*

I replied to his letter, yes, I think saying, just saying, 'Thank you very much for your letter, it's very nice to have such praise,' I think.

*Did he teach at all? He never seems to get mentioned very much.*

I don't think he did, no.

*So you didn't really know him at all?*

No.

*And would you have liked one of his paintings enough to buy one?*

Oh yes, very much, yes. I think I did consider buying one. Curiously enough, there was a member of staff at the Architectural, one of my staff was very keen on Ivon Hitchens, so I did know. And I think there was an Ivon Hitchens in the staff common room at the AA. I think Howard Robertson liked Ivon Hitchens. Yes, I would have loved to have an Ivon Hitchens, I wish I had.

*And what was Howard Robertson like as a person?*

He was very very, a very friendly, very human man. A lovely person. I really liked him. He's very curious in his practice, because, he himself as principal of the school did give a whole series of lectures about.....

[End of F8798 Side A]

[F8798 Side B]

OK.

Yes, Howard Robertson gave a whole series... Is that working? Gave a whole series of lectures about balance and composition and rhythm and so on, and he outlined a lot of very sensible theories, which he illustrated with diagrams, one of which was to do with fenestration, to the uninitiated means the placing of windows. He declared very positively that any wall which was fenestrated should make it quite clear that it was a wall penetrated by pictures – by windows, or windows supported by the skeleton of a wall. In other words, his own words were, ‘solid should never compete with void’, there should never be any quality between the...or rather, I should say, solid should always compete with void, and win, or void should compete with solid and win. You must never have the same void, area of void as of solid. Well now if you, if you go to the South Bank and look at the Shell Centre, you will realise that this is exactly what he has done, he has made the window area exactly equal to the wall area. Very odd. Another theory he had, which is a very sound theory, was that if you were building a...if you were designing a complex of buildings which played one building against another, there should never be a...he used the word duality, a duality between horizontality and verticality. So that if the stress was on the horizontal, then if you were to put a tower, either the tower should be longer than the horizontal or the horizontal should be longer than the tower. There must never be inequality between them. Very sound principle. And if you look at buildings bearing that in mind, you will find it’s a very useful thing to analyse, why one’s slightly dissatisfied, or why one is fully satisfied with a building, or a complex of buildings. Now I can’t quote any complex of buildings which he designed which broke that rule, so perhaps he kept to that rule. But there were plenty of very sound eye-opening pieces of advice which his lectures consisted of, and of which I, I think we all rather approved of them.

*And when the Shell building was completed, what was the reaction to it?*

Very hostile. I think serious architectural critics thought it was a dreadful building. I wonder now whether it's preserved; I think it must be, yes.

*Probably. And what did you think about it?*

Horrible.

*And you still do?*

I still think it's a horrible building.

*And would you have said that to him?*

Yes, I think I would, yes, I think I would. Mind you, he would have said...he had a partner called Easton, the first was called Easton & Robertson. He would have said, probably quite as a joke, 'Oh well, you'd better go and talk to Easton about that, he's responsible.' (laughs)

*And so, I mean your time at the AA, you make it sound sometimes as though it was a complete disaster, but it obviously wasn't.*

I think from the point of view of the staff it was a complete disaster. It was, I suppose, a necessary part of my development in the sense that it put me together with people to whom I had to relate, and I think I was finding it quite difficult to relate to people. I didn't find school easy, as relating to people. I tended to go off into deep areas of doubt and despondency. I think student life in London was quite happy-making, I made a lot of lovely friends. I thought we were extremely badly taught, in the sense that most of the staff were deeply embedded in the Beaux-Arts tradition of architecture, which it seemed to me absolutely obvious was totally inappropriate to modern life, because it, it wasted huge quantities of space, it was built on a system of symmetry, you had to approach a building down a vista which focused on the central axis of the building, and around the

central axis there had to be exact balance, symmetrical balance. And we would be given a project and we would be, me and my friends let's say, because I was with a band of revolutionary thinking people, Bill Edmoston[ph] and myself and Andrew Carden, and we were known as the Three Musketeers. Well, we very consciously went in the direction of the Bauhaus which was by that time becoming avant-garde thinking matter, and never never worked on the principle of central axis and vista and flights of steps and columns and classical, the classical column. Well the staff would come around with very soft pencils, and they would sort of say, 'Hum, ah, er,' to the thing that was on our drawing boards, and they would reach for a piece of tracing paper and proceed to sketch a Beaux-Arts symmetrical design in soft pencil. And then they would, I use a technical word, elevate, which is to draw the view of the building from the plan; they would make the front elevation of the building in soft pencil with columns and windows and architraves and little statues on pediments and things, and leave it on our boards. And since they always...the whole thing was very fuzzy because they were using very soft pencil you see. So, we made a particular point of working with 6H pencils, so that you couldn't fuzz the whole thing up, you had to draw it in a very accurate line, first thing. And of course we were wholly contemptuous, with the confidence of youth we were wholly contemptuous of their whole idea. And I remember, we were talking about being ashamed at one stage in this conversation, I remember something extremely shameful to me now. One of the staff called Rowland Pierce, who had won a competition for the town hall at Norwich, which he had based on the town hall at Stockholm, which was a building thought very highly of, very romantic building, architect I forget. Pierce won this competition, was very pleased with himself, and in fact slightly shifted from the symmetrical Beaux-Arts thing. But he came around to my drawing board one day, and he took the piece of, predictable piece of tracing paper, soft pencil, and he drew a big tower, and then a horizontal thing which sprang off from the base of the tower, and put big windows, and a very romantic thing, looking like Stockholm or Norwich. And I said to him, 'You know, I have absolutely no respect for what you are teaching, for your teaching, or for your work. I think the Norwich Town Hall is a total disaster.' And the poor man, he burst into tears. And, I feel very ashamed of that I must say.

*What did you do when he burst into tears?*

Oh, I was very embarrassed, and... I can't remember. I know I was very ashamed of myself from the word go. Subsequently I've discovered a psychological reason which... By this time I was, let's see, 19, let's say it was 1933, so I was twenty-three, and I was beginning to lose my hair, and very conscious, self-conscious about that, and very miserable about it. And Rowland Pierce had the most wonderful raven black hair, which unusually for that date he wore very long, almost shoulder length. So I think maybe part of my outburst was due to envy of his hair.

*But, were you seriously considering being an architect?*

Oh yes. Yes I went through this whole course, and, it interested me a lot. Particularly the practical aspects. I mean for instance, the most, almost the most interesting lectures were about drainage, and about the bending moments of steel, and modern structure. Because curiously, the technological and practical side of it was, was not lagging behind, it was up to date, in contrast to the aesthetic side which was lagging behind into classical architecture. And so I was very fascinated, particularly as I knew a lot about cantilever and the modern, and Bauhaus methods of construction, and stainless steel, and the development of glass, and new building techniques and so on. Yes, I was. And in fact the only reason, I said earlier on that I dropped out, because I felt that anything I built would fall down, but that, that was partly a joke, because, the real reason why I and many other people dropped out was that when we left fully qualified, with our diplomas, it was impossible to find any work, because there was a massive...this was 1934, and there were massive unemployment you see. And even the six months service in an architect's office, which was an obligation to get your diploma, well that was waived, and you didn't have, there was no...no architect would take you on. So we qualified without having to do that. Well I emerged with my diploma into that sea of unemployment, and I accepted a job with a Polish refugee called Landau, who was into interior design of very grand Berkeley Square types of houses, and his interior consisted, his interiors consisted of frail chairs which were heavily gold-leafed, and obviously wouldn't stand the weight of a fat man,

and very elegant reproduction furniture, lots of mirror, and flowery cretonnes. Very elegant. And cut-glass vases of flowers. All of which I was supposed to put into drawings, illustrating his plans and sections. And I got fed up with this, and, here I reach an episode of dishonesty which I will now confess to. I did a drawing for him of the interior, and I took, I stole the, I think this is probably the first time I've ever confessed to this, I stole the idea of another student who eventually married my wife's sister, called Clissold, odd name, Clissold Tuely. He had done a drawing in which he had put a dog peeing against a lamppost. Well when I told my, always up till now, this very minute, told my story about why I parted from Landau, I have said, and it's a lie, that I did a comic drawing, and opened one of the Berkeley Square sash windows and drew a picture of a dog peeing against a lamppost. I didn't at all. Hereby confess. But I did something equally sending-up, I mean I, I drew a chair with three legs, or something like that, clearly showing that I hated the sight of what I was doing. And he said, Mr Landau said, 'Mr Spender, you and I do not quite see eye-to-eye, and I think you take three days' pay and find another job.'

*How had you got the job in the first place?*

Oh simply because, I looked around and... I can't remember. I really can't remember.

*And where was his office?*

His office was somewhere in the Bloomsbury district. I remember it was fairly near the AA, yes.

*And, did he have other staff, or would...?*

It could have been Howard Robertson who put me onto him, very probably could have been Howard Robertson. I think he, yes he had about, it was quite a big office and I think he had about three other staff, yes.



*But do you think you learnt anything while you were with him?*

Not with Landau, no. No, I learnt, I learnt really how lacking in imagination, how much money could be made through sheer lack of imagination really.

*And thinking of architecture in Britain in the Thirties, I mean would you have been aware of what Ernö Goldfinger was doing for example?*

Yes. Although I might not have known Ernö Goldfinger by name, I was very aware of Connell, Ward & Lucas; Basil Ward for instance, who built some very interesting modern buildings; I was very aware of what, partly because I'd been to Berlin, of what Erich Mendelsohn was doing in Berlin, Shell House, which was destroyed, which I photographed, and I've got some very interesting photographs of. A lot of... Oh, we knew about Gropius and Mies van der Rohe and a Dutch architect called Dudok, and several architect... Peter... The names drop out of my mind now, but there was a range of modern architects who were doing really good modern architecture with lots of glass and, and steel and cantilever, and very exciting stuff. I mean, of course Corbusier was our god, although subsequently I've realised what a lot of damage he's done really to architecture.

*Meaning what?*

Meaning that, high-rise derives from a lot of Corb teaching, but unfortunately Corb did not realise the extent to which the surrounding areas of high-rise, in other words the placing of high-rise on its site, he didn't realise that servicing that area around it was going to become impossibly expensive. So that the whole upkeep of any complex of high-rise buildings was going to be not what he intended, building for the masses, but was going to be building for the rich. So that was a sort of big let-down. And, also I think he didn't quite realise the unpleasantness of weathered concrete, that there hadn't been enough experience of concrete building to know how ugly in colour and texture, and placing of water dripping and so on, staining of concrete, how unpleasant that could be.

And that was a purely sort of visual thing. But I mean he was a leading, he was a leading thinker, and parallel to the bad effects which I have described, he did a lot of good.

*And what about somebody like Lubetkin?*

Lubetkin was a very very good architect. In fact, he married a student, one year senior to me, Margaret Church, and he invented a set-up called Tecton I think it was called, to which other students in my year, I think particularly of one called Tatton-Brown, joined. And then there was the MARS Group, all of which were staffed by people who were at the AA more or less with me.

*And did you go to MARS meetings?*

No, I didn't, no. I knew a lot of the people involved.

*Did you know Lubetkin himself?*

No, not well, no. I mean I, again I met him but just socially.

*And what about Goldfinger, did you meet him?*

I met Ernő, but much later curiously. I met him at a time when he was getting a lot of stick, people were complaining. Because he built high-rise didn't he. And he built one, didn't he build one which fell down, or caused some disastrous explosion, or...? Which was proved faulty in some way. Looking...I mean I, I know, about two years ago I looked up some illustrations of Goldfinger's buildings, and thought to myself, well, we see a lot of this from the railway train, coming into Liverpool Street, which look like perfectly ordinary high-rise, rather boring high-rise buildings, and to my surprise there is one which is described as being very distinguished and by... That's the pleasant. By Arnő Goldfinger. So I'm...I'm...I'm really ignorant about assessing his work.

*What was he like to meet?*

Tall, and rather frightening. He... He frightened me in the way that all very clever people frighten me. (laughs) And he seemed to me to be enormously clever and self-confident.

*Just picking up on something you said this morning which, I think Ernő's office at one point was there, the ICA when it was in Dover Street, did that, was that somewhere you went a lot, did it matter to you?*

Yes. Partly because, Peter Watson, who was a very rich man, do you know about him?

No.

He inherited a fortune deriving from a brand of margarine called Blue Band, and he was very rich, and he got...and he was homosexual, and he got involved with John Lehmann, and Cyril Connolly, and my brother Stephen, and Joe Ackerley and William Plomer, and Forster and people. And he was a very sensitive, intelligent man, who hated pomposity and, who hated all the things that I hated. He would...he had a word called, he described something as being 'pompiers', because he was bilingual partly and he... I think *pompier* in French simply means 'that is pompous'. And, we thought along very similar lines about art and about architecture, and I met him and was able to... Since he partly financed the founding of the ICA, I met him with Stephen and, and with my friends, Ackerley, Plomer, and I liked him, just liked him very much.

*And what role did the ICA have for you?*

The ICA seemed to me to exist in order to promote modern thinking, avant-garde art, and to that extent, I was obviously very sympathetic to that. And one went to exhibitions organised, and I still would if I had the sort of physical energy, I would go to ICA exhibitions, well still exists after all, with great confidence that I was going to see

something, maybe partly outrageous but, possibly outrageous but probably very interesting, very challenging.

*And as well as an exhibition venue, was it also a meeting place?*

Yes. Yes it was. As far as I remember you could go in and, and have a sandwich, and something to drink, and a cup of coffee, and there were magazines around, and you could sit and read, and nobody bothered you. And you could...it was a very useful place to meet, an inexpensive place to meet friends. Where do we meet? Oh well, let's meet in Dover Street, it's very central. Yes, it was marvellous in that way.

*And did Roland Penrose figure in your life at all?*

Only again that he was friendly with Barbara Ker-Seymer, and from time to time I met him with her. And his connections... I'm always, seem to be always saying I was struck dumb. I think, I think I was stuck dumb an awful lot, frightened about people's intelligence. I always thought his connections with Surrealism, I mean his writing about Surrealism and his connections with Picasso and so on, put him in a, in a category which rather awed me really.

*And when you were at the Architectural Association, were you painting for yourself as well?*

Yes. We...groups of, my own group was Bill Edmostone[ph], Andrew Carden, a man called Evans, Tatton-Brown, my future wife Margaret Low, her best friend Helen Gibb, we used to go on holiday together, and we used to paint, I think probably rather boring sort of outdoor watercolour, influenced by Cézanne and Derain. I wish I had some of them still.

*What happened to them?*

Goodness knows. I don't know. Maybe I...I think I sold an occasional one, and I think people probably stole them, and I think... They all vanished anyway. No idea.

*And would those holidays have been ones where you painted in a very concentrated way, or was it just one of the things you did?*

No, I think, apart from wasting time in the sun, painting and drawing was the other activity. And walking, and skiing, I loved skiing, I was rather good at skiing.

*But would you all have discussed the paintings, or was it just something you got on with privately?*

Yes, we... No, we were all very critical of each other. And, Andrew Carden and I remember being passionate about Derain, and painting and drawing very like Derain. I was, consequently I was influenced by his admiration for Derain, so I became affected by Derain. And of course we, we all went blindly for Picasso. Braque, particularly, Braque influenced me very very much, particularly in terms of, of design. I remember one of Stephen's more vaguely malicious remarks was, when we were at Lavenham I had a, I put together a roof light in the top room and made myself a little studio, and, at a time when I was very keen on Braque, I must have produced a painting which had a pear or something, or a cross-section of an apple or something Braque-ish in it, and Stephen came and sort of looked at it and said, 'Have you ever heard of a painter called Braque?' (laughs) I felt very put down by that.

*But...*

No, the painting holiday, I remember on the bicycling tour we were all, we'd all brought sketchbooks and little watercolour things, and we all used to...we had a regular part of the day when we stopped bicycling and tended to bicycle in the, in the cool of the evening, and in the cool of the early morning, and had a sort of midday break to eat and drift off and to paint, and we did do that, yes.

*And did you think of going and doing a fine art degree rather than going to the Architectural Association?*

Well curiously enough, I had...I somehow took it for granted that this was not for me to decide, it was... Apart from this distinguished uncle once saying to me, 'Humphrey, what do you intend to be?' and I said, 'I want to be a painter,' and he said, 'I didn't quite mean that; I meant work.' And I realised that painting was not going to be considered to be work you see. So, when... What I thought probably happened was, there was a kind of, a kind of, Schuster family, that was my mother's maiden name, family committee meeting, what the hell, what...they wouldn't have said 'what the hell'; 'What on earth do we do with Humphrey?' And somebody, my uncle, a distinguished uncle George, subsequently right-hand man to the Viceroy of India, said in his quietly modulated voice, 'Well, Humphrey is, he's...he's not bad at drawing. Mother... Does anybody know whether he's any good at mathematics?' And somebody might have said, 'Well he's adequately at mathematics.' 'Well, it seems to me that architecture might be for him.' And so it was decided, I was sent to architecture school. The other two, Stephen and Michael had both been to Oxford, and I think it was decided that there wasn't enough money to send me to Oxford. Is it working OK? And the AA was I think £500 a year, as opposed to, oh I don't know, £1,000 or something for Oxford or Cambridge. And my grandfather therefore had a say in supplying the money. And I think that, it entirely...it happened for reasons outside my own choice really.

[End of F8798 Side B]

[F8799 Side A]

*Given that it was a decision like that, isn't it rather strange they went for the AA?  
Wouldn't they have been more likely to send you to the Bartlett?*

Yes, I wonder. Oh, I...no, now you've reminded me of something. One of my cousins was Edward Maufe, m-a-u-f-e, who designed Guildford Cathedral, and curiously, one of the buildings we most hated as students was Guildford Cathedral. Maufe I think had a lot to do with this, because I think my mother...he was a cousin on my mother's side, on the Schuster side, yes. And his wife...maybe his wife was the cousin, I don't know her...I don't know her maiden name. She eventually became in charge of art choice for Heal's, didn't she, Mrs Maufe. Anyhow, it was Maufe I think who advised my mother and father that architecture would be a good profession, and I think, you've reminded me of something I'd forgotten.

*Do you still dislike Guildford Cathedral?*

Yes, I think so. Do you?

*I think it's ghastly.*

Yes.

*But, tell me just, I had no idea about this, tell me a little more about Mrs Maufe, because the Heal's Gallery crops up in people's recordings all the time.*

Well, all I know is that, for a long time she was given the job of choosing the textiles, the furniture, upholstery for...she was more or less a buyer for Heal's.

*And do you know what her background was?*

But she was given a very superior... I mean it wasn't called being a buyer, she was given a very superior kind of name, I mean art adviser or, adviser in aesthetics or something like that, for Heal's. And ceramics in particular, she was there to choose ceramics. It all comes back to me. And she used to choose these huge things, rather like that gourde there, big vases, rather like William de Morgan pottery; maybe she even chose William de Morgan in those days. I mean Heal's was a byword in advanced design in those...

*Do you know what her background was?*

Oh, I had assumed that she had been an art student, art trained. Would they have taken her on if she hadn't been?

*Do you know what she was like, did you spend much time with her?*

I met her and thought of her as, I mean again with that young kind of slightly mocking attitude, we, we thought of her as very arty-crafty, and, and not in line with avant-garde stuff at all. I mean we realised that she was an improvement and that she was improving the quality of design on sale, but, but we wanted, we wished that she was more Bauhaus.

*Did you ever go to her home?*

I can't remember doing so, no.

*And, what happened with your paintings, when did it... You say when you were going on holiday at this sort of stage they were fairly ordinary watercolour landscapes; what changed it? Because you never had any more painting education, did you?*

No, never. What happened with painting? Interesting question I'd need to think quite a lot about. I still have almost my first painting, which was very...which was about, aged about... No, my first painting was a watercolour of Salcombe. I think I had...it wasn't anything sudden that happened, it was a conscious desire to be a painter, because when



I...when my uncle, JA, asked me that question, 'What do you propose to be?' I had seriously intended to be a painter, and I started... I'm getting at it gradually. I started by liking other people's paintings. I think actually there's a book called *A Museum Without Walls* by a French writer, very famous French writer whose name I've forgotten, who says that people, people begin painting not so much for thinking that they want to be a painter but for thinking...for seeing other paintings, and thinking, 'I could do as well as that.' And I think that was my principal motivation, I saw paintings by people who have now vanished, by Ethelbert White, by Mark Gertler, by somebody...William Roberts, people who at that time were thought to be very modern, by John Nash, by Paul Nash. And I thought, goodness, I could do as well as that.

*Where did you see the work?*

Oh well we used to tour the London galleries, and there were...there were galleries, there were not nearly so many as there are...there were not nearly so many as there are now, but there were galleries like, I mean the Redfern started fairly early, that was the prime source of information. The Leicester Galleries had been going on some time, the Leicester and the Redfern. There was a gallery called the Bloomsbury Gallery. I remember going mad about...we all went berserk about a painter called, whom nobody's heard of, called Troin, t-r-o-i-n, and I actually bought paintings by Troin, I don't know where it is, nobody would have heard of it. And then there were, there were friends of my brother's, like, at that stage, yes, I think as early as that, Robert Buhler, eventually Bill Coldstream. Which all made me want more and more to be a painter. And, I...I got onto a theme of industrial decay which I think derived from, from Surrealist painting where very often there were landscapes with telegraph poles and, rather sort of dreary, decaying kind of atmosphere, and that got me very hooked. And up till the war, when I think my painting then was very much better than it is now in fact, because I think the war and my wife's illness interrupted a vein of painting which would have developed into, much more interestingly than, than has in fact happened.

*Can you tell me some of the paintings of that period, can you describe some?*

One was bought by, oh, the name, quite a distinguished critic. And, yes, I can describe it. It was entirely collapsing and derelict buildings, and lots of posts and lots of wires, and these were the days of overhead tram wires you see, and I, I got absolutely fascinated with a kind of Surrealist aspect of wire landscape, wired landscapes, and I think I actually called one *Wired Landscape*. We're now, we're now almost at the stage when I was called up which was 1941, so I would have been thirty-one then, and when I was doing basic training on Salisbury Plain I became fascinated by the trail of mysterious coded signs which were all over the Salisbury Plain which was guiding the army units to their training ground or to their base camps, and these consisted of, of colour coding, sort of mysterious sort of stripes, and squares with diagonal stripes, and posts with arrows. And, you have recalled a whole series of paintings, at least five, which dealt with this landscape. And in fact they all sold at the Redfern. And occasionally I come across illustrations of them and think, my goodness, I wish I'd stuck to that whole thing. And, I mean painting is a thing which leads you on through accident through various, the way in which paint behaves and which brushes behave, and, and so, these things are always running parallel, and at the same time I became very influenced by Ben Nicholson, and his abstracts where he allows accident and texture to play important parts, and relationships of solid to void, and rectangle to rectangle, and circle to rectangle, and so on, eventually getting into those reliefs, those Ben Nicholson reliefs. So I mean all these things were sort of working together, and were interrupted.

*Can you tell me a bit more about them? I mean, the Salisbury Plain ones with the signal colours and things, what were they actually, what sort of scale, what colour?*

They were small, smallish. That was physical necessity because of the kind of rooms that we lived in. And also the whole idea of painting large pictures was, was not around, one didn't paint large pictures, unless they became murals, and... I did other, I did other murals besides Shell House. Yes, they were smallish. Eventually they...they started by being rather realistic; eventually they became unrealistic, in the sense that bombs and rockets and shiny metal, mysterious kind of cylinders, unexplained in function, appeared,

and I got involved with shadows, and very realistic treatment of these. And one painting which I did when I was told that Lolly was dying was a kind of stage set within the landscape, the three walls of a stage set within a landscape, and in the centre of the stage was a flower which obviously symbolised Lolly, but it was a, a very sinister flower which was decaying, and which clearly had some organic malfunction about it, which represented the illness of course, maybe all subconsciously. And behind this stage which was in a landscape were rather sinister looking clouds, which might have been solid, but... And that painting is, is now in the art gallery at Wolverhampton, and I wish I had it. I wish I'd had it as a kind of model for how to go on. Well now, again, you've reminded me that, I was strongly influenced by John Banting, who was a committed Surrealist, and he put me up to all kinds of...when I say put me up, he made me aware of and familiar with all kinds of Surrealist imagery, so occasionally the whole thing would take on a rather Surrealist idea. In fact that painting I've just described was in one of the big Surrealist exhibitions.

*What colours are in that, what...?*

I think it's fairly naturalistic, ochres and, and greens, and blue for the sky, and... And the machinery, the sort of sinister parts of it, which lie around, there are some sort of bombs, or mines, or sinister-looking objects, which appear in my present painting quite a lot, lying around looking as though they are about to explode. Those would have been imitating metal, they'd have, rather like that piece of stainless steel there. So it's sort of, black and white and grey, and highlights, and...

*And is it oil on board?*

It's oil on board, yes.

*And do you know when you started to use oil? I mean did you always use watercolour and oil in parallel, or...?*

I started to use oil very early, in fact, the first oil painting is in the studio, of a silver, significantly of a silver coffee jug, so I was...I was into the kind of, of stainless steel effect. This was very realistic painting with drapery behind, and, and the coffee jug and some cups, and a drape of, some kind of cloth was draped on it. Very competent, entirely realistic. I mean, the sort of thing would make, which would make visiting aunts say, 'Oh, isn't that clever. I could almost touch that.'

*It sounds a bit like a William Nicholson.*

I don't think it's as good as a... I haven't seen any of William Nicholson's early paintings. Yes, it...yes it was. But I mean William Nicholson was a very skilled... He evaded, avoided and evaded detail and got much more pictorial unity about his work. I think William Nicholson was, was a bad influence, but I...he was a very skilful painter. William Nicholson became the lover of my first wife's sister. Have we done this before?

*Yes.*

Yes. And he ruined her painting of course.

*But, when you say John Banting took you to look at Surrealist pictures, I mean, was he influencing the actual detail of your work?*

No. Just... I mean he, his own work, he once wrote me quite a scolding letter saying, 'You are allowing my influence to emerge much too clearly. Please stop it.' (laughs) And he was, he had little notebooks and sketchbooks which were full of wildly Hieronymus Bosch kind of devil, dancing devils kind of drawings, and then designs for hats and designs for fancy dress, and, and then sort of abstract designs, and, he was a very sort of fertile mind. I think he was influenced a lot by people like Bosch, Hieronymus Bosch and, and Dalí, and...and what was going on in Surrealist painting.

*Can you describe any more, some of the wired landscape paintings you were talking about, can you tell me any more about those?*

Only that they, I suppose they became more and more sinister, that there were...the idea... I mean, the whole of basic training, with the background of my wife dying, and the involvement with two-pounder guns and tanks and, and potential disaster, rifles and bullets and shooting at targets and so on, filled me with gloom, and, became...the visual aspect of it simply had to appear in my painting. So I think they did... I can't understand why they sold actually because they were very, they were very gloomy, very gloomy paintings, very sinister paintings. But people may have felt sympathetically, I mean they may have felt, felt that strikes a sympathetic chord.

*I'm interested that, given that you didn't go to art school, so you didn't have a year so to speak of other students who were painting around you, you nevertheless seem to have been painting in the context of other painters. It doesn't sound something that was totally isolated.*

No, I mean I think...I was seeing a lot of painting. I was fascinated by Paul Nash, and Paul Nash, some of his paintings, like the, the war paintings of the bomb...the burnt out aircraft, and the, the First World War paintings of the, of the stumps of trees, these famous paintings, seemed to me absolutely wonderful in conveying some kind of ghastly emotion about it. And the whole...the whole effect, the whole ghastly effect of war. And so I think, I was very very influenced. I've always been, I have always been very influenced, and that's one of the things which quite possibly has changed, too frequently changed my feeling about painting and my actual subject matter and quality of painting and so on.

*So, when you were going through your wife dying as well as the war years, was there a point where you were rather paralysed, and there's a break with your painting, or was it...did you keep painting the whole time?*

Well because the two things were parallel, the war, the involvement with the war and being called up and being put into basic training, which I think, was about three months I think, meant that there was no, no question of my doing any painting, except on those rare occasions when you were given leave, and I remember painting, actually painting in the room where she was in bed, yes. Because we had this big William Nicholson... The Old School House, which was what it was, was simply one big room, just about as big as this living room, and then a small staircase, and two rooms above it. So that the living room was everything, was eating, was painting, was being ill in, was, just where we lived, it was the living area. And I do remember having an easel put up and painting. And that's where I think I painted the picture which is now in Coventry, which was more or less stolen from me by...I had it in there, and an Ipswich dealer came... Oh, well I won't go into that story.

*But did you then, after the war, when you were free to paint, you just resumed it again, or not? Or it was... It can't have been very easy at that point.*

It was very very, very very difficult to get back, because, there was... While I was waiting for demob... You must at any time stop a repetition of something which has gone before, because I have a feeling that I did tell you this. I was waiting to be demobbed, which was incredibly boring, and there was a, in the press there was an announcement about a competition for textile design, and I had my watercolours and brushes and things with me, and I thought, oh well I'll go in for this design, which I, which I went in for, because it meant sort of totally abstract, decorative work, involving all kinds of tricky techniques like wax, wax chinks and, the way John Piper was painting with resists, with colour, watercolour breaking over a resist. And I won that design, which was judged by Henry Moore and by a refugee called Hans Juda. And, because of winning that design I sort of automatically became a textile designer.

*But did the painting carry on though?*

No. The textile... This was one of the great mistakes I made I think. I tended to allow design to take over from painting, and, it was easier, it was much easier of course. It was decorative, it was light-hearted, it was un-serious.

*So when did painting come back?*

It came back because, there was a possibility of having another exhibition at the Redfern, and I think they, they pushed me into it again. And so, gradually I, I got the whole thing going again. Always painting has become to me a challenge, it's...I tend to allow displacement activities to intervene, I sort of garden or polish the taps, or polish the, clean the car, or something.

*And, we talked a little bit about the work with textiles. What I have no sense of is how consistently you were doing textile design, what kind of volume of work was happening.*

In the sense that, they were in demand. I won, very early on I...well I won this competition, which immediately puts you as a desirable designer, so I had people asking me for designs. And so, I was under some kind of obligation to, to do them and to carry on. And then I, I started winning Council of Industrial Design awards, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, and I got involved with a firm called Edinburgh Weavers, which was a profit...which was a loss-making part of Morton Sundour, another big firm, I think intentionally loss-making in terms of income tax. I won two awards for Edinburgh Weavers which meant that other firms then... Actually Sanderson's actually rang me up and said, would I do something like one of those designs, to which I said, 'No, I won't. I'll do you something, but it can't be like,' I mean you can't... They would never forgive me at Edinburgh Weavers if I did something like. It was one of those really big mistakes to make, to repeat yourself with another firm. I was very well aware of that, so I didn't do it. But I, I got a lot of interest. And it meant a lot of slogging around with a big portfolio, and being treated by horrid little men with power complexes who delighted in keeping you waiting, and delighted in going through a portfolio saying nothing until at the end they would say, 'Sorry, not for us.'

*But were you doing this five days a week, full time, or were you doing it every now and then, or how did it work?*

Comparing it with a nine-to-five office job, I wasn't working full-time, no. I mean there were...because my wife, this was Pauline by now, wanted... Well there were all kinds of complications which led to having to do a lot of domestic work, and cooking and, and gardening, and keeping the whole thing going you see. So, so, I've always allowed that to interrupt too much. And maybe it's not a bad thing, I mean one can't be totally involved in any one activity I think without that activity getting rather stale and, I needed to have other things going on. And then there was a sort of social life which was much more than it is when one gets older, now for instance. So, it was interrupted, too easily interrupted of course.

*And once you'd done the design, did you just hand over the process, or were you involved until the thing was actually coming off the rollers or whatever it was?*

Well it varied. Some firms demanded that you should put this piece of paperwork into what's called repeat, so that it can be put on a silkscreen or put onto a roller block, in the way that you want it to run, and that leads you into all kinds of necessities, that you've got to be able to... Before you know what this design is going to look like, you've got to put nine repeats into a square, that sort of thing.

*That we did talk about.*

We talked about oxo and Graham Sutherland, yes.

*Yes.*

So, so, some firms would demand the design up to that stage; some firms would say, 'OK, give us a piece of paper with some ideas, which can be rough and needn't be in



repeat.' But, the danger there is that, you see the final thing and it's nothing like what you intend; it's probably horrible. So I always...I was always inclined to see it in repeat.

*And would they be acknowledged as Humphrey Spender designs?*

Yes. Yes, there would be, on the selvage there would be, most of the Edinburgh Weavers stuff. And then of course textile design leads directly into wallpapers, which leads directly into carpets, which leads directly into plastics. So eventually you're involved in what you could call surface design, and I was doing all those three things.

*Did you ever do clothes design?*

No.

[End of F8799 Side A]

[F8799 Side B]

*.....still get clear. If I was going to research it, would I find there are twenty Humphrey Spender wallpapers, or 200, or five? I mean what sort of...*

You would find, thirty I would think. You would find about, fifteen carpets. You would find a lot of work done specially for P&O in liners, Orsova...right from the start, Orsova, Oriana, Oronsay, Canberra, I worked on all those, with carpets, small murals, table tops, backgrounds to bands, to music bands. I think, I hope you would find some of them still existing. One of the more alarming thoughts about things like murals, and things in the Canberra for instance, in the liner Canberra, is, it's pretty certain that they don't survive you see, because, the Canberra's been used twice as a troopship, and probably they had to strip the whole ship. So quite possibly they don't survive.

*Did you work on the Britannia as well, or not?*

What line was that? No, I didn't, no. No, I didn't. I worked only for the Orient Line.

*And just briefly, because it's obviously something we want to go back to, tell me about the mural for the Festival of Britain.*

That was in the television pavilion, and it consisted...it had to, the brief was, to show a large map, and the points from which the rays were, the, whatever rays there are in television, were transmitted. In other words, the towers, the structures from which they were transmitted. And in doing that, to make it as decorative as possible.

*And what did you do?*

It had to be the map, and it had to be the places, and, I made it as colourful as I could, and the lines. And of course the latticework of the towers, of sort of pylons, intrigued me a lot, because that played rather into my industrial landscape thing. I've remembered the

bloke, Francis Spalding, who collects, who's a collector, bought a painting, an industrial decay painting, which was the sort of square where all the buildings were collapsing, and sort of ruins, and there was a hill in the background, with lots of mysterious and posts and pylons and wires and things in the background. And the colouring of that I can remember was predominantly a rather murky red, blueish, smoky, blueish red, which was very typical of the architecture of Bolton. The whole scene at Bolton when I was doing Mass Observation was...was one of industrial decline, and I did a lot of painting which was directly connected with that, and in fact, you've reminded me that Tom Harrison, who was the originator of Mass Observation with Charles Madge, he bought I think two of them. So they'd be with one of his descendents, or ex-wives or, whatever.

*OK. Perhaps we.....*

[end of session]

[break in recording]

*Recording with Humphrey Spender on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September 2000.*

[break in recording]

*OK, just tell me your name and today's date.*

My name is Humphrey Spender, and today's date I think is September the 8<sup>th</sup>. Is it?

*Yes it is.*

[break in recording]

*Before we go back into where we were before, I just wondered if we could put on tape, when we were in the car you were talking to me about the operation you've just had on your eye, and that strangely enough the sensation during the operation was rather exciting visually, and I wondered if you could tell the tape what that was like.*

This operation was due to some kind of membrane having descended between the lens of the eye and the retina at the back of the eye, which really produced the effect of repeating the whole cataract situation. So what they do is, with a laser beam they blow up this membrane, which turned out to be an incredible sensation. Your head is clamped into a position which means you can't move your head around. It's not an uncomfortable position at all. And then, literally a bloke focuses the beam into the offending part of the membrane, and pulls a trigger, which he pulled fifty times, and each time that trigger is pulled you get an explosion of light and colour and revolving Catherine wheels which is moving the whole time. Occasionally there's a flash which illustrates the whole venous system with the eye, which is rather like the growth of trees or the roots of plants. Absolutely wonderful. And I really came out of that having enjoyed the visual sensation, and I'm now looking forward to having the left eye done in about five days' time. It's really what I imagine Heaven might be like, it's just a wonderful display of, of coloured fireworks.

*Have you ever seen anything like it before?*

When I had my eyes tested, there was an equally sophisticated machine where you had to look at sort of dots and, and points, and edges, and then there were different sensations of colour, mainly connected with after-images, which I thought were very beautiful. But certainly the laser operation produced an absolutely wonderful display. No, I've never had anything as wonderful as that really.

*And will it feed into your work in any way?*

I suppose it connects certainly with work, because one sees this in the most incredible detail, and it is a display of changing textures in the form of light. I think the thing that it brought back was the excitement, my first childhood excitement at watching fireworks, where you get huge explosions of rockets in the sky. It's rather like that as a matter of fact, but in much more brilliant... Well colour is the wrong word, brilliant tone; it's a question of huge quantities of light just flooding your whole, brain I suppose it is rather than to say your eye.

*And where were early experiences of fireworks?*

Family parties, regular contributions to Guy Fawkes day. As children my...we used to have very very tame kind of fireworks for those days, compared to what happens nowadays. We used to have Catherine wheels, and sort of mini rockets which went up. My father was incredibly nervous about us getting our hands blown off and things like that, so the whole thing was done very sedately, but it was always very very exciting, and I absolutely loved it. And if there were any public displays of fireworks which one knew about in advance, I would demand to be taken to them. So, I do remember the general idea of fireworks as something which was very exciting.

*Where did the family fireworks take place?*

When we were in Sheringham, during the First World War, provided we were not disclosing too much light, I can remember having them. And when we went on holidays to places like Salcombe and so on. Wherever it, wherever there was an open-air space where these things could be let off.

*Did you have a garden in London?*

There must have been a garden, but I can't remember anything about it, no.

*And in your work, natural images are predominant very often. Were they...were you...  
We've talked about you looking for instance at Indian miniatures and at your mother's  
jewellery box and things like that...*

Mm.

*But were you also spending a lot of time with grass and flowers and leaves and shrubbery  
as a child?*

Yes. Yes, at Sheringham, and we were...we were in Sheringham I suppose about four, four years, at Sheringham there was quite a nice garden and a shrubbery, which of course, at the age, I was between six and, well between four and eight I suppose, and the garden seemed huge, and because of my short sight I was always picking up skeleton leaves, and looking closely into stamens of flowers, and looking closely into roses, and... My mother was very much aware of that, and encouraged it very much, and got me to draw, got me to do drawings of these kinds of things. I can remember...from a very early age I can remember being fascinated by complicated venous systems and root systems and the insides of flowers. The shells of snails, Sheringham I can remember particularly because there were lots and lots of snails, which my sister tried to stop me destroying, and certainly I think I was pretty horrible in the sense that I did eventually destroy them, but before I crushed them horribly under my heel, I was enjoying the patterns on their shells, looking very closely at them. And the lizards and butterflies. We did collect butterflies. I absolutely loved the patterns on butterflies' wings. But we collected butterflies in ways which now would be very much disapproved of, with killing bottles and chloroform and pins, and we pinned them to cork boards which were covered with, eventually the floor of a little drawer in a cabinet. No, those were constant sources of pleasure to me. And in a way nowadays, having been deprived of close focus vision, I do rather, quite regret not having close focus vision, because it suits my work quite a lot. So all that is lost.

*Did you have birds' egg collections as well?*

Yes, we did, yes, we used to blow the eggs and stick pins into the shells, and sometimes let them go bad and so on. Yes we had, we had a little, what we called the museum, which I remember was a mahogany cabinet, a very tall cabinet, seemed to me tall, it was probably about five foot high, and each drawer contained either butterflies or eggs or minerals or rotted-down leaves and things, and we were constantly changing that museum. In fact we, in Hampstead, later on when we got to Hampstead, we formed something called the...this was a house in Frognall, and we called it the, the Royal Frognall Society or something ridiculous like that. I remember, Dame Henrietta Barnett was a great friend of my father's, and I think she absolutely adored him, and we made her president of the Royal Frognall Society, which she took with great good nature. And, I think even put, occasionally put a shilling or so into it, to keep it up to date.

*Invested in it.*

We also produced a little magazine called *The Frognall Gazette*, to which all of us wrote little articles, and I did illustrations for. Now extremely valuable. I have got one copy left.

*And, it sounds as though the butterfly collecting was supervised if it was done in such an organised way. Who would have been the starting point of that?*

There were people all around us sort of saying no, like my father's secretary, and showing us what to do, and say, 'You've done that wrong,' and, seeing that we weren't particularly cruel, and... There was my father's secretary, my father himself, to a certain extent my mother when she was well enough, and the two, the great Berth Ella[ph].

*But you think that the idea of the collection would have come from the children, rather than an adult saying, 'Why don't you collect butterflies, this is how you do it'?*

I think it did come from us, yes. I think we wanted to... Possibly because we had seen collections of school friends, and I mean, these are kind of, habits which spread. Just as

nowadays somebody gets a...friends of my grandchildren get a scanner and then they've got to have a scanner, and they've got to have all kinds of electronic equipment, so in those days, everybody had a collection of butterflies. Maybe not so much the mineral thing, collections of minerals.

*But did you have those as well?*

Yes, that...there were at least two drawers in the little museum devoted to minerals. I mean these were simple things like iron pyrites, which was called false gold I think. And, anything which glittered, and quartzes, I absolutely adored.

*So would you spend quite a lot of time with the museum?*

Yes, I think so, yes.

*Did you have scrapbooks?*

Yes. Certainly we had scrapbooks, and there was a lot of, of confusion about gum and glues and making messes, and getting it organised, and washing the brushes, and keeping the whole thing neat. Yes. We were very much supervised in all this.

*I was in the Tate archive recently because I wanted to look up some things about John Banting, and one of the things there was his scrapbook, which he obviously kept as an adult.*

Yes.

*Did you carry on doing it as an adult?*

Only in... Yes, I did, and I can show you some of them. They were very much affected by the fashion of what people, rather sort of, sophisticated intellectuals found interesting.



For instance, the graphics on cereal packets, particularly when they were involved with Batman and that kind of thing, I decided that these were very interesting, and later on as a fellow of the Society of Industrial Designers, one of the artists who illustrated in a magazine called the *Eagle*, who also did the kind of, the same kind of things as happened on the boxes of cereals, was honoured with an honorary fellowship, and sometimes became interesting art. And I have got two or three scrapbooks where I've cut these things out. But you've reminded me also that, when... My mother had an account with Harrods, and she used to get, I don't know whether they were free or not, but absolutely magnificent volumes about two and a half inches thick, of the most marvellous steel engravings of the kind of things that they had regularly on the market, and this was to do with jewellery quite a lot, and things like candlesticks, and knives and forks, and all kinds of... And I absolutely adored these because of the quality of the steel engraving, and the detail with which they illustrated this. Now I think they're quite sought after antiques in the book trade, and I wish I had...I wish I had kept them.

*When did you first do any engraving yourself?*

Oh very recently. That's to say, I mean in terms of a ninety-year-old life, about fifteen years ago. Julian Trevelyan offered to give instruction about etching, and I did some experimental etchings with him. So, really quite, quite late.

*What did you do?*

I did kind of land... At the time I was asked to experiment with etching, I was doing a lot of paintings connected with the reeds in the river around here. I went through a whole period of painting which had to do with river reeds, and there were a lot of, there are lot of paintings called *River Reeds 1*, *River Reeds 2*, *River Reeds 3*, and so on. And so the etching was very much the river reed thing. But, eventually I got so interested in the kind of textures that etching can produce, particularly accidental kinds of textures, where you spat at acid onto the plate, and allowed accident to play quite an important part. So

looking at that etching now, it's recognisably about reeds, but equally it's quite abstract, and very much to do with texture.

*And what were you trying to achieve with the reeds? I mean presumably it's more than a sitting down thinking, I'm going to do a naturalistic image of these reeds.*

Well you've asked...that's a question which I'm always asking myself about, simply being an artist. I envy anyone who is able to put together some understandable, as opposed to mystifying words explaining their objectives about painting. There was a time when I persuaded myself that my objective was to make people, other people, ordinary people, see the world in a different way. And I once had the most marvellous letter, I think from an actress called Mary Ure, having, who had bought a painting of mine at the Leicester Galleries. The letter said, 'I shall never see in the same way again, I shall see things entirely in the way you've disclosed in your painting.' Well that, that became an objective, and I think I can still hold to that objective. I have been through phases of wanting to give important messages about the, mainly about the horrors of the world, such as, apocalyptic paintings, about the hydrogen bomb and the way in which the world might turn into a kind of moon landscape with stricken people wandering aimlessly about. Messages, pictures very difficult to sell, so, for that reason one tends not to do too many. And then, I... I mean I, at this point I have to admit to considerable inconsistency, both in what I do and in my attitude to what I am doing. And I think before we've been though this idea that, in a way I claim the right to be inconsistent, although I realise it's a very bad commercial attitude, because, when people buy paintings, or prints or drawings, they really want a recognisable thing, particularly galleries, if they want to give you an exhibition, they want to give an exhibition where people recognise that as being a typical Sutherland, or Henry Moore or, what, whatever artist. And there is never, there is no such thing as a typical Spender I think. Although there are very very nice people who, who say that inevitably they can see similarities between everything I do. I like that kind of remark.

*So, why did you become absorbed by the reeds? This landscape is full of things you might have done series of works on, why the reeds?*

Oh simply because, seasonally the reeds change in the patterns, the visual patterns that they make, particularly in winter, and I can remember winter reeds as being one of the repeatable titles. When a whole clutch of reeds go a lovely sort of ochre brown, and fall around and interlock, and make the most marvellous kind of, accidental patterns, I think it was entirely that that fascinated me. And that, that for me that could be interpreted in terms of actual materials, oil paint, in terms of paint, yes. And occasionally they came, they come up again in textile design. But of course textile design, you're governed by, very much by the desirable and the undesirable. I mean one of the, the rules of a commercial textile design is that people won't buy anything which is spiky, and looks as though it's going to hurt you, or that you could prick your skin against it, you could prick your skin. So that, reeds probably would be banished on that kind of level. But I mean students in textile design are always doing kind of thorny things, and one has to say, 'Well that's very nice dear, but it's never going to sell, and since you're going to make your living out of textile design, you have to be a bit careful.'

*It's very literal, the public response to that, isn't it?*

Very much so, yes, in what they will take and what they won't.

*And does that surprise you?*

Not any longer, no. I mean I'm never surprised by the fact that people are on the whole terrified of colour. The kind of remark I actually once overheard in Heal's where Mr and Mrs Newly-Wed were choosing their curtains, the man said, 'Oh, I rather like that,' pointing to something, and not very very brightly coloured but with fairly bright colours, and the girl said, 'Oh but shan't we get rather tired of it very soon, because the colours are so bright?' In fact she could have used the word 'positive'. But people I think are frightened of committing themselves to something like very bright colour.

[End of F8799 Side B]

[F8800 Side A]

*And, in terms of the colours that you surround yourself with in interiors, what do you feel about colour, bearing in mind that the tape can't see anything that is around us?*

I'm very...I'm always in favour of being very bold and brave, and I quite positively like that. I just enjoy looking out of the window now and looking at the colours in that limited area in the garden. I mean there are people who say, 'Humphrey, how could you, these are all clashing, and hitting each other.' I quite positively like colour, colours to fight, and occasionally to make what is called discord, because it seems to me, where in most of my life I'm rather unadventurous, in that kind of way one can be very, be very adventurous.

*Just for the tape, can you clarify that you're, what you're talking about that is out of the window and what the colours are.*

Oh the colours are a mixture of, of magenta-ish reds and orange-ish reds, and dark purples. Now, in terms of what I rather hate to call colour theory, I prefer to call it colour knowledge... Hang on, shall I explain this? Because it's quite a complicated sort of technical thing. Quite boring. There is a thing called a colour circle, where the spectral sequence is pushed, is put into circular form, and you move gradually by modulation and gradation from one colour to another, from yellow to green, from green to blue, from a greenish-blue to a reddish-blue, from a reddish-blue to violet. Well now as you, as that gradation and modulation takes place, equally a change in tone takes place. By tone I mean lightness or darkness. So that a yellow by its very nature is lighter in tone than orange, which comes between yellow and red, is lighter in tone than red, and red is lighter in tone than purple in its purest most saturated form. Now if you reverse the natural sequence of tone, and you make a purplish-red lighter in tone than a yellowish-red, so that the purplish-red is lighter, the yellowish-red is darker, then you get to what is commonly called a discord. I mean, I hate applying that.....

[break in recording]

So I, I rather go for the discords, because they kind of constantly stimulate me. But I think on the whole, I'm repeating myself now, but I think people are frightened really of using colour. Mind you, it's very difficult to find fully saturated bright colours in furnishings. It's, nowadays it's, the whole of the paint industry has moved into providing very very bright colours. Oh gosh, there's somebody else.

[break in recording]

*So the whistling was Humphrey's butcher delivering meat, and the latest interruption was two very young girls who are Jehovah's Witnesses, to whom Humphrey was very charming.*

(laughs) I forget where we were now.

*You were talking about the difficulty of getting saturated colour in home furnishings.*

In furnishings. Are we on now?

*Yes.*

In furnishings, it is still fairly difficult, though things are improving. In paint, assuming that you can always yourself modify the paint by mixing some dirt into it... (laughs)...is all right. At the moment I am trying to find a fabric to re-cover some chairs and settees and things, and there are very limited, mainly pastel kind of shades.

*Where do you look?*

We look in the Yellow Pages and get people, upholstery people to come round and bring patterns with them. Looking for carpets, I did the same thing. Very difficult to find.

*Can you talk a bit about the colours in this room? The colour of the doors, where has that come from?*

Well when we first built the house, Richard Rogers' assistant, John Young, who was really very keen about the whole project, was very keen about colour. I was delighted to find this, because I felt exactly the same way myself. And we both realised we were on the same kind of track. And we discussed the whole idea of putting very strong colours; from the word go we put very strong colours. Initially the entire floor was a very bright red, which you can see, not the remains of it but a revival of it in the little room there. So the whole house was kind of singing with very bright colours. And the colours on the doors, which have been actually repainted, were the original colours. Similarly the colours of the blinds, by discussing this with John, and making them relate, because you can see the blinds at the same time as you can see the colours of the steel work on the outside, making them relate to the steel work, the colour was really quite carefully considered, with a general background of, of white walls, and colour appearing simply on the doors and on the blinds, and the carpet of course.

*The colour of the doors is almost like the purple on a Cadbury's Dairy Milk bar. Is it specially mixed, or...?*

No, that one is actually straight out of the can. It's...it's not quite the same as the original colour, but it's...it's adequate. It's almost the same so I don't mind about it.

*And just to your left at the moment is a multi-coloured silk cushion of some kind. What's the story behind that?*

Ah, well the story about that is that, I didn't choose it, Rachel chose it. I am still trying to decide whether I go for it. I do go very much for isolated areas such as the stripes of very very brilliant colours. I'm not quite decided about it. But on the whole, in the sense that they are bright in colour, I do go for them, yes.

*And just to clarify for the tape, when we were talking about the colours you were seeing through the window, they are flowers that we're talking about, they're not painted objects or anything. And can you just talk for a little bit, going back to what we were talking about very much earlier, about natural form, could you just describe, a) the table that's here, and b) what's on it, and why the things are on it?*

The table was... When we lived at Lavenham, in Suffolk, there was a marvellous antique dealer called Nunn in Sudbury, in Sudbury in Suffolk, and his principle of trade was that he didn't give a damn for the actual value of the piece, provided he got his percentage profit on what he had, himself had paid for it. So in fact he was selling valuable stuff very cheaply. So when we were furnishing the house in Lavenham, which was a big house, I bought a lot of furniture, and what you see here is partly the remains of that. So, we're looking at an early Victorian, almost Regency, round table in a polished veneer, although the polish is in fact fake, and on that table are some, I think they're called gourds, in a brightish yellow, and things which look like giant marrows. I have to admit that they're, they're on that table partly because friends had brought them to me, having grown them in their own gardens, and having been very proud of producing such big things. And I think of them much more in terms of objects to stand around, rather than food. In fact probably I shall never eat them, and probably they will go bad there. But on that particular table I like to keep a fairly constantly changing lot of objects. Mind you, time is so scarce now that I don't change it as often as I should.

*And will those objects feed into the work at all, or not?*

Yes, it's quite possible. I look at them occasionally, thinking, shall I do a painting like that? And, I might, yes. Yes, they are there to give me ideas, certainly. Everything in, everything around the place initially was chosen that it might give me ideas for either printing or painting or designing. Going back to the colours in the house for a moment, Richard Rogers and John Young hated the idea of having curtains, and they thought that the blinds were adequate. In fact, blinds with their kind of unruffled, flat surface are



rather cold and uninviting, and un-cosy in the winter, and very early on we decided to have curtains, which Lord Rogers disapproved of very strongly. Partly because he said that the view of curtains from the outside was not...was not what he wanted at all, it was going to ruin the exterior view of the house. Nevertheless we went on with the curtain idea, and then came the whole problem of colour and pattern and design. And I decided that I was much too involved with patterned fabrics in my life; at the time I put the curtains in, I was still designing patterned fabrics. So I decided to have plain colours, stitched together in kind of sequences which were repeated in various aspects of the house. like for instance the electric plugs and the blinds themselves and so on.

*So were these curtains made up for you specially?*

Yes, they were, yes. I managed to get a Dutch textile firm to give me a discount on the material, because they're very expensive materials. And so the curtains were chosen to my design. Oh simply in terms of, of stitching different colours together.

*But you didn't ever live with any of your own textiles?*

Yes, quite often, I've used my own textiles just to put them to the test. Yes, and some of them have survived my critical eye, and... I go into houses now where I see them, and surprised to find that I quite approve of them.

*But there aren't any here?*

There aren't any in use here, no. I've got a whole chest full of designs in the studio.

*While you were talking to the butcher I went outside to see the house from the back garden which I'd never seen before, and I saw there was a shaped tree just to the right of the house. What's the story of that?*

Oh, the...that tree I call the dragon tree. In fact it's a dead tree on which, which is entirely overgrown with ivy, and, I decided that I didn't want to lose it. Somehow automatically it produced a topiarised kind of shape, and eventually it suggested to me a kind of dragon from a fairy story. And, I gradually pushed it into a shape which resembles, in my imagination resembles a dragon with a, with ears and a kind of, and a tail and a tongue which projects from its mouth in the form of an uncut twig which I've left there. And, the person who does work in the garden, Rachel's brother, takes great pride now in cutting it as I want it, and regards it as a kind of work of art. Which I do really.

*And I was very intrigued that you said just now that you like to be adventurous in colour, because you're not adventurous in life. I would have thought your life was pretty adventurous by most people's standards. How serious were you when you said that?*

Well, I'm only adventurous in life when it's pushed onto me, I mean as for instance during the war. I tend to be very very cautious, and if someone suggests to me some really adventurous kind of trip which would involve, oh, camping out for instance, I find now at my age if somebody says, 'Oh come on, you're perfectly capable of sleeping in a van,' and going through that kind of life, I find caution rather takes over. I have been adventurous, yes, in the sense that I've done kind of massive bicycling tours and walking tours over Austrian, over mountain passes and so on. Yes I suppose compared to a lot of people I am fairly adventurous.

*And I know you've been to New York earlier in this year to do with an exhibition, so that you obviously travel in connection with exhibitions, and you were at Yale and, again for exhibition purposes. When was the last actual holiday that you took?*

Must have been quite a long time ago. I always regard the...I always push a certain amount of time, add a certain amount of time on to these exhibition visits. For instance, the most recent one was in March this year at the Leica Gallery in New York, an exhibition of photographs, and I need only have been there about four days, but in fact I

wanted to swan around in America a bit, and, particularly in the New York area, so I stayed an extra eight or nine days. And I shall be going again in December this year to take part in a seminar about Christopher Isherwood. I need to be there only about four days but I intend to spend about ten days again.

*What else did you do on the most recent New York trip?*

What did I do? Oh, simply become a tourist, and see things like the, all the museums, particularly museums which aren't generally popular. There's a marvellous museum on Battery, what's it called? Battery...point... The place where you get the boat to see the Statue of Liberty. There's a marvellous museum which used to be a Customs house, it's a classical building, completely dwarfed by the huge skyscrapers all round it. And it's Indian art. Very few people know about it or want to see it, would want to go and see it even if they did know about it, mainly because there are so many other museums in New York. No, I on the whole become a sightseeing tourist, but in rather more obscure areas. For instance, I...the lack of adventurousness would be to take heed and warning about going into Harlem for instance, where I was warned that as an elderly person, elderly white person, I might find life quite rough there, and even be mugged or burgled or, so on. Now, I'm pretty sure that that's not true, but I do get rather nervous about that kind of thing.

*But, on the whole you've lived as you've wanted to. I mean, compared to many people you've been quite sexually adventurous. You haven't been cowed into living in a way that you didn't want to through nervousness?*

No. I mean, being...I haven't been cowed by outside opinion; I've been cowed by my own conscience I suppose, in not being too sort of grotesquely orgiastic and wild, which maybe part of me would like to have been, but my conscience takes over. And, been fairly conscientious. I wish I had been in fact more conscientious about wasting time. I think part of my younger days were taken up far too much by sitting in the sun and

getting brown. In fact one could really describe that as being vain, thinking that I looked very much more attractive when I was brown.

*But I think we've talked before about you not taking up various sexual invitations when you were in Austria or Germany, I can't quite remember where it was. But that was because that was a direction you didn't want to go in at that time; it wasn't because you were worried about what someone was going to say or think.*

No, I think the main worry is exploiting people. I don't know whether I've ever told you about being sent into Germany after the war, very close to the end of the war, weeks, to write a report about German photo-interpretation. Have I talked about that? I found myself with a very nasty little man whom I won't name, who was the Air Force part of the...there were only two of us, he was the Air Force side of the expedition, who was palpably exploiting the poverty and the lack of cigarettes and things which were being suffered by the Germans. Well now, on that occasion one was literally offered anything, sex, anything, for a cigarette, for a packet of cigarettes. And I found myself on one occasion with a very charming boy who was a refugee, who was wandering around and just wanted help, and saw me in uniform and made what could only be called advances. And to this day I'm pleased that I didn't fall into having exploited him sexually. He was extremely attractive, he wanted it I think, but I think it would have been morally very un...a very reprehensible thing to have done. So, I mean does one call that being unadventurous? No, I think possibly it's having a vestige of morals left.

*Mm. And you once told me off tape, but I don't think it was off tape because it was private, but if it was, then we'll keep it private, but, a story about Stephen being on a tube platform and being approached by somebody to do with whether he had a light or not.*

Yes. Yes.

*And I can't quite remember the details of it. But, I think that was another illustration of something you didn't feel would have been the way you could have handled it.*

Ah, well I think, the actual event would have amused me, and if it had led me into a relationship I would have had no kind of hesitation, because this particular young man was entirely responsible, and... No, I think, what I was saying about that was, that Stephen had a, had a box of matches in his hand, and went up to this young man and said, 'Have you a match?' And the young man said, 'You don't need a match, and I know what you're up to.' And so that amused me a lot. I don't think it was anything more than that to it. I think I would have, if I'd been attracted to the young man, I think I would have done exactly...thought up some means of approaching him, yes.

*And what about the level of danger that there is in that sort of encounter?*

I think one probably tended to ignore that, or maybe not be aware of it. Yes, in the days that Stephen was involved in that actual incident, it was...prison...it was an offence, it was illegal offence, yes, and he could have been betrayed. And of course blackmail played a very large part in it.

*I wasn't even thinking of that. I was just thinking of being presumably in a confined space with a total stranger. I'm thinking of physical danger really.*

Never really, it didn't really occur to me, no. Never. I mean, danger made itself of course very apparent in various episodes in the war, which I think I've talked to you about. But no, maybe unwisely. I mean thinking of course of, someone who came down here, very interested in my embroidery design, he had a very curious name which maybe I'd better not remember, and I can't remember. A handsome man, a very intelligent man, very sensitive man, wrote very interestingly a long article in the *Telegraph* about the embroidery, the Maldon Embroidery. Eighteen months ago he was murdered in Notting Hill Gate. I knew from the word go that he was gay, and that he, by his very appearance that he was quite possibly involved in quite a dangerous life in that respect, and he was. But, no, it...it never occurred to me at all.

*And were you ever in danger of blackmail?*

Yes, yes I have been in danger of blackmail, yes. Somehow or other it never happened.

*And how did you deal with it?*

I didn't have to. I mean I don't know how I would have dealt with it. I think I...I think the general conclusion, because it was, it was discussed, and I know many, quite a few people who were blackmailed, was that immediately blackmail was suggested, then you simply went to the police, and you risked yourself being questioned about the nature of the involvement, because one knew that the police regarded blackmail as a more serious offence I think.

*But when...if you...I don't know whether the sort of encounter we've talked about with Stephen with the matches, would that have been a weekly event, or twice a year, or four times a week, or...?*

I can't talk for Stephen.

*Well I was meaning for you really.*

For me? I think it entirely depended on whether a relationship turned out a happy one, and, I mean if it was happy then one continued it. If it ended in that character simply not turning up, having promised to turn up, then by that very nature of the event you didn't continue it. There was an occasion, there were occasions when people simply would give false addresses, and so you would write or turn up at an address and find out that they were simply not known there. So it was a matter of chance, yes.

*But did you think that you might spend the whole of your life with a man? One man I mean.*

Yes. Yes, I did. I...I thought that a life with a man would probably have been more easy than a life...than marriage for instance, than a life with a girl, woman. And, it just didn't happen that way. I suppose... Certainly after my first wife died, the important factor then was that I, that she had adopted a child, that we had both adopted a child, and so I had the responsibility of a child. But I do remember telling Stephen that if it were not for the child I would go and live in Greece, and that was partly because John Craxton, who was, who had been quite a friend of mine, lived a very happy life in Greece, and Greece seemed to me to offer a climate and a surrounding and a generally sympathetic environment. But because the child, and again I, I don't know whether I've told you the story about David and Stephen's advice, have I?

*I can't remember.*

Well Stephen...very quickly I'll repeat it. Stephen told me that, having David was a big thing in my life, and that it was going to completely govern my life, and that I might come very much to resent it, and therefore in a way I would be killing the child and the child would be...I would be destroying I think was the word he used, the child, and the child would be destroying me. And so he advised me to have David re-adopted. I agreed with that rather, because I saw that David's life was very insecure, and I could find no method, unless I remarried, of making it secure again. And at that point I didn't intend to remarry. So I took David to the adoption society, and I was faced with the fact that he would be taken into an adjoining room, on some very trivial excuse, and that, without having said anything to him, or him having said anything to me, he having said anything to me, I would never see him again. And I just couldn't do that. And I thought that this is not on. This is a great betrayal. And the child would never never again feel secure. So I did not have him re-adopted, and for that reason my whole life was changed, because I had to stay in England and be partly responsible for him.

[End of F8800 Side A]

[F8800 Side B]

*.....Stephen was jealous of you having a child? Was there any other motive in him in telling you, advising you to have him re-adopted?*

No, I don't think so, no. I...I mean I...I'm terribly bad at chronology, and I can't remember. This would have been in about 1940, early 1947, late '46 I think. I can't remember whether his own children had been born. I think he had, I think he already had a child.

*I didn't mean because he wouldn't have had a child, but in a sense it was somebody you might have cared about more than Stephen.*

No, I don't think Stephen was jealous. No I think he was genuinely... I think he genuinely thought that it was a bad thing for me to...that it would destroy my life, I think he genuinely thought it.

*Mm. But, was there... I mean how did you come to get married, if... When you say it might have been easier to live with a man rather than a woman, why? I mean why did you ever think of getting married? Was it because you wanted to get married as much as you didn't want to get married, or was it because it was easier socially, or...?*

It was mainly other people round me gathering together the facts of David's existence, that I couldn't look after David by myself, that for that reason it was necessary to get married. That's point number one. Number two, I needed someone to love and someone to be loved by, which is automatically assumed to be the conditions under which one marries, which aren't necessarily, although those conditions aren't inevitable of course. And also pressure of what people said. And also the fact that two friends of mine, one the brother of my first wife and his wife-to-be, really started serious matchmaking. And they happened to know that Pauline was very desperate to get married, and they thought, ah, these two things go happily together, we'll introduce Humphrey to Pauline, and click,



it'll all happen. And that's the way it went of course. Now it didn't go all that smoothly, because, after we were more or less, although privately but not publicly engaged, I got extremely cold feet, and decided, no, this is, this is just not on, I am...this is wrong for me, and I said this to Pauline. Again, have I said all this before? Partly because, although this may sound trivial it's very important, she had said something so stupid at a dinner party we were having, and I had heard a rather distinguished man called John Hayward comment on this piece of stupidity, and I thought, no, this, that girl is not for me. So I more or less told her that I think I didn't want to get married. And she had absolute hysterics, and, I mean literally physical hysterics, and started shouting and screaming, and banging pillows around, and kicking her feet around, and floods of tears, and staying that I was treacherous and a traitor, and all that. And so I thought, oh well, I'll try. And...and I did in the end get married. Now partly behind all that was the fact that, Pauline had realised the existence of David, and she was constantly saying that she would take David on, and mother him, and in fact that's what she did. So that was one, one good reason why I got married, entirely practical reason. It happened that, almost the moment we got finally married and settled down in Lavenham, David himself, who was by then five or six, got whooping cough and got whooping cough very badly, so he became a terrific strain on our marriage in a sense that Pauline had to cope with this, and had to get the doctor in and... I mean I was involved of course very much too. But that was a bad start. And for some reason or other David eventually turned out feeling very much let down by Pauline. One particular incident very very much later when he was returning with his wife-to-be from Australia, asked if we, if he could use Pauline's flat in London, of course also my flat in a sense, and Pauline said, 'No you can't, because I've got a very important' poetry reading or theatrical, actress type involvement at that time, 'and I need to be in London.' Well, David has, David literally never forgave her for that, and even now still talks about that. And so in those kind of ways, the whole thing went badly wrong. But that's anyone's life really isn't it, I mean these are just problems one is bound to have to cope with I think.

*But why did you get married the first time?*

[pause] I don't...I... It's a very good question. There was another factor, yes. Lolly was an absolutely marvellous person, she was full of laughter and love and everybody absolutely adored her. And, she... We were very, we were very close and very much in love. I adored her, partly because she was laughing the whole time, and she was very loving. And everybody round me said, 'You really can't keep this girl attached to you in the way she is...' Are we on? 'It's simply not fair for her.' I mean these were the attitudes of the time you see; you didn't have a partner, because you...you were not accepting...you were not giving the full kind of security. People expected, people thought that if you lived with someone and you didn't get married to them, that in a kind of way you were side-stepping responsibilities, particularly if the marriage ended, then the legal security, the legal system left the girl unprotected and insecure and without anything. I mean this could happen. So there was that kind of background. And my very good friends and her very good friends were quite often saying to me, 'You're being a bit of a bastard, you're having it both ways; you're living with the girl and you're evading your responsibility.' So I was kind of morally pressurised into marrying. And eventually persuaded myself that it could have been...and I think it could have been, I mean it could have been, part from, if it hadn't been for this illness. I mean how on earth can one tell? She was in fact two years older than me; how can I tell that... Let's look back ten years. I'm eighty, she's eighty-two; how can one possibly know that one is still going to be... Even earlier, I mean I'm fifty, she's fifty-two. I've always thought that it's expecting too much to be able to be, to have a relationship with the same person all one's life. How can one? I mean, one changes oneself, and one's partner changes. Not in the dramatic terms of Alzheimer or something, but one changes in attitudes, in behaviour, in physical ability. I have very down-to-earth theories why relationships break down; I think they break down in terms of, in a way, who buys the lavatory paper, who is extravagant and who is parsimonious, and that kind of thing. But, certainly I think the relationship with Lolly could have been marvellous, I can't guarantee that it would have been.

*And, did you feel on the whole that your marriage to Pauline worked, or on the whole that it didn't?*

It had its wonderful moments, it had its happy moments. Certainly... Pauline's absolute obstinate determination to have a child. Although every medic in the country told her that she had so many, I think they're called fibroids or something, in her body, having had a peritonitis operation when she was twelve, that she could never have a child, Pauline was absolutely determined that she was going to have a child, and she chased around until she found a gynaecologist called Bethel Solomons[ph] who made it possible somehow. That I admired very much. And certainly I enjoyed watching, with her watching Quentin grow up. And also watching the adopted child growing up. No, there were happy moments. I was...I was never as in love with her as I was with Lolly, no, and she knew that, and she did the kind of Rebecca thing, she...she was liable to explode occasionally, emotionally explode in terms of having this image of the perfect Lolly, which was...which of course, Lolly wasn't perfect, but the image of the previous wife who was perfection, to live up to, made things very difficult for her, and she was right, I mean that, that did happen to a certain extent. I think it was partly my fault, and... There's a very good poem of Stephen's where he scolds himself for not having loved Ines, the wife that Charles Madge ran away with, enough, not having loved her enough. And I mean quite often I scold myself for having been undemonstrative, not having been demonstrably affectionate, physically affectionate enough, yes. I mean in that, in a kind of way, she thought of me as being a rather cold person I think, which I'm not, but somehow she brought that on.

*How long did you have before she became ill?*

With Lolly?

*No, with...*

With Pauline? Oh, we were married in 1948, and she showed first signs of, of being very difficult in about 1990, so that was quite a long time.

*Mm. But you never considered splitting up, if you weren't entirely happy?*

Yes, because, I was unfaithful, she was unfaithful. We had quite...we had quite a lot of very serious, almost physical battles. She was much more physical than I, I mean she used to throw things around, and, and hit me and so on. So it was a fairly rocky relationship. And although, before we were married I made it quite clear that I was bisexual, and that I would have boys, or men, if there was any kind of unfaithfulness, and she, she simply said she would rather it was male than female. So, I was very careful to make it quite clear that I was a fairly un, would be a fairly unsatisfactory husband.

*If one's bisexual, inevitably you're not going to be faithful. I mean was fidelity any kind of ideal for you, or did you think it was not very important anyway?*

Well in the sense that I felt very guilty about being unfaithful, I, I always made it clear that there was somebody else, and she sometimes was very patient, sometimes exploded. It was...I mean we weren't kind of dishonest. I was never dishonest with her. I think I was less dishonest with her than she was with me, because, there is...there is now, at this date there is now emerging evidence of her, some affairs that she had which I didn't know anything about. But I mean I don't resent that in any way, I would think of it as more in a way my fault than hers. And, she was very attractive, very physically attractive. Have I ever given you the book of her plays?

*No.*

There's a photograph. Remind me because I will give you that. There's a photograph I took of her where she is very beautiful. She was photographed by Angus McBain as very beautiful. She was. One of the things that did get in the way was that she would never let me criticise, and in a critical way be help to her, but when she was writing a play, or doing an adaptation for radio, and she did some very good ones, she would never show them to me so that I could advise her and criticise her. Because she said that... What did she say? She said that I sapped her confidence. Well now, that's a big failing, because I know I could have been a great help. I could have helped her poetry reading, because she

did a lot of quite public poetry readings, and, I thought that she occasionally slipped up in the sense that she got the meanings of the words wrong. And I tried to help her about this, I invited her to do her reading to me, but she never would because she would say that I was far too critical. The fact that she would never never help one tiny little bit, she would never help in the garden, because she said that if she did, I was immediately too critical. That I think was just a way of avoiding having to do it. But maybe she was right, I don't know. I was always longing to, to help her. No, we...I mean, I don't know to what extent my marriage to her was a typical marriage. There are very few marriages which I know of where I, which I could describe as total, total successes. I can think of...I can think of... I mean Mary Fedden and Julian Trevelyan by all accounts was a total success, they were... On the terms that Mary was doing absolutely everything, to the extent of tying up his shoelaces and turning the etching press, which are terms which I would not have liked to establish, I wouldn't have expected that. And it is perhaps quite significant that now that Julian has died, Mary has never painted better. And this very often happens. I mean one thinks back to the evidence that William Blake was an absolute male chauvinist pig and treated his wife abominably in terms of, of cooking and, and menial tasks. And I do know that John Nash was pretty like that to Christine, and that Paul Nash was rather like that to his wife. And I've therefore always tried not to be like that.

*Was Pauline involved with your work at all, did she get...?*

Only to the extent that... I mean here again, there was a kind of totally, what appeared to me to be a false situation, that, anything I was doing, she would come into the studio and look at it, and say, 'Oh that's so exciting, that's so wonderful.' There was never... I would far rather that she had said, 'That's crap, and you must sling that and throw it away.' I mean that's what Rachel does, she just says, 'That's crap, throw it away.' I don't. (laughs) But that seemed to me that, either it was dishonest, or it was simply...what else, what else was it? It was just dishonest I think. Or just laziness, just mental laziness. She was...she was a very good liar, I mean, her whole life was based on a string of self-deceptions, and I was always trying to disclose those. And, I mean, the

thing about writing plays, when we were having conflicts together, I would suddenly in the middle of it all say, 'You know this is, this is a kind of play going on. All good drama derives from conflict, from... I mean the dreadful kind of conflicts in Strindberg's *The Father* which I saw when I was about twelve, and which seriously informed my life in a way. Pauline would absolutely refuse to believe that good drama demanded conflict, and in that sense her drama wasn't good. It could have been good, but she wouldn't take that kind of advice. She was incredibly, incredibly obstinate.

*Why was the Strindberg so important to you?*

Because it presented an absolutely heart, tearing to pieces of, of conscience, of, of conflict, of the, the wife pushing the man into insanity. I forget the details of the plot, but one realised that this hard and yet at the same time rather attractive and, and fascinating woman, was quite coldly pushing her wife into a straight...her husband, into a straightjacket. And that, I sat... I mean, at the age of twelve it was a slightly adult situation, partly because it was involved with illegitimacy and so on. Can you remember the plot of *The Father*? I can't remember the details of the plot. Ibsen's *Ghosts* also was another play which was full of that kind of conflict, to do... Again I can't remember the details of the plot, but it was about syphilis and, the essence of drama which kind of tore one to pieces really.

*I suppose actually, that's another element about infidelity, I mean was sexual diseases very worrying at that time?*

Yes, very very worrying, and... I'm amazed by the extent to which children are not aware of that now, although I believe, this very morning I heard that the Government is investing a lot of money to give serious sexual education to teenage girls who don't seem to realise that they are going to be stricken by herpes or AIDS or clap or, anything.

*But these days there are various clinics that you can find out about, not too [inaudible].*

There are, but I wonder if those kind of clinics are any less embarrassing. I mean I've had, myself had to go to those kind of clinics, on no very serious situations, but certainly in the past they have made one feel quite uncomfortable and quite sort of outcast, and a general lack of sympathy. And I can imagine clinics, I hate to be saying what would sound to be a rather anti-feminist thing, but I can...I can imagine clinics run by women looking upon teenage girls, spending a lot of money on cigarettes in the first place, and getting involved in sexual antics which have given them AIDS or herpes or gonorrhoea or, so on, being not all that sympathetic to them.

*Where was there to go when you were a young man?*

Oh there were...there were well-known... Every hospital had its VD clinic, and it took quite a lot to find out about this, but I mean in the end one found out and just went there. And then it was a question of telling friends about it, and gradually got there[???]. Particularly in the homosexual world, there were doctors who were secretly, and it had to be very secret in those days, known to be very sympathetic to gays, and to be able to give them good advice, and to take them to, to guide them to clinics, or even at huge expense treat them themselves.

*Do you know who they were, can you remember?*

Gosh I can't remember any names, no. I know there were... No, I can't remember the names, no.

*And, what was Pauline's background, had she nearly married anybody else?*

Yes, she had had quite a few affairs. She'd been involved with someone called Christopher Fremantle. She had then been involved...I'm never quite sure of this, I think with Christopher Fry. She had had... I think that was quite possibly a real affair, but I'm not sure. She had been, I know that she had a very longstanding affair with a poet called Gittings, who was married to Joan Manton, and they together were big authorities on

Keats and wrote books. I imagine you know about them. And, it's all...I've always wondered why...why these affairs petered out, why in fact Christopher Fremantle, Christopher Fry, Robert Gittings, didn't actually marry her. I've never discovered. We have recently discovered about 200 letters between Jimmy Stern and Pauline, and Desmond Hawkins was very, I think quite in love with her, yes.

*I've gone blank on who both those are.*

Desmond Hawkins was an ornithologist, a nature lover, who did, who made the BBC aware of the need for nature programmes, and who was a very big shining light behind the BBC's attitude to natural programmes. And together, because of that Pauline was very interested in birds. And she used to go... I mean the Desmond Hawkins thing in fact was a serious interruption, a serious cause of conflict between Pauline and me, because, he lived in Dorset, and she used to, at one time, round about 1985 up till 1990 perhaps, she used to go every third weekend and stay with him, which I was quite happy about, because it meant that I could have my own friends to stay here, or I could go away and stay with other friends. And I knew, perfectly knew this was going on. But the main source of conflict was that, she had no, absolutely no ideas about timing. She used to have a, every evening, to start with three evenings a week, but eventually every evening, exactly at six o'clock she would telephone Desmond, and have a conversation which might last twenty minutes, forty minutes, which was quite expensive. And anyhow, interrupted my use of the telephone, which I wanted to have. Well, she would always say that I was absolutely ridiculous, that this call...she spoke for three minutes, five minutes at the most. And when she was saying this, there were no itemised telephone bills you see. But when itemised telephone bills came, I was able, perhaps rather unkind of me, to bring her the telephone bills and say, 'Look, Blandford, Blandford, Blandford, Blandford. Blandford forty minutes, Blandford thirty-five minutes, Blandford twenty minutes.' And she would simply say, 'Well they're wrong, I mean they've got it all wrong.' (laughs)

[End of F8800 Side B]



[F8801 Side A]

Well, in the end her, the Alzheimer took over to such an extent that she couldn't any longer remember the dates that she had made, and her diary was just a mass of...

*Sorry, you've got the microphone under the...*

Oh. Oh do I... Do you want to test the...?

*No it's OK.*

Her diary was just a mass of scribbles, and she never knew whether she was booked to go for the weekend and, and Desmond used to get really quite cross on the phone, and... But nevertheless was very loyal and went on, right up to the end he went on asking her for the weekend. So that, that went on right to the end. The Jimmy Stern thing... Was he one of them you don't know about?

*I can't remember who he is.*

Well, he was a great friend, I think bisexual, friend of Wystan Auden and Stephen and Christopher, and he was married to a Middle European called Tanya, and he was an extremely good short story writer, a very very good writer. And, there are 150 letters from him to her. And we have yet, I have yet got to find out whether, whether this was a real affair. He was a, he was a very sort of, fascinating man, very grumpy man, a very accident-prone man, and the few letters which I have found time to read are strings of sort of accidents like... 'I have a thorn, a rose thorn deeply embedded in my right forefinger, and that's why my writing is so bad. And having done that, and going into the house, running into the house to find some iodine, I tripped over the mat at the front door and fell over and broke my glasses.' I mean the letters are rather like that. I've yet to find out whether they are sufficiently lovey-dovey to indicate any kind of affair.

*Where have all these letters suddenly come from?*

When Pauline went into a home, that little room there, her study, was absolutely chaotic, and Rachel, one of Rachel's major jobs was to find everything, sort everything out, and put them into boxes and things. So, they've been separated and put into boxes. What we found was absolutely unbelievable, I mean, there were nests made by mice into boxes of, of quite important books, and £5 notes, and, shredded £5 notes and so on. £82 worth of copper coins were found in handbag stuffed with these things. Which were simply her refusal to believe what was going on you see. If I picked up a bag and said, 'Look, it would be very easy to take these to the bank, I mean all you've got to do is to count them out,' she would just say, 'Mind your own business, and leave them alone. I know what I'm up to, and I need that bag to be left just as it is.' Well of course I mean we found all this afterwards. And there's masses of stuff there which we haven't yet sorted out. Quentin is very interesting. Incidentally the British Library has an archive about Jimmy Stern, and someone called Miles Huddleston, who may or may not be a son or even a grandson of Trevor Huddleston, wrote to me saying they're very interested in these letters, and they would quite possibly buy them. Quentin is quite interested in, in buying them – in selling them to the British Library. But we have to go, I think we have to go through them first, is the problem.

*Mm. Did you know Robert Gittings and Jo Manton?*

Yes, yes I met them quite often. And, I think he was a very talented man. Whether... I mean, I'm no judge of poetry, I don't know whether he was a good...was he a good poet? Don't know?

*But, was he married to Jo at the time that Pauline had the affair with him, or not?*

I think probably not, no. I think Jo stepped in between them, yes.

*And what about Christopher Fry, because, Christopher's wife didn't really join in the theatre world, she was rather someone who stayed at home.*

She was aloof from that, yes. I don't know what part Christopher Fry... I do remember when Pauline was married to me, and Jo was married to Robert, and Christopher Fry was living opposite Jo and Robert, literally opposite, you just crossed the road, we all went up to see Christopher Fry and, Phyllida was it?

*Phyl.*

Phyl. Who was then supposed to be slightly dotty, and did...well she was eccentric, but she didn't seem to me to be pretty dotty. And we had quite a nice social occasion, and they were all very friendly with each other. But that was, I mean that was purely a...nothing important emerged from it.

*Why was she thought to be eccentric?*

Phyl? I don't know, she... I think she was a bit absentminded, and, maybe this was just age. Is she still around by the way?

*No.*

No? Christopher's still alive, isn't he? Yes. He must be older than me isn't he?

*He's...*

Ninety...

*1907 he was born.*

Yes, he's ninety-three. And still in good nick?

*Not so much at the moment actually.*

No?

*Had rather a bad year. But was he part of... Pauline was in one of his plays, wasn't she?*

I think so, yes. Yes I think, I think that was how they got together. And Pauline was very friendly with Douglas Cleverdon and with Reggie Smith, who maddened her because he was always late and drunk and, and I think she felt very let down by him. But, Pauline was absolutely shameless about writing to people pleading for them to give her parts in their plays, and readings and so on. And I do know that eventually Douglas Cleverdon, I'm not supposed to know but I do know that Douglas Cleverdon got very fed up with this, and, and more or less shut her up, and more or less said, 'I have to look for new talent, I have to get new people. I can't go on recommending the same people.' At which point Pauline would say, 'Well what about Jill Balcon, I mean she's always going on reading.' Jill Balcon was her great rival in the world of poetry reading and performances in plays on the tele – on the radio. Pauline remained both admirably and maddeningly convinced that she was employable. You see in the end, simply because she wouldn't take any advice, not just from me but from anyone, in the end, I think she was dropped. Oh, the other thing about Desmond Hawkins was that he started the whole thing about the Thomas Hardy poetry readings, and she, Pauline and Desmond and an actor called Leech[ph], I can never remember his name, he was clearly very gay, Donald Leech[ph] perhaps, used to do a sort of trio, a tour, all over the place, and they went to America, and Pauline was a great success in America, and in fact still, there are letters from her American admirers still arrive here.

*Did she know Jill Balcon, did they have a sort of, friendship?*

Oh yes, I think she knew Jill Balcon, yes. Perhaps not so much when, before she married Cecil Day-Lewis, I don't know. Yes, she certainly did meet her professionally, yes.

*And what about Day-Lewis, did he come into your life?*

Only... No, not at all. He was one of those people who was occasionally in the same room that I was, but, I... With all that lot, Day-Lewis, Isherwood, Auden, MacNeice, they all seemed to me so clever that, I was struck dumb by them and never said a word, and so I didn't do anything[???].

*And did you know Pauline's parents?*

Yes, very complicated story. I think I'd better give you a handout about that. I mean, quite incredible story. Would you like me to tell it?

*Yes please.*

I mean, it is so full of coincidences that one can hardly believe it.

*Oh, wait, this....*

[break in recording]

.....came into it, only in the sense that, her mother, quite disconnected and coincidentally, was in love with one of the twins, and she knew the twins because her husband, Lolly's father, had worked on a hospital ship on the disastrous Gallipoli event in the First World War, so that, Gayer-Anderson, Major then in the Army Medical Corps, and Vincent Warren Low, Major also, were on this hospital ship, and got to be very good friends, partly because Vincent Warren Low did not know that Major Gayer-Anderson was gay, because he never gave it away. One didn't in those days. So it was natural that Vincent Low's wife met his war buddies, and she fell in love with one of these twins. And that

made it so complicated, because that was, that meant that Lolly as a young girl was one of the sort of young people that the twins found very attractive, because they were sort of bisexual in a way and they found anyone up to the age of about fifteen very attractive. I suppose they would be called paedophiles now. And so Lolly was frequently photographed in the nude, kind of romping around in the grass in the garden at Lavenham, because that was the house that they lived in, and where subsequently Pauline and I lived you see. So these...a sort of entanglement of coincidences. That's the milkman.

*Oh right. So that's all right. And if Pauline and Lolly were the two main women in your life, if...who were the men? I mean we've talked about Hugh.*

Hugh Gibb.

*And we've talked about Bill Edmostone[??].*

Yes.

*I mean if we're looking for a sort of parallel in terms of commitment to the marriages, are those the two main people?*

Yes. Bill Edmostone[ph] himself fell in love with Lolly, and, and wanted...and quite often asked her to marry him. But then he was a joker, and he was always asked my grandmother to marry him, and she would say, 'Bill, dear boy, why should you want to marry me?' And he said, 'Because of your money.' (laughs)

*Were you married to Lolly at the time that Bill would propose?*

Yes. Yes. (laughs) And, I could have lived with Bill... I didn't find him... I mean we were physical lovers, but I didn't find him very attractive physically, because he was...he was rather fat, and I was thin and very vain and... It didn't sort of work out in that way,

but I was very very fond of him. And, I don't think, if we'd started living together... We did live together, but I don't think it could have lasted a lifetime, or even very long. Then there came...well, then there came the war, and you know the story of, of Bill being made a parachutist and... He was rather proud of his Scottish descent and he decided to join the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, because he fancied himself in a kilt, and he did look very good in a kilt. And, the commanding officer suddenly summoned the whole regiment together and said, 'We have the honour of being made into a parachute regiment.' Pause. 'Anyone who doesn't fancy that, step forward.' How could you, how could you step forward? Signing a document of cowardice more or less in doing so. So poor Eddie remained doomed to become a parachutist. At which point he asked me to meet him in Salisbury Cathedral Close, and we went walking round, and he said he knew he was going to get killed, and would I... By this time he was married to the daughter of a very anti-gay judge called Pamela Blunt-Mackenzie, Pamela Oliver, Mr Justice Oliver being viciously anti homosexual. And, this girl, Pamela, had the most wonderful body, but looked like a horse. A very entertaining person. And they had a marriage which was based largely on shouting at each other and being, having what I thought were quarrels, but which they said they loved having. And he, Bill said to me, 'I know I'm going to get killed. Tell Pamela...' de-da-de-da-de-da. He was shot down parachuting into Italy, shot in the thigh, put onto a hospital ship where he got gangrene. A doctor comes up to him and says, 'I'm afraid old boy, we've got to take your leg off.' And Bill said, 'Not on...you're not taking my leg off.' And he died. And, then I remembered that... I mean Ed, Bill's death was at the time when my older brother was killed, and when Lolly was dying, and, dead I think, and so this was sort of, additional blow. And I then remembered, oh my God! Eddie said, tell...tell Pamela something, and I simply couldn't remember the message. I never have remembered the message. But I don't feel all that guilty, because, Pamela immediately married, within a month, let's say three months so as not to exaggerate, had married Bill's OCTU instructor, who was also gay. (laughs) And so, she's had three gay husbands in a very short time. Only to annoy her father, Mr Justice Oliver.

*Who was the first?*

He was called Blunt-Mackenzie, I don't know... I think he...

*Oh I see.*

I think he was a drunk, but...

*And did she stay married to the third?*

Whether she stayed married to the OCTU instructor, I don't know. I don't even know whether she is still alive.

*Mm. Was John Banting someone you could have gone on living with?*

No, no, he was... He was absolutely dotty, I mean... Well he was...he was an alcoholic, he was a drug addict, he was absolutely zany. A wonderful person to be with, he was so witty, and such a good dancer. And, no, I couldn't ever have lived with him, no. One of the reasons being that, he would have been totally dependent. I mean John never had any money, we were all supporting him, and he would pay back money in terms of drawings and, and sketchbooks and things, which was...which was good. And, he, I think he rather fell in love with me. I was horrible, I mean I was very vain and, I loved people falling in love with me, and maybe led them on rather too much. And we had a long loving correspondence, some of which I think you know is in the Tate. Caroline...

*Cuthbert.*

Cuthbert, there's a long, I forget how it all worked out. I think in the end... Yes, they've got the original, originals, and I've got the, I've got photocopies of them all.

*Mm. The one I saw was actually, or one or two, there seem to have been a long gap in your being in touch with each other, and, your letter was really saying, it would be nice*



*to see you but since you live in one place and I live in another, it's probably not going to happen. And it didn't sound very enthusiastic.*

Oh well that, again that was me, and I've... From the word...from being a schoolboy, one of my school reports said, 'Lacks enthusiasm.' And this is a kind of shyness really, that I, I have always been very undemonstrative, physically undemonstrative, and I'm... I hesitate to do what Pauline would do, and I found embarrassing that she did it, which was to rush at people and throw my arms around their neck. Of course I saw Pauline rushing at people, who flinched, and who didn't want arms round their neck. And so I've been very reticent about that. I've forgotten my train of thought now.

*About re-establishing seeing John Banting.*

Yes. I think I probably, from his point of view, I think, I did show a rather characteristic coldness, but a coldness which was based on a kind of shyness, and not wanting to be falsely demonstrative.

*Was he taking...what kind of drugs was he taking?*

There was a character called Brendadeam Paul[ph], famous in, who was one of the very first publicised drug addicts, and he was...John was into kicking the gong around, cocaine, sniffing powdered stuff, smoking early forms of hash and so on. And alcohol to a very big extent, I mean, which one really can put into the same category, on that kind of level. And, he, he got himself... I mean he would do absolutely daft, under the influence of drugs and drink, he would do absolutely daft things, like stealing the flowers which had been put round a First World War memorial stone, and he was arrested and jailed, and... Be was always in trouble, and...

*And he seems, going through the scrapbooks, there were quite a lot of things that must actually have belonged to Julian Trevelyan and Mary. He must have been terribly close to them.*

He was. Later on they supported him a lot. I mean we all supported him. He, he paid his debts in terms of paintings and drawings and sketches. Later on, Julian succeeded in having him supported by the, oh, I forget the, what it called itself. Artists who were on, who were on the rocks.

*The Benevolent Society.*

Benevolent artists' thing, yes. Julian got a subscription of support from them, and Julian and Mary themselves gave him a lot of money I think. By this time he had an extremely boring ex-boxer as his boyfriend.

*Mary seems a funny mixture really, because she's quite moral in many ways, and yet she's also able to support people who maybe have very different morals than herself.*

Yes, I think she is exactly as you described, yes, very like that. She's... I mean, Mary has been quite a, a confidante of mine, and she's always been...listened, she's always listened to my problems and to my affairs, and, she's always surprised and amazed, and, how can one fall in love, she might say, with somebody who looks like that, who is Chinese and...to my mind absolutely ravishing, and to her mind just not. And, she's just been vaguely surprised. She's never adopted any kind of moral stricture about it.

*But I would have expected her to be rather disapproving of somebody taking drugs and drinking overmuch. I mean I know there's...*

I think she did disapprove of John, yes. Partly because he became so boring. I mean it does... People who are on a constant high are very egotistical, and are doing kind of, act...are unaware of sort of limits of interest, that things just aren't interesting any more, if you... But also John, I think because of drink he lost his real originality. I mean he was, originally he was an absolutely fascinating person to be with, because, he had a kind of, eye-opening vision which was very surrealist. I mean Stephen in the end I think

found Surrealism not to be approved of, and rather predictable and boring, but Stephen was very fond of John Banting, although he would have described him as a Surrealist, and in fact introduced John to Rosamund Lehmann, and John then painted a very interesting mural in Rosamund's house at Ipsden. I wonder if that mural still exists.

*Can you remember what it was like?*

Yes, it was very abstract, but referring to natural forms presented in a very unnatural kind of way. Rather Hieronymus Bosch kind of thing. Large in scale, it was probably as high as those windows, sort of eight foot high, and surrounded a whole room, and was...was not in very brilliant colours, it was in rather polite and subdued colours. Fascinated me, I mean, from having seen... I never saw the actual mural, but I saw the photographs which John, which John had taken. Of course he was a great friend of Barbara Ker-Seymer also, and she took photographs of it. And I remember thinking that it was a marvellous mural, and always thinking of John as a very interesting artist.

*Nancy Cunard was obviously an important figure for him.*

Oh, he was very, very friendly with her, partly...again, they shared this love for coloured people. John was mad about black people, same as Nancy Cunard, whose affair with Leslie Hutchison wasn't it, called Hutch, who was a black pianist, wonderful pianist, and I mean she shocked the whole of London society by suddenly turning up with a black man, one of the first to be... But I mean there were plenty, amongst my circle of friends there was Tony Butts, John Banting, Barbara Ker-Seymer, William Plomer, Forster, a Frenchman called Rene Jamert[ph], all of them mad about black people, simply because they thought them physically very marvellous, marvellous bodies, and also intellectually. I mean the argument that black people are intellectually inferior to whites is still going on. And the argument that if black people are intellectually inferior, then it is simply because they haven't been privileged with such good education as white people, and that in terms of actual brain power, they're exactly equal. But that argument is still going on. And there are people who genuinely think of black people as being intellectually inferior.

*What was William Plomer like?*

Oh, a lovely, lovely, gentle, laughy, restrained man. I loved William, yes. I think I could have lived with William, purely on intellectual terms. But then you see, how does one ever really know people? There were things, surprising things about William, about...

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

[End of F8801 Side A]

[F8801 Side B]

About the fact that they got involved with people, in William's case, I think he was a policeman, there's no reason to suspect that that policeman wasn't a brilliant mind. But it always seemed to me, from the way William talked about him, that, he was rather bored with him as, simply as a, a friend on his own intellectual level. So there were, there were always these mysterious things going on in the background. I mean there's still this mysterious thing about Forster and Bob Buckingham, incidentally, who was extremely helpful to me in the early days of Lolly's illness, because, I think his sister had herself died of Hodgkin's disease which was what Lolly had.

*Who was Bob?*

Bob Buckingham was Forster's policeman boyfriend, man friend. But talking to Peter Parker about this, it's quite questionable as to whether there was a very active physical relationship going on.

*Did you know Forster?*

Again, one of those people whom I, whom I met, and who was extremely...whom I met, and, never...I was never alone, I always met him in company, so, the connection was very frail. But he was extremely helpful to me in trying to solve the problem of Hodgkin's, and, he sent me, he gave me names and addresses which sent me hurtling all over the place, trying to find a possible cure for Hodgkin's, which I never did of course.

*And somebody who cropped up a lot in the letters I was looking at to do with Banting, but I didn't know who he was, was Brian Howard[ph].*

Well Brian Howard[ph] was one of those characters who was, who thought it very important to be seen around with a beautiful young boy with, preferably German, with a floppy...with a lock of floppy blond hair hanging over their forehead, which was the kind

of generalisation of the physical attraction of those boys. I mean like Heinz Christopher's boyfriend, not at all like Tony, Stephen's boyfriend. Brian was a very very clever, camp person, who let me down very badly because, I invited him, I got to know him, on very superficial terms, because he was a friend of John Banting and a friend of the people I used to meet. And I invited Brian to a very carefully prepared meal which took me the whole day in the flat where I lived in Upper Montagu Street, and he never turned up. So I was a kind of Charlie Chaplin with a beautifully laid table and a marvellous meal waiting. And in a sense, I found myself unwilling to go on with that particular connection. Because clearly he, he didn't give a damn really, I mean, he was very important to himself and something better turned up for that evening.

*Did he work?*

I don't think he needed to work. He was very deeply into writing and into literature. Maybe he had a kind of editorship. I think he was connected in some way with the *New Statesman*.

*And were he and Banting partners?*

He and Banting were always quarrelling. We had a kind of regular meeting at the Café Royal, which was John Banting, myself, Brian Howard[ph], Stephen Tomlin, Eddie Gaythorne Hardie, and one other whose name I forget. I've included Brian have I?

*Mm.*

And this inevitably turned out to be a kind of, slightly alcoholic shouting match between John Banting and Brian Howard[ph], and Eddie Gaythorne Hardie and Brian Howard[ph]. So Brian Howard must have been a very quarrelsome kind of character, I think.

*Who was Tomlin?*

Tomlin was a sculptor, who committed suicide in the end. I think probably rather a good sculptor. He was quite a friend of Barbara Ker-Seymer. Occasionally Barbara would be in on those Café Royal parties, because Barbara and John Banting were very close. She adored, she adored his kind of surrealist behaviour. And I think she supported him quite a lot too.

*Did anybody else take the drugs with him?*

That I don't know. He never...apart from smoking hash which was quite sort of mild, he never tried to persuade me to, to take drugs. He... I think, he was mad about the music of, of Cab Calloway, and, he explained to me that one of Cab Calloway's more famous records which was called *Kicking the Bomb Around*, he explained to me that 'kicking the bomb around' was the Harlem phrase for sniffing cocaine. What's the other great drug? Heroin. Which I think are all forms of opium aren't they? And, again, leads into another aspect of John's talents; he was a wonderful dancer, and he could put on a record of Cab Calloway, and do absolutely enchanting kind of dances. He was extremely live, and... [pause] I think that's about all I have to say.

*Mm.*

You must spark me off again.

*Can I just ask you, did you ever...did you meet or did he ever talk to you about Bernard Meninsky? Because he was taught by Meninsky, wasn't he?*

Well, he certainly convinced me to like Bernard Meninsky's work, and I still do. And, yes, John gave me...John educated me a lot about painting and Surrealism. I was very very influenced by John, and in fact one of those letters, I think he accuses me very strongly, and tells me not to be so influenced by him, and to take off on my own. Oh he was a very influential person. One of the things that John gave me as a repayment of

some quite big debt was a publisher's dummy, one of the Hogarth Press, John Lehmann publisher's dummies, which John had used as a sketchbook. And that was full of... I sold it as a matter of fact to a rather doubtful character, a doctor in Leeds, and probably didn't get nearly as much as I should. Which John had filled with all kinds of drawings of, ballet costumes. He did a very good ballet, he did the sets and the costumes for a very good ballet in which a Russian dancer called Riabouchinska starred, and Barbara Ker-Seymer was asked to photograph it for *Vogue*, and she felt she, technically she couldn't cope with it, so she got me to do it. And I have a whole set of pictures of that ballet. And of John occasionally strolling onto the stage, and putting a word in here and there. Wearing his beret with... He went totally bald very early.

*I think we ought to have a break in a minute, because...*

Yes.

*We've gone on rather a long time. But in terms of, at this point, sort of tracking down the main emotional relationships, and marriage type relationships, are there other men who are really significant in that way who we should include in order to balance it?*

Well, there are men... Yes, there are plenty, yes. There's Hugh Gibb.

*Hugh and Bill we've talked about.*

Hugh and Bill we've talked about. And there was a Chinese man called Chim Lam, who I was madly in love with, although I don't think he was a very strong influence on me. Stephen was a very very strong influence on me. Christopher Isherwood.

*But I'm talking about in terms of love affairs.*

Oh love affairs, yes. No, I don't think there were, no.



*And the Chinese man came into which part of life?*

The Chinese man was really quite late, I suppose, probably '70, '75-ish, yes.

*And just before we end, what sort of period did you have your flat in Upper Montagu Street?*

That was from 1931 when I was twenty-one, and I must have had it for, I would think about three, four years, yes.

*Mm.*

And then I had a flat in, in Ladbroke Gardens, with Lolly. I mean, Lolly was quite often in Montagu Street, so that was... I might have had that till 1933-ish, Montagu Street, and then I got a flat in Ladbroke Gardens.

[break in recording]

*Over lunch you were just telling me about Nancy Spender, about whom I had completely forgotten. And I wondered if, just so we've got it on tape, you wouldn't mind saying again how she fits in with your family.*

The connection. Yes. My oldest brother Michael, elder brother Michael, was killed a day after the war ended, Second World War, was originally married to a German girl called Erica, I've forgotten her surname, who separated, they got separated. Because Michael was largely away on scientific expeditions, like Everest and the Great Barrier Reef and so on. And, eventually Michael fell in love with Nancy, then Coldstream, Bill, the wife of Bill Coldstream, the head of the Slade, and a good painter. And they married, and, he produced a son from each wife. The first wife produced John Christopher Spender, who is a mysterious, likeable, stressed-out character; and Philip, who is outwardly very calm and contented, and handsome, and, has also three children, one girl

who is incredibly beautiful, and two boys. All of whom in fact were at my private view. Although I think by the time you'd...I think Isabel turned up, Isabel, who is an absolute dream of beauty, turned up rather late I think.

*At your private view or the ninetieth [inaudible]?*

At the gallery, at the private view. Did you come to that?

*No I couldn't come to the opening.*

No you couldn't come.

*I did come to the show separately. And, and Nancy had been married before and went on to have other relationships didn't she?*

Oh, had she?

*Well Louis MacNeice was one of the ones.*

Oh she...she had a terrific relationship, love affair with Louis MacNeice, which she described in very great detail on radio. So that if you wanted the details of that, she might even refer you to that tape.

*Oh, sorry, so, was Nancy Sharp her maiden name?*

Nancy Sharp was her maiden name, yes. And she painted under the name of Sharp. And in fact there's an amusing story about how Bill Condstream was on the selection committee of the Royal Academy, and saying, 'No, no, no, yes, yes, no, yes, no.' And one of Nancy Sharp's paintings was carried in front of him and he said, 'No,' and somebody nudged him and said, 'Bill, that's Nancy's, that's one of Nancy's.' And he said, 'Oh, oh, oh, yes.' (laughs)

*Did he mind when she went off with Michael, was he heartbroken?*

He was very gloomy. When I was with him in Bolton, where he was somehow involved in Mass Observation, yes he was very much involved, because he was painting pictures... Hang on, I've just got to retrieve my glasses.

[break in recording]

.....painting some, now very well known pictures. But in the evenings he and Graham Bell, a South African artist, who was killed later on in the war, we used to go out searching for food, and in Bolton in 1937 it was very difficult to find any place to eat after six o'clock in the evening, because the north country habit then was to eat very early. And Bill was in an extremely gloomy mood, partly I think because of Nancy running off with Michael, and partly because he found the Bolton and the north country very depressing. To a certain extent we all did, yes.

*And, you said that Michael was rather arrogant.*

Michael was a kind of genius. Intolerant, impatient, arrogant. Probably very unintentionally. Who could be arrogant intentionally? Yes, it was clearly unintentional. But very very knowledgeable, and competent, efficient and sure of himself. Tending to be very outspoken about what he called incompetence. And one of the reasons why he didn't ever want to get into uniform in the Second World War was that he knew that he couldn't call rear admirals and air vice marshals incompetent idiots, which he did up to the time he was himself put into uniform, because he was a very important figure in Photo Interpretation.

*So in adult life was he quite a difficult brother to have?*

He was beginning to be human. One of his great difficulties was that, he had a, a kind of conventional sense of humour, so that, a good joke would make him laugh. But he had no sense of fun or sort of giggling, and I think everybody found that about him, but... Towards the end of the war, because I got to know him rather better then, because we were both working in the same establishment, the headquarters of Photo Interpretation in Medmenham near Henley, and he was really beginning to be very, to have a sense of fun and to be human. All the girls in Menmenham, and there were many, WAFs and Army girls there, absolutely adored him. He was very handsome, and, just incredibly clever. What else can one say, except it was a, potentially a marvellous life cut very short. I think he, his relations, I think he found relationships very very difficult. He quarrelled... I know that he quarrelled a lot with his first wife, and I know that both Erica and Nancy complained bitterly that he seemed always to want, to wish to get away from them, and the reason he wanted to get away from them was that in general he hated what he called, what he would think of as conventional civilised living. He liked sleeping on the floor; he liked the open air. He thought civilisation as it was becoming was nonsense. He was...he was restless, a very restless person.

*And how involved was he in your life as adults, did he show interest in your work, did he overlap the circles you were in?*

Not as much as I would have liked, no. When I was, up till the age of eight or nine, I thought of him as god. He was absolutely wonderful. It seriously upset me when I, when I was told that Paderewski was a better pianist than Michael. I simply couldn't believe that there could be anyone who played the piano better than he did. Similarly the violin, or the organ, because he played all very well. So I thought of him as god. And then, Stephen somehow took over from that, and Stephen became my god, and Michael rather faded away. But he faded away because he always distanced himself from the family from a very early age. When we all used to go on family holidays, we used to go to Salcombe and Fowey, and Michael by then was an expert sailor, could handle a small boat, at the age of about fifteen, sixteen, and later on became a half-blue in sailing, and he distanced himself, he just went off on his own in his sailing boat. Occasionally he would

ask me to become his crew, and he was...he was always very intolerant as a boss, and being a crew for him was very difficult, one was totally incompetent, and always did the wrong thing. I remember him becoming very rude. But then sailors do tend to do that.

*And how did he and Stephen get on as adults?*

In a very inconsistent way. Michael had been fairly mocking about Stephen. A famous occasion when he looked at Stephen's socks, and Stephen was by this time very tall, sort of, nearly six foot I think, Michael observed that Stephen's socks had vertical stripes, and he said, 'Just like you Stephen to emphasise your verticality, by vertical stripes in your socks.' Which reduced Stephen completely to a state of helpless giggling. And, no, Michael was very mocking, and contemptuous of Stephen after a time. But later on, somehow they came together, because, one reason was that, when Auden and Isherwood wrote a play which had to do, I can't remember the title, which had to do with exploration, Michael was called in so that they could pick his brains, and also... Michael was unaware of this I think, but, they wanted to make kind of observations of his sort of character, as the kind of person who would get on with other people living in a tent and living a hell of a primitive kind of life. The psychology of the explorer, they wanted to investigate, and so, Michael was used as a kind of guinea-pig. And I think at that stage, as Stephen and Michael became closer... I think if you were to task Stephen to talk about Michael, he would talk about him in fairly affectionate terms, yes.

*And what about with your sister, Michael?*

We were all horrible to my sister I think. We were always accusing her of treading on the toy railway lines, and telling her she, her feet were too big, and...

*What about in adult life?*

I think again we failed in taking enough interest in her life. Particularly since she became a Roman Catholic convert, and that created a kind of, a barrier between us I think. And

also, because she... She was sort of frightened of...she would have been very frightened of the kind of life that we were all living, and she never... It's difficult to speak for someone without completely knowing the facts. I think probably Christine... She never married. I think she was absolutely terrified of any kind of sexual relationship. I mean how does one know? Maybe she did have one. She did fall in love with our friends. Eddie was rather naughty with her, because, he was rather gallant towards her, and used to ferry her across traffic, crowded roads, by holding onto her elbow, and pushing her along, and I think she rather liked that. I think she rather fell for, for him, and was always being disappointed. It's difficult to talk about her, because I really don't know enough about her.

*That was the other thing we wanted to clarify, is who you mean by Eddie.*

Ah. The person I call Eddie was Bill Edmostone[ph], who was one of my greatest friends, and lover, and who was a student at the...with me, a fellow student, at the Architectural Association.

*I think we've talked about him, but I wasn't sure always that he was the Eddie.*

Yes. And, the other confusing thing is that, Eddie was Eddie Gaythorne Hardie. But I wouldn't ever refer to Eddie Gaythorne Hardie as Eddie.

*So, that's great. And actually that cropped up because, I'd asked you what it was like living in Upper Montagu Street, and you told me an anecdote about the Great Cumberland Hotel.*

Oh yes. Eddie, Bill Edmostone[ph], never had any money, and so in a way I was sort of supporting him, and sometimes paying him to be a kind of assistant. And he stayed a lot with me, in fact he lived really in Upper Montague Street with me. We used to live a kind of, never going to bed till very late kind of life, sometimes working, and sometimes just gadding around. And, we had a habit of, every morning it really was, between,

probably after one, one o'clock at night, one o'clock in the morning, we would go to the Cumberland Hotel in Marble Arch and each of us would have a chicken carcass for a shilling each. And we would spend ages pulling this carcass to bits and sucking all the bones. They left an incredible lot of meat on them of course. And to this day I, nothing I like more than pulling apart a chicken carcass and picking the bones with my teeth.

*Did you ever go into the hotel?*

We didn't ever ask to see a room. I think, there were occasions, yes, when we took a lift up, and rather guiltily wandered around the corridors, looking at the pairs of shoes left outside bedrooms and things.

*Was it a smart hotel?*

In a totally middle-class kind of way, yes. I mean, it didn't compare with the Savoy or the Ritz, but it was a, a kind of very middle-class, fruity interior décor, luxe, it was a kind of luxurious... Marble, lots of marble.

[End of F8801 Side B]

[F8802 Side A]

*And do you remember how you first came across the idea that they would sell you this chicken, do you know how it began?*

Oh, well it just began by having no money, and the waitress coming up... Eddie was the kind of young man that waitresses absolutely loved, he had thick black, rather sleek black hair, and a rather, sort of dago appearance. And the waitresses would inevitably, being rather bored at that time of the night, would come up and say, 'What would you like?' And Eddie would say, 'Well we haven't any money, so...' – we both said we haven't any money – 'so what would you, what can you cough up?' And they would say, 'Ooh, we know the very thing. We have chicken carcasses; normally they're thrown away, but you can have one for a shilling a time.' Well actually a shilling in those days wasn't all that cheap, it was probably nearly £1 in present-day money wasn't it.

*But you mean they were open for serving meals at that time?*

They were open for serving meals, yes. All night.

*And what else do you remember about that area at the time?*

I remember the cinemas. Quite honestly I, I haven't any very exceptional memories about... I was always excited by being in, in London. London I always found exciting. That area, of course Cumberland Hotel had one façade in Oxford Street and so, Oxford Street was, was a lively place, I mean there was a lot of night life going on, and there were interesting lights, and shop windows, and, I think, everything that appealed to a young, a person of my age.

*And you were...because we've been talking about the Great Cumberland Hotel, it reminded you about one of the Lyons Corner Houses at, was it Oxford Circus?*



Yes, there was another...the...the Lyons Corner Houses were parts of London which appealed to us because of their exotic interior decoration. There was one particular one in Tottenham Court Road, opposite the Dominion Theatre, which had, which disguised what was then a rather remarkably modern kind of engineering, architectural construction, big columns which fanned out at the top. The fanning out was to do with cantilever, cantilever which supported the floor above, but they turned this fanning out into a kind of, almost equivalent to Gothic vault, and they had encrusted it with mosaics of mirror and coloured stones, pieces of gold mosaic and so on. So it was a very very fruity interior where, a kind of night life of, I suppose, I suppose prostitutes and so on were loving the kind of luxury of it, smoking themselves to death, and, and being treated to cream cakes and things by their, people who picked them up.

*So, again that was open late, was it?*

Well we never...I never experienced the Tottenham Court Road one late, because, that one was in our lives because the Architectural Association itself was in Bedford Square, which was literally three minutes' walk away from Tottenham Court Road and Oxford Street. And so we would go there, maybe late in the evening, after we'd finished being students at the Architectural Association.

*And while we're on the Architectural Association, you mentioned Margaret Church, and I wonder if you could tell me a bit more about her.*

She was in the year above me. She had a sister called Kitty. Margaret Church herself married, as you obviously know, Lubetkin. She was very beautiful. I think Lubetkin thought of himself as a lucky man. That's really about all I know of her.

*You don't remember her character particularly?*

No, I... We confined ourselves very much to our own year, and because she was a year above me, I didn't know her very well.

*And remind me how Tatton-Brown crept into everything[??]?*

Well Tatton-Brown was the same year as me, doing exactly the same thing, doing the same kind, the same projects. And, he was very tall, and we used to laugh at him rather a lot. And he appeared to be very very respectable, until one day, in one of those silences which sometimes happens when there's a crowd of people in a room, suddenly there's a silence, this rather respectable Tatten-Brown suddenly came out, 'Do you know what the best definition of buggery is?' And we said, 'No, tell us.' And he said, 'Enlarging the circle of your friends.' (laughs) And of course we, we all collapsed. I still think it's rather a good, funny definition. Later on, we called him Tatting, and he and Bill Edmostone[ph] and myself and Andrew Carden, and a student called Evans, all decided to go on a massive bicycling tour in France from Bordeaux to Genoa, up and over and down the Pyrenees, into Perpignan, and from Perpignan along until we got to Genoa, through Ventimiglia and so on. And we did this, though of course there were various quite funny episodes on the way. I've omitted one character in that expedition who was called Clissold Tuely, t-u-e-l-y, who married Lolly's sister Di. And Clissold Tuely was one of those punsters who couldn't go through a day without four or five absolutely wicked puns. One of his better puns was, 'Better violate than never.' That's the only one I can remember. (laughs)

*But what were the... Having made this comment, did Tatton-Brown sort of just become part of your circle in a very active way, or not?*

Then he subsided into respectable silence. And, it turned out that he was silently listening and silently amused by our kinds of conversation, and pretending to be very respectable and very shocked. I think he reverted to a very respectable life because he became one of the chief architects for the London County Council. In fact I think in the end he was Sir William Tatton-Brown, yes.

*And did you stay in touch with him, or not?*

No. I stayed in touch with him quite a long time I think because, I still occasionally, about once every three months, come across a list of photographs which he borrowed from me which he has never given back, and, I wish, wish he had given them back. But I never did anything about it.

*Right. And we've gone on a sort of long winding route this morning, which really started off with you talking about Julian Trevelyan teaching you how to do etching. What was he actually like as a teacher? I mean I know he wasn't your, it wasn't a teacher-student relationship, but when he was teaching you, how did he go about it?*

Well really there were two stages of Julian you see. One when he had command of speech and he was very eloquent, and able to lecture, and be very knowledgeable, which he was about painting and about his own training in Paris, and his meeting up with the famous etcher whose name I am trying to remember but can't.

*Was it Hayter.*

Hayter, yes, his meeting up with Hayter. And because he met Hayter, he was, he became very very experimental in techniques, employing accident, which I was describing in my attempts to do my own etching. And he became a devoted, for a time he became a very devoted Surrealist, and a disciple of all the then, and subsequently modern, very modern painters. I mean I think he actually, he met up with Picasso and Giacometti and all the famous heroic figures of modern art who were in Paris. And so, that was the background of his teaching, and he was a good teacher in the sense that, what he said made very good sense, and was understandable. And he never talked any kind of high-flown, mysterious kind of language.

*But when he was teaching you to etch, where did it take place?*

The experiments, I think were in his own etching area, in his own house in Hammersmith. Rather than the College. I think the...his teaching at the College really had to be confined to students and not to friends. I think it could have become an awkward thing if he brought all his friends in. But he taught quite a few of us. And he was very practical, and dealt very well with the purely technological aspects of it, the acids and... And he, he was very instructive about aquatint and mezzotint, and the reasons why one did it, and, he demonstrated very clearly, and generally very successfully. Yes, he was a very good teacher. I think there was only one area which I, where I didn't approve of his teaching, and that was about colour, because, I had by that time genned up on colour because I wanted to give lectures on colour myself at the College, realising that no, no textile student who ever came into our department, who had been three years in a provincial art school, no student ever knew anything about colour. And I thought that was rather disgraceful, so I decided to give, not what I would call colour theory, but colour knowledge.

*We did talk about that long one-day lecture.*

Yes, and I gave a, I devised this lecture.

*Yes. But where did you differ with Julian then?*

Differ?

*Over colour.*

Oh, that he...I thought he was rather inaccurate, and that he didn't know enough about it. Partly because I'd read about twenty-eight books and he'd probably read only about ten.  
(laughs)

*And would you actually argue with him, or did you just let it go?*

No, I never argued with him. I didn't want to appear to be...I didn't want any sort of one-upmanship going on.

*And when you, I think you were saying there were sort of two phases of Julian, one before he got ill and one afterwards. When he got ill, what kind of communication was possible with him?*

Well, very difficult. Because to start with, he could hardly respond at all, and one had to pretend to understand what really appeared to be just sort of grunting noises. And in that, in that way I think Mary was very remarkable, and no doubt she is able, she has probably talked to you about it, that she, by sheer patience and encouragement, and love, because she absolutely adored him, I think she gave him back, brought him back to, never quite to normal speech, but to a very comprehensible speech, I mean recognisable words. It took a long time, they took a long time coming out. And always Mary was sort of by his side, encouraging him and so on. So, I mean that was very touching.

*Did she change as he became ill, and he died?*

Well her own health of course has worsened, and she has had this bad sort of leg problems and, leg trouble, and ulcerations and things. And I think she has, because she hasn't had the actual physical effort to produce, the physical effort of looking after Julian, because he did need looking after like a child, he demanded that; whether he needed it or not I don't know, because that is no longer a part of her life, she is able to devote much more of her time to painting, and I think her painting has vastly improved. Certainly it's become very much more successful. I mean she is one of the most successful artists around.

*But in terms of her character and mood, she's pretty much the same as she always was?*

I think so, yes. I think so.

*Mm. And going back from what Julian was teaching you etching for, it was the images of the reeds that we were talking about. Were you using the reeds as they were upright in the water, or by the water or whatever, or are we talking about reeds which have been cut, or arranged or...? What was it that interested you?*

There was never any artificial arrangement. I was simply observing and enjoying them in seasonal change, starting as being very upright and vertical, and grouped, and ending up in the winter as having collapsed and formed these most remarkable clumps of falling and twisting and bending, angular sometimes, patterns.

*And was there a particular site that you would go back to to see the same?*

No, I would...I would simply walk along... We've got these marvellous walks around here, in both directions, one towards Chelmsford and one towards Maldon, and there's a towpath all along the Chelmer and Blackwater, and if you walked any distance at all you always came across some configuration of reeds which was absolutely fascinating.

*And would you then draw? What would happen?*

I did a lot of outside drawing, and in general that was, has been and still is part of my method, is to do outside, rather conventional, slightly boring drawings, and then bring them back, and either build up the original drawing into something rather different, ceasing to be bullied by the actual surroundings... One of the problems of being an outdoor painter I think is not to be bullied by the actual fact in front of you, but to allow freedom for the imagination. So I would bring outside drawings back into the studio, and then either work them up into some, different surface, enlarge them, and make any kind of painting, watercolour, oil colour, pastel, paintings from them. And that's really been my principle all the time. I mean whereas Mary can carry around with her a sketchbook and do marvellous drawings, which are, are very...which are scarcely descriptive, they...they hardly relate to what she's looking at, immediately she converts them into her own mental images, which are very interesting images, I could never do that with the

subject in front of her, in front of me. Mary doesn't seem to be bullied. Similarly, Julian would carry around a sketchbook, and he also was able to avoid being bullied by the actual fact.

*Did you ever go out walking and drawing with them?*

Well we spent a holiday in, partly in Yugoslavia. Yes, one holiday in Yugoslavia, Pauline and I and Julian and Mary, in which Mary had the fairly frequent kind of struggle with Julian making public protests about radios being played in the hotel dining room, and he demanded that that radio should be turned off. And the bloke refused, quite rightly refused to turn it off, and Julian got into an absolute rage. I mean a real rage, sort of flinging of his arms around, and shouting and yelling, and Mary had to gently extract him from the dining room and take him for a walk around the local church. And...

*Was that typical?*

Yes, he did get into rages, yes, he got into a rage. And then, we had, when Quentin was about twelve, which means, forty-eight minus thirty...which means thirty-six years ago, we went...we were all in Florence together, and then, Pauline had a violent... Julian absolutely totally lost control with Pauline for some reason or other, totally trivial reason, and that cast rather a shadow over our subsequent relationships. And then, and yes, we had two or three, there were two or three occasions when Pauline had hysterics, and Julian got very stroppy about it. We had these two friends, we had these friends, the gay gynaecologist and the, a gay music master at Oundle. Did Mary talk about Tom Eland[ph] and Dick at all?

*I actually didn't do the recording of Mary.*

Oh you didn't do the recording.

*Mel Gooding did it.*

Well there were these two, and they had a, a house in the Bay of Naples, a place called Mussulobrenzi[ph], and we went on holidays with Mary and Julian there, and we used to...drive? Yes, we must have driven there. Anyhow, en route, Julian had a terrible scene with Pauline, and, Pauline was very quick-tempered herself, so I mean these were real slanging matches, and, it interrupted future relationships of course very much.

*What would they be about?*

Oh, route finding... Julian was absolutely convinced that he was a walking atlas, and that he knew backwards, he knew absolutely, automatically he knew where to go. And Pauline was equally obstinate and convinced that he was going in completely the wrong direction. I have to say that, Julian would have been more accurate than Pauline, because I mean, Pauline hadn't a clue about map-reading or direction or anything. And so they had that kind of row. Of course we were late, and we were still looking for accommodation, and Julian got lost, and... I think Mary was driving, and Julian was guiding, and Julian got lost. I mean, purely daft...

*But although they were over things of the moment, that there was some hangover left on the holiday?*

Yes. From the first row, there was an occasion in Mussulobrenzi[ph] when Pauline became passionately wanting to ring up to find out how Quentin was, and, somehow or other that developed into a terrible row between them. And at that stage, Mary has told me she became, not wanting ever again to have Pauline around on those holidays. So it all rather broke up.

*But your relationship with Mary is now re-established isn't it?*

I never broke a good relationship with Mary really. I wish I could see more of her. I wish she would... I mean she is a very tricky person, because, I would love her to come



down here, and she won't, partly because it's a very unpleasant drive down here; for some reason or other she doesn't want to take the train. Whereas she will go and see a lot of other friends. So I have a kind of reserved area where I'm rather annoyed with her, but we still get on very well.

*Mm. But apart from the quarrels, I mean what else happened on the holidays, did you have a pattern of how the day was spent? You obviously all were doing some work as well.*

Well he were, we were able...we were doing our drawing, and, and then we were all passionate museum, gallery-goers, and, and Julian was very very knowledgeable in a way which I could never be, because, if I read a history of art, or a history of a limited area of art, I can understand it and take it in, but ten days later I've forgotten everything. Whereas Julian, it seemed built in, and he was able to talk very interestingly about Carpaccio and Donatello and, and he knew, just knew a lot about it. So he was a very interesting to go with. And since, Quentin, since being on that holiday in Florence, has always accused me of not having told him enough about the history of painting. However much I say, 'But Quentin, if I had tried tell you, I'd have got it all wrong,' but he's still very accusing that I didn't tell him, nearly as much as Julian told him.

*Where did you stay in Florence?*

We had a, Mary and Julian had some very good friends, whose name I forget, who had a flat in Florence, and they used to lend it to us. And one of the...the cause of the big row in Florence was that, Quentin and Pauline went out to get some kindling, wood, for the stove, because we had to light a wood-burning stove, and there was plenty of solid, big pieces but there wasn't any kindling. And they came back with a load of kindling wood, which they proceeded to drop all over the marble floor, and Julian got absolutely furious, absolutely furious, he had one of his rages, and sort of said, 'How dare you go out and mess up somebody else's flat.' And at this... I think these were in the days when he had his entire speech, I mean I think it was a really big row.

*So you must have been quite frightened.*

Oh Julian, Julian had these, almost insane attacks of fury, yes.

*Did they happen at the College?*

Yes. I remember meeting him, seeing him once walking down Camden Hill, past Camden Hill Gardens, shouting and waving his arms about, and... He was a very neurotic man.

*Why was everyone so fond of him?*

[pause] Mm. Well he was a lovely man. He was...when he wasn't in a rage, he was...he was the most friendly, courteous, intelligent, interesting, instructive, educative, liker of good things, appreciator of good painting, possessing a lot... A lot of attitudes of not... I mean he would have...he would have hated this room. He hated things lying around. He would have said, 'Take them away Mary, take them.' And he refused to allow any kind of, of clutter. Incidentally Mary has become much more liable to have bowls of shells and things lying around now that Julian isn't there. But he hated... He was a real, a real kind of character. And also, I think... I'm never quite sure about his painting. Stephen thought he painted like a, a baby waving his arms around in a pram. (laughs) Clearly didn't think much of his painting. But there was something very endearing about his painting, and a lot of people think of him as quite a great painter of course.

*Did he get in rages with Mary?*

Yes, he did, yes.

*And how did she respond?*

Oh very lovingly, and calmingly, and I mean... I mean the rage in Yugoslavia about the radio was... Mary was very much a part of the thing he was raging at, he was sort of saying, 'Mary, why can't you stop them? Why do you have to... why do you allow it? Let's go.' And Mary would say, 'No, we don't need to go.' And he would say, 'I insist on going.' No, she had to bear quite a lot of the brunt.

*She didn't ever get enraged with him?*

I don't think ever, no. I'm always very... I mean, in the sense that, in a very sort of loving and, and un-accusing way, she would sort of gently complain that Julian expected an enormous amount of labour from her, cooking. I mean Julian would invite sort of eight people to supper, and Mary was responsible, I mean Mary had to cook it. And then afterwards Mary would have to wash it up. If there were guests like me around, I would always help her, but I... and I think probably other guests helped. But, but he was a real male chauvinist pig really.

*And, for somebody who doesn't know Mary, she is coming over as being rather a weak doormatty sort of person. But she's not.*

No. Somehow, she made it all a matter of love. I mean I think, I think she did absolutely adore him. And, I think she suppressed any element of complaint, and simply regarded that as part of being married to Julian, one simply did everything. One cooked and washed up, and turned the wheel of the etching press, and then said, 'Julian, what next, what do you want now?'

*And, do you think he really loved her?*

Yes, I think so, yes, I think so. I think it was more the other way round, I think Mary loved him more than he loved her. I think his love for her was in terms of her being the kind of manager of life. I mean, I mean it... Although of course, it was his friends, like Barenson[ph] and other sort of famous painters, and the family connection, I mean the,

the Trevelyan connection, the G M Trevelyan thing, the Rawley-Trevelyan[ph] thing, and there are so many distinguished Trevelyans that immediately....

[End of F8802 Side A]

[F8802 Side B]

Is it on?

*Yes.*

Mary drifted into Julian's life, which was a kind of high-minded intellectual life, concerned with famous and distinguished people, like Julian Huxley, all the distinguished Trevelyans, G M Trevelyan, Rawley[ph] Trevelyan. And I think she liked that, and she liked the kind of socialising. And they became famous for the, the Boat Race party, I mean which was a gathering of, of all the famous intellectual people, like Cyril Connolly and Virginia Woolf and Leonard Woolf and, any famous name that you care to think of, they went to the Trevelyans' Boat Race party.

*And was Mary equal to it intellectually?*

In a way I would say not, but she had a, she had a very good ear for the funny story. Another of their famous friends were of course Bertrand Russell, and she gave a hilariously funny imitation of Bertrand Russell. And so... She developed her own kind of independent, unintellectual kind of character. She never pretended to be very knowledgeable and...but she was very appreciative, and she accepted being educated by Julian.

*And what were the Boat Race parties like?*

They were...they were very crowded gatherings of people wanting to meet each other again. They were a reason for whole groups of highly qualified intellectual people to meet up, and, and drink a lot, and exchange, possibly trivialities. But they were a big social scene, yes.

*And did people dress up to go?*

In kind of, un, informal, careful but, but not respectable... I mean, people took a lot of trouble about their clothes. Almost a kind of fancy dress party, one wanted to look good and... And there was always a chance of making some wonderful new friend there. Which I did in fact do.

*With whom?*

I think it was there that I first met Joanna Thornton, whose name was, John Harvey, her maiden name was Harvey. And she was a very beautiful girl, with whom I had an affair, suddenly and unexpectedly. She suddenly decided it should become an affair. And she married an absolutely crazy, insane person, called Philip Thornton, who became, who turned out to be a real freak, and an absolutely pathological liar. Used to have...pick up the telephone, and unknown to Joanna he used to hold the, the thing down, and so that the telephone wasn't connected, and he would have a long conversation which really was, with nobody, but I mean he would invent it. So that he would deceive Joanna about what he was going to be doing that evening, he would sort of say, 'Well, OK let's meet then at such-and-such a place.' There was nobody there of course, and it took Joanna a long to discover this.

*What was he up to?*

Oh, he was an absolute freak in every possible way. He was inclined to wear ladies' pink knickers. They had to be pink, according to Joanna. (laughs) And, oh! Well I can hardly...I...they were so unbelievable, these stories, that I really can't remember them.

*But why was Joanna at Mary and Julian's, what was her...?*

Now why did she get into that circle? Maybe she was taken there, maybe Philip Thornton was one of Julian's friends, and she was taken there by Philip. Anyway suddenly she turned up, and I, I... She was very very beautiful, and I adored her.

*And when did she come into life?*

Into my life?

*Mm.*

Oh, probably not before 1935-ish, that kind of thing, '34. Probably when I was a student at the AA, yes.

*And did it just fizzle out, did she stay in your life?*

No, she died of, she died of some dreadful kind of cancer. She died very young in fact. Oh it went on for a very long time. And it happened also that, when I was stationed in Salisbury during the war, her mother lived very near Salisbury, and occasionally we would meet in her mother's house, so it went on to a certain extent during the war.

*Was she someone you might have married?*

No. No, she was quite stupid. (laughs) Awful thing to say.

*And did you know the Mansers? I mean there were quite a lot of people who lived on that Chiswick Mall stretch, did you know that community?*

No I didn't. It was Manser who wrote that book wasn't it? Unfortunately... I think she...she illustrated... It's called *Modern Houses* or something. Can you see it there?

*José Manser or Michael?*

José I think. And I was sent the book to review, because it had this house in it, and the description was so inaccurate, and all the kind of tabulated... Facts were so inaccurate,

that I gave the book a rather bad review, which one should never do really. And that caused a lot of offence of course. So I've really never been able to know... (laughs)

*One of the people who used to go to the Boat Race parties was Jocelyn Herbert. Do you remember her?*

Yes, yes I loved her, yes.

*What was she like?*

Oh she's always been one of those kind of ideal ladies who's always very loving, and, and smiley, and...and always... And convinces one that she likes you, and... No I've always loved her. I haven't met...I would love to have seen more of her.

*Actually one of the pictures in John Banting's scrapbook was a photograph of George Devine, which I was quite surprised to find. Do you know why?*

Was it?

*Do you know why that would be there? I mean it was just one of many, there were lots of people, but I was quite surprised.*

Now, John Banting is quite liable to have...to have met Jocelyn, and, obviously you mention George Devine because that was the great final affair, final love, wasn't it, as opposed to...and to Anthony. I don't know why John knew... Possibly some stage connection. You see in the days when, when John designed the ballet sets, Jocelyn might well have been on the scene and they might well have met then.

*Mm. And did you know Anthony Lousada then?*

I met him at Julian's and Mary's, yes.



*And what about Jo Patrick?*

And also at the College, of course Anthony Lousada was...

*Oh of course. What about Jo Patrick?*

Oh Jo Patrick embarrassed me enormously, because she made a very sort of dead set at me, and, I didn't really respond. (laughs) So...

*And what's her claim to fame, what does...?*

Jo?

*Mm.*

She would claim that she was very well into the world of interior decoration, which I think she was, and I think probably she was a very good, did good work.

*What sort of work, do you know?*

Being married to Michael Patrick, that was his name wasn't it? Yes, he, he was principal of the Central School of Art, but he was...he began his life as an architect, and in fact it was he who designed the building which Julian built, had built next to his house. You've been there, haven't you? So... And therefore Michael Patrick and Jo Patrick lived as next-door neighbours to Mary and Julian. So I would meet them there. And Jo, as I said, embarrassed me enormously by making a dead set at me and, so I never, never really got to know her very well. I didn't... I mean I never liked her really. Michael Patrick I liked very much, but for some excruciatingly entangled, difficult reason, Julian had made an enemy of Michael Patrick, partly to do with the sacking of Cecil Collins from being a

tutor at the Central School. I know they, they became very much in disagreement about this. But Julian did tend to suddenly make enemies with people about attitudes.

*Why was Cecil sacked from the Central?*

Age simply. It was not a sacking in the sense that... Julian resented very much that Michael Patrick didn't intervene, and say that in spite of having come to retirement age, Cecil Collins was such a good teacher that he should be kept on.

*It must have been extremely difficult for Mary, having them as neighbours.*

It was, very difficult, and it's still very difficult, because Jo is still alive, and a thorn in Mary's flesh. Jo is very ill, and in a, I think she's got this curious, scoliosis, the sort of, back problem, and, spinal problem, and tends to be crippled by it, and makes huge claims on Mary, assuming that Mary has got time to sort of drive her around and, to specialists and wait outside while she is having interviews and things. So Mary is in a very complicated relationship with Jo, and rather dreads Jo turning up.

*And, did you ever meet A P Herbert, as well as Jocelyn?*

Yes, again, he was one of those people who I never got to know, but who I would listen to and think of as very entertaining and very clever, and...

*And was Carel Weight someone you would see there, as well as at the College?*

Carel Weight was a lovely man, yes, I loved him. And I like his painting very much. Carel Weight and Robert Buhler and I and Pauline and Frederick Samson and Christopher Cornford used...quite often, I think three times in all, used to go to the chateau, almost, chateau of someone called Dominique de Grun[ph], have you ever heard of him? Who had this lovely house in the Loire Valley, and whose account, a Belgian who had been a monk, and a very, physically very very beautiful man, whom I think

Natasha fell very much in love with. And he had this lovely house, and he used to invite the people that I've just mentioned, together with quite a few students, to go and spend a sort of fortnight or three weeks in the summer in the Loire Valley. And we had lovely times there. But eventually Dominique suddenly realised that Carel and Bobby were expecting him to, to be a kind of resident servant, that they would have...he was a wonderful cook, that they would have...sort of gulp down a lovely meal, and then gather together their easels and their painting things and rush out and paint, and come back to waiting supper, Dominique having washed up the lunch and cooked the meal. And eventually I think, quite rightly, Dominique got rather fed up with it, and decided that he wasn't any longer going to be their cook.

*I only knew Carel really in the last sort of five years of his life, and I find it quite hard to imagine him as a younger person. I mean was he quite astute?*

He was, in my eyes he was never a younger person. He was always that kind of age. I remember a lovely scene, when we were at the College, and this was when the senior common room was in Cromwell Road, there was a pub fairly near South Kensington Station, where Carel and Bobby Buhler and Leonard Rosoman and the then staff used to meet, and I was friendly with Bobby Buhler, and Carel, and I used to go there. And we, we were...we were sitting round over our, whatever it was we were drinking, and there was a bit of a silence happened, and Bobby leaned forward and said, 'Carel, had any good sex lately?' And, it was rather awful, because, everyone sort of burst out laughing. Because the idea of Carel having sex was so unlikely, but, I mean obviously he did.

*I was led to believe he had quite a lot of it.*

Well maybe, maybe. There you are, what mistakes one could make.

*But in other words, people really didn't know about his private life?*

People just didn't, didn't know about Carel, no. When he was at Ribe[ph], he was...he was already quite sort of elderly, and rather Ardizzoni kind of character. He looked like an Ardizzoni drawing. But he was always, I always liked him. He was so honest and straightforward. He was very straightforward, and very kind, and appreciative. I liked Carel.

*And I can't imagine Leonard Rosoman in a pub.*

He was a bit standoffish. Yes, he didn't often come. But I don't remember much about Leonard. Except, an extraordinary story. One of my students, a girl called Valerie Hooker, was absolutely longing to be...sort of drifted across to the painting school, because she thought of herself as a painter rather than as a textile designer, and so she begged me to arrange it, that she should go and have an interview with Leonard Rosoman, whom I, that was the only one I knew, apart from Carel, and Carel being professor, I couldn't very well ask him to interview. So I sent this girl across to Leonard, and she came back, and, I went to her and said, 'Valerie, how did you get on?' And she...she collapsed in absolute hysterical laughter. And she got absolutely helpless with laughter, until I said, 'Well I'm going to...there's no point in trying to make you talk now; I shall come back in ten minutes and find out about it.' So I went back in ten minutes. 'Valerie, why on earth were you laughing?' And she started laughing again, and eventually she managed to blurt out, 'He was wearing suede shoes.' (laughs) Why, quite why she thought that so funny, hysterically funny. But it did rather, it was rather a good description of him. He was very sort of dapper, and, very handsome. Very under...he thought himself as being too short I think. But why they were so funny, I never discovered.

*And, he was married at one point to Jocelyn Rickards. Did you ever come across her?*

Yes that's right. No, I didn't know him very much, no.

*What was Robert Buhler like?*

We...I knew him when he was very young and very beautiful. And in fact, they used to come very often to Lavenham, to The Great House in Lavenham, and in fact we, we let them have it to themselves. He met this girl Eve, who was also a ravishing girl, and they became engaged, and they spent their honeymoon in The Great House in Lavenham. And we left them to it. And in those days he was full of energy and inquisitiveness, and, to the extent that he was extremely foolish, because when eventually war was inevitable, and everybody got very cautious about who might be an agent, and a spy and so on, and with the name of Buhler, which is actually Swiss, he became an object of suspicion in the area. And, because he was a strange in the area, we had lent him the house. And he was going, at that particular time he acquired a, an absolute passion for aircraft and airfields, and he would wander around with his sketchbook, absolutely incredible, and he was actually arrested. And we had to sort of bail him out. But I...but that's sort of by the way. As time went by, it became clear that he was becoming rather too fond of the bottle, and in the end he became very fond of the bottle, and became rather, quite an alcoholic, as you probably know. But I... He was very direct, tending to be abrupt and brusque, and rude, and I think adopted that attitude with his students. And was rather bulldozing, rather inclined to say, 'Forget all that rubbish and get back to something really basic, and start drawing again,' or... I mean, just... His great theme was, 'Look, never stop looking, just look. And look at that chair; now you're not looking at a chair, you're looking at spaces between the legs, between the seat and the, the floor and... Really look, and invent different ways of looking at things.' And, it wasn't the time to adopt that kind of attitude, students weren't having it, so he wasn't a very...he was considered to be a kind of grumpy old reactionary I think really in the end. I mean he had his followers of course, and... Again, something to remind you, there's a curious book which arrived through the post which has in it a painting by Bobby Buhler and by me, and by one other person we were talking about, but I'll...if I can remember I'll show it to you.

*And was Ruskin Speer part of this circle*

Yes, very much so. The painting school at the College, spurred on by Robin Darwin, who incidentally was the brother of Julian's first wife, Ursula, whom I know very well still and who's a lovely person, Robin Darwin, rather unwisely, encouraged the idea that the painting school was in a kind of upper region, as opposed to the fashion school, the textile school, the furniture school, industrial design, for goodness' sake, industrial design at the College. He thought of the painters as being superior beings. And he made this attitude practical by reserving a table in the senior common room which was entirely painters, and you were almost trespassing if you went there without Robin saying, 'Humphrey, come and join us.' I mean you weren't allowed just to go and sit down at that table. And I think that was a bad policy. And Ruskin...Ruskin, who was a big drinker himself, and Bobby and Leonard and Carel, and all his, all Robin's cronies, painter cronies, used to have their lunch at this table, and they would, after that they would spend really, in the eyes of students they would spend a disgracefully long time sitting around drinking and not coming back to be teachers. And I think that was one of the ways in which the College went badly wrong, when teachers simply didn't have consciences about the time they would spend... And since many of the staff, including my own professor, were frightened of their students, this was an easy way of, of really getting out of it. So occasionally they would stay in the senior common room until it was time to go back, and then they would all foregather in the pub, which I was telling you about.

*Who was your professor of textiles?*

I went through two or three professors. When I, I first...I was first asked by Robin Darwin to go there because, when I was waiting to be demobilised, it was so boring that I went in for a textile design competition.

*We talked about the Edinburgh Weavers thing.*

Yes.

*Yes.*

And, and I won this competition, and Henry Moore was one of the judges. And after...and that design, that was publicised quite a lot. And Robin had known my painting, because, he also was exhibiting at the Redfern Gallery, and I suddenly had a letter from Robin saying, 'Situation has arisen at the College which makes it necessary to get the textile school going on painterly lines rather than on commercial lines. You seem to me the ideal person to do this, would you come and be a tutor?' So I was delighted at this, and said I would. And the then professor was called de Holdenstone[ph], and he had put together an exhibition by the textile students, which was supposed to go up to Manchester. And Robin reserved the right to, to come and see the exhibition before it went to Manchester, and he came up and saw it and thought, this is absolutely dreadful, it's dead commercial, not what the Royal College should be up to. And so he told de Holdenstone[ph], 'This exhibition is not going to Manchester.' And de Holdenstone[ph] said, 'Well, if that's your attitude, you must sack me.' Very cleverly he didn't say, 'I'm going to resign,' because if he had resigned, his pay would have stopped, so he said, 'You must sack me.' So Robin sacked him, and he went on being professor for about two years, because that was his contract, and he could be seen leaving the College with his little sack of golf clubs every day, going to play golf. Well, to take his place, they put the professor of ceramics, whose name I forget, in charge of textiles, so when I went there, I was bossed by the professor of ceramics, who was OK, but, not a...not very interesting design-wise. And, then Robin decided that he should have another professor, not a temporary professor, so he had someone called Gooden. There was Robert Gooden and his brother, something Gooden, who became my professor. Who was... Oh, gosh, how to describe him? Almost as vain as I was. Very anxious about the physical impression he presented to his students. A complete swindle in the sense that he exploited his college secretary for his own private work, did a lot of his own private work in college time; left early, arrived late. And eventually was discovered by Robin applying, while he was still professor, applying for a job as manager of the Spoken Word on BBC Radio 3. And Robin couldn't take this, so he got the sack. And then, somebody called Nicholson, no

relation to William Nicholson the painter, Roger Nicholson, who was a charming, endearing man, but terrified of the students really.

[End of F8802 Side B]



[F10429 Side A]

Roger was terrified of the students, and therefore devised any possible means of not being with the students, and one of his favourite phrases was, 'Oh Humphrey, if you could see what's on my plate, I've got no time for...look at this, look what I've got to do. Professorial board, senate, then I've got to go off to inspect some other department at some other, university.' Never never never with the students. So he was very unsatisfactory in that kind of way. Nevertheless a very endearing man, and having a very miserable private life, his marriage was going all wrong. So, my attitude to him was very kind of mixed. I couldn't ever forgive him for being quite so irresponsible with the students. And he was the last, Roger was there when I left. So that was the three professors, none of whom were any good at all really.

*And were you part of a team? Who else did you work with?*

Well we had a good team of tutors. John Drummond, not the one who is involved with Edinburgh, but, a lovely man called, who is still a great friend of mine, who had been a student at the Central School. John Drummond and myself, and for a time the painter, Louis Le Brocquy, and William Turnbull, Bill Turnbull. And we made a kind of, a very modern attitude team, which in fact pushed the whole student production so much into abstract mode that it became almost too uncommercial. And then eventually a pendulum started to swing where, as a result of the diploma show, the rector or, whatever he was called, the rector...Robin Darwin of course was pushed out, and I think Lionel Brett came in after him.

*Lionel Esher.*

Lionel Esher. And, Esher of course thought, well this is lovely stuff, but it's totally pointless in terms of training students to be paid commercial designers. So the pendulum swung back a bit until it became commercial again, and then somebody said, this is dead commercial, and it went the other way. And it's still doing that rather, but that's quite a

good thing to happen. And of course as technology advances, methods of printing textiles change, in a way which makes everything...anything goes, anything's possible now, because methods of printing are so sophisticated. In my day students had to think about the limitations of printing, and they had to think about this complicated thing called repeat, where you had to put a pattern into repeat in such a way that it didn't form a vertical stripe, an unintended quality, like a vertical stripe or a horizontal stripe, or the worst thing of all, a kind of, something called a lazy diagonal, where it drifts...

*Yes, actually we talked about that.*

I think I've done this, yes.

*Talked about snakes [inaudible].*

And snakes and things, yes.

*But, what was Louis Le Brocquy like?*

What's the Irish word, zany; he was so positively Irish, and sort of out of this world, and... You see that little painting there is Louis Le Brocquy, and it's of a dove. You can hardly see that it's of a dove. If you take it down you can. He was a very very attractive man, full of...totally impractical but wonderfully poetic ideas. Very keen to have the students all being kind of visual poets. He was absolutely the right thing to have, provided there was some kind of compensation for that, I mean somebody seeing the other point of view.

*Had he got experience of textiles?*

None at all I don't think, no. I think he came, he drifted into it, because the head of the weaving department, who was an ex-Bauhaus student called Margaret Leichner, I think she came across him somewhere and fell in love with him, and thought that he would be a

good thing to have around. I think that's how he got there; I don't know quite how he got there otherwise.

*And would you overlap with each other's teaching, or were you all teaching in a very separate way?*

We did overlap, too much I think, because, we tended to, to get too involved with wanting to know each other. I mean we, we would tend... I mean, potentially the danger of being a tutor is to be neglectful, to neglect the students. The students tend, then and even more so now, to think of tutors as a bloody nuisance, and they want to go their own way, and tutors tend... Maybe I've said this before, have I?

*No.*

Tutors tend nowadays to be far too accommodating, and to say, 'That's very nice dear, carry on.' And that lets them off, they needn't do anything more. And I think, I thought and still think, that we should have... I thought we weren't severe enough, we weren't disciplinarian enough, we let things go far too much, and we weren't allowed to attack things. The only way in which eventually I decided I could be useful, was purely in terms of technique. Because, if you said to a student, 'There's something wrong with this design, there's lack of space,' or rhythm or balance or something like that, they would say, 'You may be right, but, but if I do what you are going to...what you are telling me to do, then it won't be my design any longer.' Well, I mean what is the reply to that? 'No, it won't be your design. OK, carry on with your own design. And when it's finished, I can then tear it to pieces.' 'OK, you do that then.' And so it became too like that. Now how, quite how one can deal with that. I mean in the old, in...I take it, I didn't experience it, but looking right back the sort of, 1920s and so on, I imagine that tutors were able to say, 'You have got to produce by the end of the week three life drawings,' or half a dozen drawings of that chair, and I'm going to tell you whether they're any good.' And I think they, they had to do it, or else they got the sack, probably.

*Were you really the only one who had any actual experience of doing these things? Not the teaching, I mean, of the textiles, of producing a finished textile?*

I was the...I was the only one who realised that the most valuable thing they could learn was the actual technical methods of producing designs. And one of the problems of being a designer is that you, you can't repeat yourself. I mean, quite possibly this is part of my own creative confusion, that I have designer and painter mixed up. And in designing you can...you simply cannot take a similar set of... Imagine that you're hawking them around to textile-producing firms, you've got a folio of say fifty designs, which possibly all have common features, and you show them to Heal's, you show them to Sanderson's, you show them all around the place. And, some of them are bought, I mean Heal's might buy three and Sanderson's might buy three; provided Sanderson's knows which Heal's has bought, that's OK. But if six months later you take around the same kind of quality, then you're not on, then that's simply not on. So you've got to produce inconsistency, you've got to vary your designs. And to do that you've got to command a lot of different techniques, which have to do with scalpels and Sellotape, and glue and accident and intention, and knowledge about dimension, and verticality and horizontality, and, all kinds of aspect. And I found that that's the only thing that it was useful to teach, which, I actually invented a method of doing something which was necessary, in those days, which isn't necessary now, which is, to put things into repeat by means of a scalpel and Sellotape. And not laboriously to have to make traces the whole time. And those kind of things they found very...very useful, some of them, not all of them. And then the whole idea of liberating techniques, not being confined to small brushes, large brushes; being able to use a huge variety of, of instruments and so on.

*And did someone like Louis Le Brocquy respect your side of it?*

Yes, he did, very much, yes. Louis Le Brocquy was, was interesting in, in the sense that, he had the very sound theory that you didn't equate time spent with merit; that because some stupid buyer would come and look at students' work and say, 'But, but that couldn't have taken you more than two minutes, I mean, you've just flicked a brush on a

piece of lavatory paper,' which incidentally, some of the buyers were buying, but Louis preached the theory that, stop thinking that endless time spent on any given design does not make it any good, and nor does it make it very purchasable. Although it can do so. But there were tutors teaching, I mean even, even Roger Nicholson himself, on the rare occasions when he did look at students' work, he would say things like, 'Well I mean, a child of three could have done that.' At which somebody would quote Groucho Marx and say, 'Bring me a child of three...'

*I'm amazed to know that Bill Turnbull was part of [inaudible].*

Bill Turnbull was absolutely hated by Roger Nicholson. Roger Nicholson simply couldn't bear him. And it was Louis Le Brocquy who brought him in.

*How and why was he brought in?*

Oh simply as a modern influence. I mean Louis was, was all for this sort of release into the, into the atmosphere, into the intellectual freedom. But of course Louis had...although quite a lot of his work, I mean he did some very interesting tapestry designs, very much influenced by Liotta, the French tapestry expert. He did, Louis did some very interesting tapestry designs for Edinburgh...no, not to be confused with Edinburgh Weavers. Edinburgh Tapestries was another thing. And there again, I mean, Louis and I were once commissioned... Have I told you this? Stop me if I have. We were commissioned to work on a mural painting, a combined, a combined work, and Louis did a marvellous design, which literally took about ten minutes, with a huge, huge sort of red disc against a drifty sort of background, which was made drifty by an accidental application of spray gun or something like that. And it would have looked marvellous in its setting. But the bloke who had commissioned it looked at it and said, literally did say, 'How long did this take you? You're being paid £300 for this. It's ten minutes' work isn't it?' Literally said that. And of course Louis went up in smoke.

*Was it a private person?*

No, it... Well it was a businessman, it was a businessman who somehow had been put on to Louis as an emerging important artist. And then was completely shattered by the fact that the design took only ten minutes.

*But he was commissioning it for an office, or for home?*

Yes, it was some restaurant or...or office.

*And how were you going to work together on it?*

I was actually going to put the whole thing, I was going to work it up from Louis' small-scale drawing, and I was going to work it up onto a larger scale, through a series of larger-scale things.

*And then you would both have painted it, or, how...?*

We never got to that stage of discussing that, I don't know what would have happened.

*But you can imagine working together fairly easily?*

Oh yes, yes, I like Louis. Incidentally Pauline fell madly in love with Louis. And I think, I rather think she had an affair with him, I don't know.

*At the time you would have been working with him?*

Yes. We went on a, on a holiday to Italy, aiming for Ischia, and, I was driving, Louis and Pauline were in the car, and, we came to a bend in the road which disclosed a bend in a parallel river, where there was a wonderful sort of pool, clear, glistening pool, and Louis and I decided that we'd have a swim. And, I jumped into this, rashly, and my big toe hit a broken bottle, and nearly, I nearly cut my toe off. And when... Louis got me out of the

water, and when I, when I got out, and I saw the amount of blood, I started to faint. And Louis took...became a quite different person, took immediate control, very efficient control, and bound me up and got me into the car and took me to a nunnery, which he knew would have some kind of medical situation. And there was a very severe nun who talked a little English, with a mixture of French and English and Italian. She told me not to be a coward, and pulled the wrappings off my toe. And then, without asking me whether I'd recently had a tetanus injection, which I had had, she gave me an injection which was presumably a tetanus injection, and I got anaphylactic shock. And I very nearly died. And I would... I ended up lying sort of semi-conscious with a big canister of something that was being dripped into a vein. By this time we had got to Ischia, and it happened that Wystan Auden was staying there with some of his friends, Samuel Barber and a lot of intellectual friends. And Pauline went to Wystan and said did he know a doctor, and Wystan knew an English doctor there, who he said was very good, and he got me that doctor. And it was the doctor who put me onto the drip. And, I would have died I think. And I had a thing called anaphylactic shock, where you do totally collapse if you have had two tetanus injections too close together. And that was... During that holiday, while I was recovering, Pauline fell madly in love with Louis, and goodness knows what happened because I was too weak to be... Look, there's a rabbit eating everything. Oh!

*How did Pauline get on with Auden then?*

Oh, she never met him. Oh, well she met him... Auden was completely disdainful of anyone... I mean, I mean in a way Stephen was the same you see. Stephen took absolutely no notice, practically no notice of Pauline at all. They had their, their very high intellectual level of, of chatter, and, well not chatter, of serious intellectual talk, and, I mean I found this impossible to join in with.

*Did you mind Stephen taking no notice of Pauline?*

Yes, I think I did, yes. Yes. I mean, not...not just with Pauline, but, he had a way of refusing to recognise people's existence. I mean he, he could be in a room with friends

of mine, and, unless they happened to be physically very attractive, to take no notice of them at all.

*Did you ever say anything?*

This whole area is very much in the limelight now, because, Natasha read one of the articles about my exhibition, the article in the *Guardian*, which I think was a rather mischievous article, Sabine Durrant, do you know her? Which, in which... Apparently six friends of Stephen's rang Natasha up and said they were sorry to see that Humphrey had taken a swipe at Stephen in this interview. Well I hadn't taken a swipe at Stephen at all; I had just bemoaned the fact that, in a way Stephen had never allowed me, because of his life which was very much in America, that somehow circumstances never allowed us to become very close. And, because he was a VIP, his life became incredibly grand and complicated, and he had friends who were above my intellectual level, and so, this was a progress of ever increasing distance. And I mean I hold to that, and I...it's not necessarily against Stephen; it's a moan that I wasn't able to know him better and to get, spend more time with him.

*And has she taken it very hard?*

She's taken it very hard. She wrote me quite a long letter about it, and said, 'You must realise that Stephen absolutely loved you, and was praying for your success the whole time, and he was absolutely slaughtered by Lolly's death, and he loved you both,' and so on. And... But, she can't see him in, in real terms, she can see him only in terms of absolute perfection. So it's difficult, it's difficult. She... And after that she suddenly turned up here unexpectedly, and sat me down and went over the whole of Stephen's relationship with me, and so on. No, I mean, I do wish I had known him better.

*But when she went through as you put it Stephen's relationship with you, did it bear any resemblance to your version of Stephen's relationship with you?*



It bore no resemblance to the rest of Stephen's life. I mean what she was describing was a sort of, everlasting constant love, and a constant worry about my wellbeing and so on; whereas in fact, when we did meet Stephen never appeared to be interested at all. He never asked me any questions, he never asked me about my life. I mean, the only episode in which we were totally together, involved and sympathetic, was about Lolly, and I think he was mad about her. I think... I mean those poems he wrote about her, poems of dedication, were some of the best poems that he has ever written. And John Sutherland agrees with me, that they were probably.

*And I know you're going through what John Sutherland has written so far; are you finding that it tallies with the way you think of Stephen, or...?*

Well John Sutherland has kept it very chronological and factual, and drifts into comments about Stephen's character very, not very often. And mainly what he says, I think I agree with him. But I think he is being restrained, because we both know that Stephen had a lot of enemies. I mean people were quite often coming up to me and saying, 'You know, Stephen absolutely ignored me the other day, and, what's wrong with him? Have I done anything?' And some people absolutely hated his poetry. Michael Ayrton for instance once told me, said across a dinner table, in front of a lot of other people, 'Your brother writes...why does your brother write such absolute rubbish?' And, Anne Scott-James, who by coincidence was my, was a godchild of my mother, was introduced to me in the senior common room at the Royal College, and said to me, her very first words were, 'Your brother's poetry makes me vomit.' (laughs) It's a splendid thing to say on first, on the first meeting. She was married to, to Macdonald Hastings, not for long, but, quite a long time. The parent, the father of Max Hastings.

*But, are you...did you say you are finding some of the things in the manuscript not accurate as your memory?*

Oh, well, John has done a fantastic piece of research, and I can correct only on a fairly trivial level. I mean if he gets names miss-spelt, or if he gets... No, I mean, I think he's,

on the whole he's been incredibly accurate. Sometimes he mixes up two characters, and... But that's possibly a typist's error, one doesn't know.

*Did you go on holidays to Stephen's house in Italy quite a lot as well, or not?*

Stephen's house in France?

*Oh, right, it was France?*

Yes. He didn't...no, his son has a house in Italy, Matthew has a house in Italy. Yes, I went to Maussane quite a lot. I went there once alone with... I had been given a, a kind of honorary fellowship to investigate... This seems to be a very tenuous roundabout connection. To investigate the cottage industries of Turkey. And I had to have a guide, because I couldn't speak Turkish and I didn't know my way around, and I had an American called Brosnahan[ph], who drove me around, who was a nice bloke, but, wasn't to be any... Really, I mean I liked him, but he wasn't to be of any particular interest. And, Natasha wanted somebody to occupy Maussane. Because you see, they fell into the trap of regarding Maussane as a profitable letting thing, but they hadn't thought about the filling-in of spaces, intervening spaces. And they didn't want to leave it burglar...burglarisable, burglarable, and so they wanted, desperately wanted people to occupy it. And Brosnahan[ph] and I went and occupied it then, and that was nice. And then, on one occasion, I think I was there with, I think Pauline might have been there on that occasion. I certainly was there with Pauline when Stephen and Natasha weren't there, because of wanting to have it occupied. And, then quite often we were there when they were there too.

*Were those the times when perhaps you spent most, the most easy time with him?*

Yes, but, with the qualifying factors that, Natasha was there making demands on him, and he was desperately trying to, just do work, do his own work. And at the same time it

was, it was too hot for him. He never really liked it, liked the heat there. It did get terribly hot. I can't take that kind of heat.

*Whereabouts was the house?*

It's near Les Baux, do you know Les Baux? Near Avignon. Not far from Arles.

*And did that landscape come into your work?*

Yes, very much, I did a whole series of paintings around there, some of which I've still got.

*What kind of paintings?*

Oh, very straightforward, manipu...what I might call manipulated landscape. I mean they were very correct renderings of what I saw, but they were what I'd described previously, of doing a direct drawing and then taking it back and working on it.

*Would you take it back while you were staying in France, would you take it back to England [inaudible]?*

No, probably I would allow a... I think when I was in Maussane, I left them as they were. They were never all that direct, but, they were certainly sitting outside, and drawing from outside. And maybe turning, facing a different way, and that kind of thing. Mixing up two angles.

*And, would the setting make you draw in any way in a different way from the way you might if you had been setting out from here, or is it really all part of the same thing?*

I wish I could say it was all part of the same thing. I come back to the theme song of being inconsistent, and rather insisting on being inconsistent. And it would depend very

much on the medium I was working in, on the kind of paper I was working in, on the sort of size of the paper, size of the sketchbook, on the climate. If I was working in colour, and it was a very hot sunny day, then did the paint dry very quickly, and if it did, then one used much more watery technique. I mean all, all...all those things had immediate effects on my work.

*Some of them are ones you can control; some of them you have to accept; and some of them are random. I mean, when you say it would depend on the paper, you must have made a decision about the paper before you set out.*

Yes, there are certain kinds of paper that I, I like. I don't like very rough paper.

[end of session]

[End of F10429 Side A]

[Side B is blank]

[F10430 Side A]

*....I could just do a sound check, and ask you to tell me please your name and what today's date is.*

My name. Tell me when to start.

*Now.*

Now. My name is Humphrey Spender, and today's date is Thursday the 4<sup>th</sup> of October.

*And the year?*

And the year is 2001.

[break in recording]

*I've put the tape back on now.*

Right.

*You've just casually dropped into the conversation that you had your first serious affair with somebody we've never even mentioned or touched on. So, that's a bit of a shock to me, and I wondered if you could tell the tape about it.*

Essie Robeson, Paul Robeson's wife. Yes, I went to a party given by William Plomer and his partner, Tony Butts, and curiously enough I remember the address, it's No. 1 Canning Place in London. And William opened, William Plomer, who was a very very witty and lovely man, quite a dear friend, he opened the door to me and said, 'I'm going to...Humphrey, I'm going to introduce you straight away to someone you're going to get on with very well.' And he took me straight up to Essie Robeson, who was a sort of

bundle of, of feminine charms, and, looking very jolly, and gleaming white teeth, and lovely dark skin and sparkly eyes. And, during about an hour at that party, she had given me her telephone number and her address, and I knew of course precisely what she meant, and so I followed it up. And, before long we had started an affair. Which became quite interesting, because, walking around, trying to go to smart restaurants, this would have been in 1932-ish I suppose, '31 perhaps, so I was twenty-one, walking around trying to go into fairly conventional restaurants, or even smart hotels like the Savoy or, and that kind of hotel, we were very often refused entry, because they didn't, just didn't want black people around. And so we played the game, and we did it, we went to places on purpose where we thought we were going to be turned down, and just sort of notched it all up, just for the record. And, I suppose it, this went on I suppose for about, about a year. But it was a very laughey, jolly kind of relationship. And, not altogether successful sexually, but, interesting. And...

*Why not successful?*

Largely because I suffered in those days from premature ejaculation. And...

ANNE/ANN: Thank you. Thank you so much.

OK Anne, nice to see you.

ANNE: When [inaudible]?

I don't know. Probably Friday evening.

ANNE: I'll call in again [inaudible].

Yes.

ANNE: [inaudible]. Thank you so much.

Yes, OK Anne.

ANNE: Bye bye.

Before you switch on again, I'll.....

[break in recording]

.....which made her not despair, but find substitute sexual things to do. So, it could be described as an odd sexual affair. But it was nice, because, it...that didn't seem to make very much difference. And, and also we were having a jolly time together, we went to cinemas and, and she knew a lot of interesting people, and... But of course that was... This very morning, the BBC announced a series of programmes about Leslie Hutchinson, the black pianist of that time, and it was well known that he was having an affair with Nancy Cunard, and the announcer this morning said it was well known that he was having affairs with lots of white women, which, as a black man having affairs with white women, wasn't...put him into a category which did not allow him to emerge as the talent demanded he should have emerged. So, the reason why he is not that well known... Do you know about him, Leslie Hutchinson? He was known as Hutch.

*I know him as Hutch, and I really, exactly what you're saying, I know him to do with stories about Nancy Cunard.*

Yes.

*Not because of anything else.*

And a brilliant pianist. And, entered into the rather upper levels of social life, on the basis this rather scandalous affair. So in a way our, my thing with Essie Robeson was playing along with that. And people like my friend John Banting, and all his painter

friends, and the photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer, and the group in the Café Royal, Brian Howard, Stephen Tomlin, Eddie Sackville...yes, Eddie Sackville-West, Eddie Gaythorne Hardie, I mean they were all very much into that whole, all found black people physically very very attractive. Tony Butts had a mad passion on a black actor called Harry Quashi. Well there's a Quashi who is his descendent functioning now I think.

*How do you spell that?*

q-u-a-s-h-i.

*And how do you spell the Christian name of Paul Robeson's wife?*

Essie, e-s-s-i-e.

*And, did the fact... I mean if this was your sort of first continuing sexual encounter really, did the fact that you were different colours come into it? Was it... It must have been visually very extraordinary apart from anything else.*

From her point of view, I learnt afterwards, yes, that she was, just as I was very interested in coloured people, because, I think that, certainly at that time, and I think probably still, physically they are much, in much better shape than white people are. Maybe the colour of their skin also hides blemishes, and for that reason white people are always wanting to go dark brown. And, they have...yes, they have a kind of physicality which appealed to me at the time, and still does, yes, I find, I find, still find oriental coloured people very very beautiful. I mean, the Filipinos for instance are amazingly beautiful. Films about Thailand and about eastern nationalities are always amazingly full of startlingly beautiful people. And maybe that's a generalisation, and maybe could not successfully be put to the test, I don't know.

*And what was she like?*



Oh, she was jolly, laughey, very energetic. I would think probably the fact that she had actually demanded... I mean, it was she who instigated the whole affair. I would think that had it been me instigating it, I would not have probably gone for her. There was a friend of hers called Nina-May McKinney[ph], who was absolutely fabulously beautiful, and, rather insensitively I made it quite clear to Essie that I was finding her friend, Nina-May McKinney[ph], rather more attractive than I found Essie herself. So I mean she wasn't in the area of one of the world's great beauties. Oh she was a very attractive woman, and, later on I learnt that she was quite a seducer, particularly of young men of my kind of age then, twenty-one. In fact once on leaving her house, I ran into an extremely handsome RAF bloke who was calling on her, presumably for the same purpose, I mean, I can't shut that kind of knowledge out of my mind of course.

*And was she living in London?*

Yes, she was, yes. And she was, at that time she was separated from Paul, who himself I think was quite a seducer, and having affairs with white ladies.

*Did you learn anything about him through her?*

Yes, she was... Well, I was a great admirer of him, of his voice, and I would... Yes, I thought him as fabulously talented, and of course admired his left-wing stance, his politics very much, as we all did. And she, she admired him enormously; she didn't approve of his faithlessness, and her parallel faithlessness was a kind of punishment for his I suppose. If you can do it, I can do it.

*When you say you admired his politics, are you thinking about the Fifties and McCarthy and...?*

I'm thinking of, maybe I was wrong in thinking so, but he, I saw him as a left-wing character. Although, I realise that he'd stepped into an area of fame which meant, which

was in danger of pushing him into the other camp, because he became rather grand, and rich, and famous. No, I thought of him as verging on a communist, yes.

*Did you meet him?*

Yes, but only...only to the extent of being in the same room, and not having any contact with him, no.

*And, and how was it that she was living here, and had sort of, hit on this social circle?*

I don't know. I just accepted the fact that she had a rather grand apartment somewhere, I think in Villiers Street, near Charing Cross Station. I just accepted the fact that, as the wife of a famous man, she was well enough off, and... I mean it wasn't a question of, of me having to treat her, having to buy her expensive meals and things like that. I mean we went around on a kind of equal basis.

*And which were the restaurants that you remember being turned away from?*

I remember as a joke going to the Savoy, rather expecting... What happened was that, we...the only way in which we could go was to try and get a meal at the Savoy Grill. And after an intensely interested look, the, whoever it was who stood at the door of the Grill, because we got through the main entrance without much trouble, and went to the Grill, said, 'Just wait a moment and I'll find out if there is a table.' And clearly he went to the head waiter, and the head waiter took a peek at us through a crack in a, somewhere, and said, 'No, on no account, we don't have coloured people in here.' And so he came back and he said, 'I'm sorry, we have no table, we're booked up for the rest of the day.' So, it was fairly clear what they were up to.

*And how did she react?*

Oh, in a jolly kind of way. She just said that, 'This is happening all the time, and I refuse to be got down by it.' She was a cheerful lady. 'I refuse to be got down by it. I've got very good friends, like you, and many other. I go around with sensitive, clever, intelligent white people, and I expect to be treated like that by unintelligent, insensitive people.' I mean that was her attitude.

*And were you shocked by it?*

Yes, very. I expected it. Yes, I...I was... I was much more angry than she was, I mean I really got furious. There was one occasion when we, we went, I think to the Empire Cinema, and they refused us, were refused entry there, which is extraordinary really.

*On what explanation?*

Oh I don't know. I've really forgotten. They made it quite clear that... I mean, 'We're sold out' or something like that. I mean they made the most transparent excuses. Things that had never happened to me. I mean I'd been to the Empire cinema with lots of my student friends, and my family, and there was never the possibility of being turned out, being told, 'No, you can't come in.' But this, this did happen.

*And who else do you remember being part of her circle?*

I don't... Oh, oh well, she was friendly with William Plomer, and therefore with Tony Butts, his friend, and of course Stephen, and Auden. And... William Plomer's circle of friends was the kind of Day-Lewis, Auden, Christopher Isherwood, that, so she was half in that. And she, she loved laughing with John Banting, who was a kind of surrealist character. That's his painting over there by the way, on the... That's my wedding, my first wedding.

*Can you describe it for the tape?*

Ye, it's a painting by John Banting of my first wedding where the priest is armed with a, a kind of hood on a string, or a rope, and is catching me round the neck and dragging me towards my intended wife. And it's entirely, entirely abstract, bulbous kind of forms, looking like sort of bulbous bones and things. That is done with a laugh of course. Quite a valuable painting now.

*Was he shocked that you got married?*

Who?

*Banting.*

[pause] No. No he wasn't, no, no. [pause] He loved my first wife, as indeed everybody did, and so he said things like, 'If you're...if you've got to get married, then, you couldn't have made a better choice.' It was that kind of attitude, yes.

*And how did you know William Plomer?*

Oh entirely through Stephen. My very best friend at the Architectural Association was called Bill Edmostone[ph], and that was my first homosexual affair. He was a very dashing gypsy-looking young man. And we more or less set up life together in the same flat in Upper Montagu Street. Eddie had absolutely...he was...I shall refer to him as Eddie. Eddie had absolutely no money at all. And Stephen introduced us as a pair to William, who had expressed interest, because he'd seen us around, I think he said, 'Stephen, would you introduce me.' And, William was then living with Tony Butts. Do you know about Tony Butts?

*No, he's one of the people I wanted to pick up on from last time.*

Well he was the grandson of a William Butts, who looked after William Blake, who really sponsored and partly financed William Blake. He was, when he was a very young

child, we're talking about Tony Butts now, when he was a very young child he was incredibly beautiful, and in fact he always used to say that, something which I think many people say, that when he was young he was the model for the poster advertising Pears soap, which is a very famous poster of the fabulously beautiful little boy with golden curls. Lots of people say that by the way. Later in life he lost all his hair, as some of us do, and became one of the ugliest people you could think up. And... But nevertheless, he was an incredibly intelligent man and quite a good painter. And evidently William found him a good companion, and they set up an establishment together. I don't...it's always been doubtful to me anyway, and I think to Stephen, whether it was a successful sexual thing, but certainly it was a successful intellectual partnership, and both Tony and William were marvellously interesting people. William was marvellously funny, which comes out in his poetry of course, in a rather sinister way. His interest in... I mean, the poem called *The Dorking Thigh* when, two people sitting at breakfast, the postman delivers a parcel, and the parcel eventually is found to contain a human thigh which has been cut off a murdered character. And William had a marvellous story about how he used to dine with a group of people in Bayswater, and one of them used to get up from the table at the end of the meal and sort of, clap his hands together and that kind of gesture, and say, 'Well, off to another murder.' And they all took it as a joke and said, 'Ha ha ha. Well be careful who you murder. Don't go and call on my wife,' that kind of thing. And in fact this was a bloke called Heath, who became known as the Acid Bath Murderer. And it was a perfectly serious remark. (laughs) And William had that, was full of that kind of story. I loved him dearly. I wish he'd written more.

*What did he look like?*

Quite well covered, rather plump. Benevolent. He grew a little sort of moustache. He would have fitted very well in today's gay scene, better than he fitted into the, into the Twenties, Thirties gay scene.

*What do you mean by that?*

The present gay scene demands moustaches, shaved heads, that...a kind of masculinity which is really very unattractive. As opposed to a cultivation of beautiful hair and... I mean, do you know who I mean by Bunny Roger? Who was...

*Could you...I do but could you say for the tape who he is?*

Can I what?

*Could you tell the tape who he is?*

Yes.

*Because somebody else listening might not.*

Oh I see, yes. You can cut that out can you I hope. Where were we? Bunny Roger was the son of the Minister for tank production, and was a fabulously beautiful young man, in a way which demanded a great deal of attention by very expensive... Quaff, lots and lots of, of beautiful clothes, very very expensive and beautiful clothes. And the yearly attendance at the Chelsea Arts Ball, for which he made his own female costume, and spent the whole of a year making his costume for the Chelsea Arts Ball, and then, once that was finished he would start making his next costume for the next Chelsea Arts Ball. And he always bought a box in the Albert Hall to which occasionally I was invited, and that was full of fabulously beautiful young men. But that was...what we're talking about really is the then homosexual physical appearance, as opposed to today, 2001, homosexual appearance. And in the early, the earlier appearance was very feminine, very heavily made up, very much attention paid to hair, and even the dying of hair, and so on.

*We're sitting in the middle of the countryside. You're not in this house in a particularly good position to know what the current gay scene is. What are you talking about, where have you been watching it?*

Perhaps my, perhaps my information is slightly out of date, because I haven't been around for, I suppose about a year, maybe two years. But I do go...I do go to London quite a lot, and, I know when I am in a pub, if I... I don't like going to pubs but I do occasionally go to pubs, and I know when I am in a pub where there are a lot of gays around, and it seems to me that that's what they're looking like. And also of course television is a great instructor on these occasions. There was that, the film, oh what was it called? Something about folk. *Queer As Folk*. There was that whole television sequence. Although there were a couple of, there was one particularly beautiful, almost 1930s type in that film, the majority of the gay characters were the moustachioed, rather military, cropped-haired type. So I suppose I get my information... Rather, maybe rather unreliable.

*No I wasn't meaning that. I was just staring out at your birds and the grass and everything. But, I mean, there's obviously been enormous other changes in gay life. How do you think you would have enjoyed it now? I mean, are you...do you...do you prefer the way it was?*

I very much prefer the way it was. In any case I absolutely, I absolutely hate the, the typical gay behaviour. I hate, hate the... It's difficult to identify exactly what I hate. But it makes itself very clear, somehow it's designed to make it very clear, I am gay, and I speak in a certain kind of way with certain kind of coded messages, and put on a kind of tone, quality of voice which is gay, and it makes the ordinary conventional person tend to send them up. I hate immediately recognisable homosexuality. I like the kind of natural look. When Oriental people are gay, they are no different from other kinds of masculinity. And there's a kind of wild natural appearance which I go for which has nothing to do with being gay. I mean I, in fact I suppose what I am saying is, I hate the typically gay person. Somebody like Christopher Isherwood you see wasn't typically gay in that sense at all; he was a hundred per cent gay but he was primarily interesting because of his intellect. And he, he would have equally disapproved. Well actually, I suppose what I'm coming round to admitting was, I've always been attracted by a very young age group, and, that's something which makes life very difficult, very dangerous,

and in very young people the kind of homosexual behaviour simply hasn't yet developed, simply isn't there.

*So there was never an older man for you?*

No. Bill Edmostone[ph] was more or less my age. He was killed in the war, he was a parachutist and he was shot down over Italy. I think I've told you.

*Yes, we did talk about him.*

And, I think we wouldn't have...we wouldn't... We would each have gone our separate ways I think.

*If you feel, as you've just been saying, how did you regard someone like Bunny Roger?*

I regarded him simply as an object of...he was just fabulously beautiful. Had the most wonderful hair. I was amused at the act he put on, which was in direct conflict with what he knew to be his father's attitude towards him. I mean, the fact that he was the son of the Minister of tank production seemed to me highly amusing. And I thought, and I knew, that he was extremely intelligent and witty and clever, a nice person to be with. And as it turned out, everybody, those who didn't like him always thought that he was somehow going to get out of war service, but as it turned out, he immediately offered his self to the Army, and he got into Italy and into a very very dangerous war situation, where one would have expected him to be what his fellow troopers might have called pansy, in fact he behaved with incredible bravery. And his, the platoon which he commanded respected him very much, and thought of him as absolutely marvellous.

*Did he talk about it?*



I didn't know him well enough for him to talk to me about it. I met him always in groups of other people, where I would talk to him, not to any great extent, not for very long times.

[End of F10430 Side A]

[F10430 Side B]

*.....person who talked about him very well was Billy Chappell. Did you know Billy Chappell?*

I knew Billy Chappell only because he was quite a friend of Barbara Ker-Seymer, and we, I used to meet him occasionally in Barbara's house, but otherwise I didn't know him. The other person I knew as a result of knowing Barbara was Ed Burra of course, and that again, that was a very kind of casual, only occasionally meeting kind of friendship. So it could hardly be called a friendship really. But one of my problems was that, if I met very very talented people, and from the word go I thought of Ed Burra as a wonderfully talented person, I loved his paintings, still do, or someone like Wystan Auden, or Christopher Isherwood, I found myself wanting not to compete, and I knew that I couldn't be as clever as them. So my friendship with these people was very limited I think. Somehow I never got through a certain barrier with very very intelligent people; I was much more happy listening to them talking. Auden struck, made me absolutely dumb, I couldn't...I just liked listening to him talking so much, it didn't seem to me necessary for me to talk. But that didn't...that led to very inadequate relationships really.

*And you said that you met William Plomer through Stephen. Was Stephen very open to including you in his life, or was...were there parts where he wanted to keep people in compartments, or did it change at different periods?*

Oh Stephen used, made quite an effort to introduce me to friends. In fact it was Stephen who first introduced me to John Banting, by telling me that John Banting had caught sight of me and found me very attractive, and that was always a good thing to say to me, because I was rather vain, and very much wanted to know me, and would I like to know him? And I thought, oh yes, John Banting, quite a...he was quite famous in those days; nobody's heard of him in these days. And I thought, oh yes, I'd like to be friends with a, admired and friendly with, admired by and friendly with, a famous painter. He was then painting a big mural in the house of Rosamund Lehmann at Ipsden, and I liked very much

what I'd seen of that, through photographs, and so I was very keen to know Banting. And we became really very good friends, and for about ten minutes lovers. I didn't find him at all attractive, but, he was such a wonderful person, he was a wonderful, funny, witty, interested, inventive, marvellous man. And a wonderful dancer. Extremely talented I think. Though he was perhaps, a valued criticism was, he was very influenced by people like Jean Cocteau and Picasso and, the then very influential people.

*And, just before we lose Bunny Roger, things like dying of hair and cross-dressing and everything, were those things that lots of people dabbled with, or was he considered to be a one-off in that respect?*

He was simply, he was just a famous beauty, and, he was aware of this and he played, he played up to it. I...I think that's about all I...

*But would you have ever worn make-up or dyed your hair or done any of those things?*

[pause] I dyed my hair to the extent that I knew it got bleached in the sun, and so I, I lay and sat and idled regrettably, a regrettable amount of time in the sun. And Stephen once introduced me to one of his friends as, 'This is my brother who dyes his hair.' Yes, I suppose I did, yes. Yes. I hated, I actually hated my own physical appearance; I wanted to be of a totally different type. I hated my hair, which was sort of frizzy. I still hate it, what I've got left. (laughs) And, I wanted to be snub-nosed and I was not, I was aquiline. But I was very happy to know people who found my type attractive. I didn't agree with them but I liked it.

*But what about make-up and dresses?*

Oh no, not that. Well I suppose... Yes, what a good question. I did go to two of the, Bunny Roger's Chelsea Arts Balls, in which I spent a lot of time having made, because I didn't make it myself, having made a costume out of one of Dürer's wood engravings, of the, the big procession. There's a whole sequence, I forget the name of this sequence of

engravings. It was to do with the Emperor Maximilian, and it was a sequence of engravings of fantastic costumes and vehicles, sort of horse-drawn coaches, and, absolutely wonderful costumes. And all of the men wore skirts. And I did choose one of the costumes, which I remember Stephen saying looked rather pansy, which was skirted, yes. It was a great success.

*Where did you get it made?*

Oh I got a friend to make it. I think Bill Edmostone[ph] probably made quite a lot of it.

*And did you wear it only that once?*

No, I kept it for a long time, and I wore it probably far too late in life. (laughs)

*Have you still got it?*

No, it's disintegrated. It was made, it was made of sort of blue corded velvet, and it...oh it was rather marvellous, yes, I did look rather marvellous in it. (laughs)

*And make-up?*

Probably, yes probably.

*But only for an occasion like that?*

Only for that occasion. No, I wouldn't have made up otherwise.

*And any other costumes?*

Yes, I was very much involved in the drama which was carried on at the Architectural Association. There was always a kind of yearly play or pantomime. I was a hopeless

actor, very very bad actor indeed, but because the directors of the stage show thought I was handsome enough, they made me appear in these things. And I do have photographs showing me in all kinds of cloaks and kind of Gielgud type things. One of the better moments in my life I think was that, at one of the Chelsea Arts Balls, when I was wearing a rather glamorous kind of Hamlet type cloak, I got into a crowd which was looking at some side-show, some kind of act, and somebody turned round and said, 'Oh, Mr Gielgud, you're rather crowded out here, you need a better view.' And everybody turned round, and said, 'Oh, Gielgud.' And so, as Gielgud, I was pushed into the front where I could get a better view. That was quite a proud moment. (laughs)

*Actually while you're on the Architectural Association, I was going to ask you about Aileen Stafford[ph] who cropped up, and her husband. You said her husband, which presumably it wasn't Aileen Stafford[ph] at that point, was Quentin's godfather.*

Yes, John Stafford, who I think was a descendent of the Singer sewing machine empire.

*What was he like, and why did he become godfather?*

Well, my wife became very friendly with Alleen[ph], having met her on a completely different route. I knew Alleen[ph] as a student at the AA and I think she was in the year, I think she was in a year above me, or maybe below me. She certainly wasn't in the same year. She was very very attractive, I mean she was the kind of girl that I would have gone for.

*What did she look like?*

Oh, blonde and, oh just, just beautiful. I mean just, just classically beautiful face, with lovely straight blonde hair. And she had a lot of, lots and lots of admirers. And, I know several people, several of my colleagues at the AA wanted to be her boyfriend. But she chose to go outside the AA and, and met John Stafford, who was very tall, and not handsome, rather, rather grotesque looking man, rather beaky looking man. But

incredibly kind of well bred, and right, correct, the right shoes, the right clothes, the...very very conventional. Rather like Bill in fact. Everything kind of handmade, and super quality. And Alleen[ph] was rather like that herself. And so eventually she married John Stafford. And at the same time she became increasingly friendly with my second wife, Pauline. And, Pauline and she remained very great friends for the rest of their lives.

*How had they met?*

I have absolutely no idea how they met; it was just coincidence that Pauline knew somebody that had been with me at the AA. John Stafford was very rich, and Alleen[ph] liked that, and she got a lovely house, lovely things, and all the cares of life were taken off her hands.

*Where was the house?*

Somewhere in Sussex. Oh gosh. I can only remember aiming at Blackboys. It was somewhere in that area. Lovely period farmhouse. He was, he had been an architectural student, so they knew a lot about architecture, and they bought a very very perfect period Georgian house, and everything they had was very superlatively expensive, quality, lovely silver, lovely china. There was nothing in their house which one could regard as cheap or bad taste. Maybe slightly they were illustrating Osbert Lancaster ghastly good taste, I mean, it was just very very tasteful.

*What was on their walls?*

Oh, he had very expensive paintings, like George Frederic Watts, like...a bad painting by Watts. But of that kind of... Now, funnily, I can't... He had a Samuel Palmer I think. He had very very expensive paintings, I mean really, kind of old, things which would now sell for a million, a million pounds, that kind of thing.

*Sounds quite oppressive.*

Exactly the right word. It was rather oppressive. And I'd...for that reason, the times when we used to go and stay there, I found the, the anxiety, a certain anxiety about doing the wrong thing, not knowing quite enough about why, not knowing what one should do to show one's appreciating good wine, that kind of thing. And, whether I was holding my knife and fork... A great temptation to start eating off my knife, that kind of thing, but I did resist. (laughs)

*And did he become an architect, what did he do?*

He, he was too rich to bother very much about becoming anything. I think he... Quite honestly I, I'm not quite sure what he did. I think he...

*And did she carry on with architecture?*

Only in a very minimal way. No, she...I can't think of anything that she did. She was friends...I mean she was great friends with Hugh Casson, as indeed Pauline was, and he was another of Quentin's godfathers, so, Quentin had John Stafford and Hugh Casson as godfathers.

*Aileen[ph] and Hugh were actually involved with each other weren't they?*

Probably. Yes. I think.

*And what was John Stafford like as a godfather?*

Apart from a very expensive initial present, which was I think something silver, I think a sort of, silver flexible snake, with interlocking, the body is made of interlocking tubes, and it can be bent and turned round, and I think it was almost certainly Georgian, it was very expensive, after the initial present, he did nothing at all. Neither did Hugh.

*Why did you choose them?*

Oh entirely Pauline who chose them. They were both friends of Pauline's. I didn't...I mean I wouldn't have gone on knowing Alleen[ph] if Pauline hadn't known Alleen[ph].

*And what was Alleen's[ph] background, do you know?*

I've no idea. I should think fairly posh.

*And do you think she was a happy person?*

No, I think in a curious way she was always dissatisfied. I think she...I think she respected John and got on very well, but I think all her life she expected some wild, grand passion which never happened. Her knight in shining armour should have appeared and swept her away, I think.

*Did she have children?*

Yes, she had two girls. And then the most...then the most ghastly thing happened. A relation of theirs, who had two children, a husband and two children, she and her husband were killed in an air crash, and Alleen[ph] and John felt compelled to adopt the two children. They were sufficiently close to have done that. And that really altered, changed their lives considerably. And I can remember Alleen[ph] struggling with the conflicting thing of feeling bound to do this, and yet resenting it bitterly. The feeling of being bound to do it won in the end, but it did not suppress the resentment at having this stroke of fate landed on her. It was as though some crippling illness had suddenly occurred in the whole... And I think very troublesome... And I think the two adopted children gave a lot of trouble. I used to hear about it from Pauline. And then one of the daughters married someone, a painter, whose name I always get wrong so I won't mention it, who beat her up. And so, that was a bad start. It produced a lot... The whole



of the family development. Then produced a lot of problems, they always seemed to be trying to solve insoluble problems. But of course this was helped out very much by having enough money in the background. And then, Alleen[ph] eventually became a counsellor. And Pauline, Pauline always spoke of her with great respect as a counsellor, but I was never able to imagine her as being anything other than very clichéd and conventional, and...and not a good counsellor. She would say all the things which were very obvious, like, take a good rest, or, get away from it all somehow. That kind of thing. But maybe I'm being unfair to her.

*And do you remember the names of the children?*

I wouldn't risk it, no.

*And you don't know what happened to them ultimately?*

They became, they married and had families. Pauline used to keep in touch with them. I don't think...I don't think it ended either happily or unhappily, I think they made conventional marriages.

*And why do you think Aileen[ph] and Pauline were such good friends, what was it?*

[pause] Entirely as...cushions to cry on. Shoulders to lean on. That each of them told the other about insoluble problems, and each of them gave sympathy and support. I know Pauline used to go to Alleen[ph] and tell her a lot of her troubles, and I know that Alleen[ph] used to telephone, and spend hours on the telephone talking about her own problems. So it was that, it was I think that kind of... There was a lot of respect I think, I mean Pauline respected her very much.

*And somebody else you've mentioned in connection with Hugh was, is it Marjorie McClintock[??]?*

Yes.

*What was the story? Because she was in your life too wasn't she?*

Oh very much, yes, she... After my first wife died, people made lots of efforts to introduce me to other potential wives, which I mainly wasn't interested in at all. Hugh Casson... Marjorie McClintock[ph], whom I knew nothing about at all, and I don't...I still don't know very much about, except that she was badly treated by a very fast, very...too-quickly-made marriage, and the bloke took her to South Africa and proceeded to beat her up, and she ran away. Well she ran away straight into the arms of Hugh Casson, and fell very much in love... Well, to say she ran into the arms of Hugh Casson, she met Hugh Casson shortly after she returned to England, having run away from her husband. And she fell very violently in love with Hugh Casson. And I don't, I don't really know whether he responded or not, I mean maybe he did, maybe he didn't. Then, eventually anyhow Hugh thought, well, Marjorie[ph] is, 'I will introduce Marjorie[ph] to Humphrey, because, clearly Humphrey might want to marry again.' And so he did. And she, Marjorie[ph] immediately sort of took me under her wing, she thought, oh poor man, he's a widower, he's lost his wife, he needs some looking after. And she became always, and irritatingly, there, to, as she called, help me and advise me. And at that time I was living in Lavenham, because Stephen and I had bought Lavenham, I think we've talked about this, The Great House, and she more or less said, 'You need looking after; I am coming to do, I'm going to be your cook and housekeeper, and really look after you in Lavenham.' Well this kind of thing is very difficult to turn down, I mean, because, what could be more marvellous than to be given time to do one's own work and break off and have a meal that somebody else has made? (laughs) And so, rather foolishly I said, 'OK. Mind you...' I think I did actually say to her, 'Mind you, I don't want to go to bed with you,' because I thought it's better to be honest straight from the word go. And she said, 'Oh, don't worry, don't worry.' Clearly thinking that in the end she would break that resistance down. And so she came and lived with me in Lavenham. Now it happened that she was extremely accident-prone, and she used to do the most incredible things. She, she used to sort of trip up over things, which she herself had made dangerous by

dropping them on...sort of electric flexes and things, she would drop in strategic places so that she would then trip up over them, and badly bruise something like her elbow or her knee or something, and therefore demand a lot of sympathy. And therefore her function as the carer of Humphrey Spender, painter, was no longer able to function. I had to look after her. So that became very tiresome. And, I found myself not really liking somebody drooling over me to this extent. And so gradually I, I hope tactfully and politely, I managed to push her out.

*What did she look like?*

I think she was probably a little older than me, which wasn't in her favour, because I have this thing about young people. Rather sort of blousy really. Undistinguished. Sort of acceptable, but un, undistinguished.

*Do you know what happened to her?*

No. Do you?

*No, I don't know about her at all, except through you mentioning her before.*

Oh.

*And, also in connection with Hugh is somebody Gray[ph] I think you mentioned.*

Patricia Gray[ph]? I don't know. No, she...she entered Hugh Casson's life... No, I can't think of any Gray[ph]. There was a, a student at the architecture called Richard Gray[ph], who was in my circle of friends, but there's no, nothing particular about him. No, I...

*Who is Patricia Gray[ph]?*

Patricia Gray[ph], I can't really tell you very much about her, except that she became a very important thing in Hugh Casson's life.

*Was it something to do with Italy, or is that somebody else?*

Yes, she lived in Italy, yes. Mm.

*And, while we're talking as we were earlier about relationships with men, and in particular you were talking about Orientals, the person you've talked about a little but we've never really talked about him, and I also don't know how to spell his name, is someone you referred to as your Chinaman.*

Oh, my Chinaman. Well there are lots of them. At the AA, Architectural Association, there was a very beautiful Chinese young man called Cheng Yum Koh, k-o-h, and he, he was very very keen on things, which I haven't mentioned maybe enough in terms of my own interests...

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

[End of F104530 Side B]

[F10431 Side A]

*OK.*

We go back to Cheng Yum Koh. Full stop. And I shall then insert something which will explain the relationship. I was very very good at games and sport and very fond of playing squash and swimming and diving, and all the things which really one wouldn't have expected of my type. But I just happened to be very good. And quite good at tennis, really quite good at squash, and eventually a very good swimmer and a diver, all things which used to make Stephen rather giggle. Well, Cheng Yum Koh was also very, had the most wonderful body, which I discovered simply because we discovered that we were very interested in swimming, and we used to go to swimming together, and he taught me the essentials of diving, of how to control one's body diving. And naturally I fell very much in love with him, because his body was just so beautiful. And he was a nice, laughy, active young man. And our relationship was entirely doing sporty things together. There were other people in my year who also fell in love with him, and one of my friends, Eddie Gaythorne Hardie, caught one glimpse of him at one stage, and said, 'Oh Humphrey, you must introduce me to Koh again, because he's so marvellous.' But that, that proved a non-starter. Now, so he was the first sort of Oriental in my life.

*Had he...where had he grown up?*

He was straight Chinese, and he simply came from China at a time when it was not difficult to get out of China, I imagine, because after all we're talking about 1930, and I think the political thing in China did not restrict people getting out of China. That would need checking.

*Did you learn anything about China from him?*

No, not very much. He...he...he wanted... The fact that he was studying architecture in England, implied that he wanted to become, he wanted to westernise himself. So I learnt

only totally trivial things, about food and... He introduced me to, to really good Chinese meals, and, he knew where to go in London to get good Chinese cooking.

*Which at that time, where would that be?*

Oh gosh. There I...I'm tempted to say Gerard Street, but, do you know, I absolutely... I remember, there was one place in South Kensington, fairly near South Kensington station, where we used to go together. And that must have been one of the first Chinese restaurants in London. Well, I lost...he went back to China and started a practice in China after the architectural course. Then, he gave me... There was...there was no sex, I mean he was quite shocked by the idea of homosexuality. Although he was very vain, and very naughty and very tempting, and, he knew how everyone was attracted to him. Then, that made me realise about Oriental bodies, and coloured bodies, and the fact that the body looked very sculpturesque, and the darkness of skin accentuates the whole sort of form, and the muscle and... And also conceals lots...something which I don't go for very much, which is lots of body hair. I remember one of the most horrific moments in my life was to discover that I was growing hairs on my chest. Anyhow, that's, that's in brackets. Then, much later on, I met Chim Lam. Now this is really much later on.

*And how do you spell his name?*

c-h-i-m, l, capital L-a-m.

*And by much later on, what do you mean?*

Oh, sort of, 1970s, '75 let's say. And I met him because he was a great friend, though not the lover of, another lover of mine, Hugh Gibb. And we met in the Royal Academy. This young man was, had come to England because he thought of himself as a painter, and he wanted to pull strings to get into the Royal College of Art, for which he was totally unqualified of course. So I did my best, knowing perfectly well that there was absolutely no hope of him getting into the Royal College. But in doing so, I became very

friendly with him, and we became physically involved, and he was very, he had a wonderful body. And that became really obsessive. I was absolutely madly and passionately in love with him. And he was...we had a common interest, which was music. He was really...in a strange way that Orientals have a grasp of European music, and sometimes become wonderful performers, like the Chinese violinist lady whose name I can't remember, and a very wonderful pianist who's rather faded away now. And we used to go to...we used to go to concerts, as opposed to... We used to go to opera and concerts together. And, on one occasion when we were in the Festival Hall, walking around during the interval looking at one of the exhibitions the Festival Hall tends to put on, we were holding hands, and an elderly lady came up to us and said, 'I think you are disgusting.' And I looked at Chim Lam, and Chim Lam looked at me, and we didn't know who she was talking to. (laughs) So, I said, 'Why?' And she said, 'Well, what are you doing? You're holding hands, and this is a man, this is not a girl.' And I said, 'Well, if we were to have a serious discussion about this, it would take us well beyond the interval of the opera, so I don't want to get involved in a serious discussion.' I said the usual trite, stiff-upper-lip things, like, each one of us is entitled to our own opinion, and if you think it's disgusting, then go on, think it's disgusting, but we don't think it's disgusting, do we?' And Chim Lam said, 'No, we don't.' (laughs) Well, then, eventually... Chim Lam in fact was the partner of a Portuguese judge who lived in Kowloon, which is opposite Hong Kong, across, across the estuary. And, Chim Lam felt very guilty about this and felt that...which I think he really loved... This was a Portuguese judge, which sounds kind of Gilbert and Sullivan. But I think he really loved him, and he felt very guilty about him. And this man had said, 'OK, you want to be a painter. You go to England and do what you can to get yourself trained as a painter.' And this is why he was in England. And he had only a year in England. Well then, something went wrong with his attitude to me. I never ceased to love him really. He found something inadequate in me, and, I got to know that he was going around with other people, and I got pretty hysterical about it and started to wander around trying to find him, literally, literally trying to find him, physically find out where he was, because he failed to turn up to various dates. And in the end, I mean it ended in utter misery for me, which I simply had to grow out of, that was all, as one does.

*How long did that take?*

About two years I suppose, the whole thing.

*And what were those two years like?*

Well there was a year of sort of bliss. We had...we were together quite a lot. We never lived together, it was just sort of meeting once a week. And then, I think he came down here, I think... Pauline was aware of this. Because before I married Pauline I told her, had told her that this kind of thing was liable to happen, and she had accepted that. And, I think he came down here, and he fitted in quite well. In fact Hugh Gibb himself on one occasion brought him down here, so... I... [pause] I suppose in a way, in telling that story I'm confessing to being, having been unfaithful, and so, I have felt guilty about this, and wondered to what extent this has contributed to Pauline's illness, and so, I mean one has endless feelings of guilt and anxiety and conflict about these things.

*But what about the time, when it had broken up with him and you were very distressed, how did you cope with that, what was that period like?*

Normally when I'm distressed and unable to cope, I bury myself in work, and so, it has the rather good effect of pushing me back into trying very hard and working very hard, and testing my own talent, which I haven't much confidence in, of trying to just create and produce as much as I can. And that has happened at the end, at the ends of affairs.

*So, you don't get so depressed you're completely blocked?*

No, I have very strong, very strong powers of revival. I think the worst, the worst patch of, nearly not reviving, was after my first wife died, after Lolly died, when my friends... Barbara Ker-Seymer told me afterwards that I appeared to be in a complete kind of daze, d-a-z-e, and went around looking as though I was hardly alive. But I do remember that,



because Stephen was very helpful and told me that I could go and live in St John's Wood where he was living, once I was established at St John's Wood, I did start painting very hard, and in fact it resulted in having an exhibition at the Leicester Galleries then.

*What were those paintings?*

The paintings were to do with the architecture of St. John's Wood. There's a kind of stucco, stucco, white stucco faced, or cream stucco faced, early Victorian or late Georgian, around about 1820, 1840, kind of house. And somehow or other, by using a medium of, of crayons and chalks and pastel, I managed to produce a kind of, abstracted quality, of architectural themes. And the Redfern liked these. And in fact as a result of those drawings I was asked by another character in my life, Robert Henriquez, who had been asked to write a book on the Cotswolds, I was asked by him to illustrate his book on the Cotswolds. Which I still have, and which I think was quite successful. And so painting has been my refuge, yes. Oh, not necessarily only painting, painting and, and photography and, just being creative.

*And do you associate any particular paintings with the year or however long after you broke up with your Chinese friend?*

With Chim Lam? That one, not Koh, not the...?

*The second one.*

The second one. [pause] Yes, I suppose I was into very... I was very much into textile design then you see, I was teaching textile design at the College, at the Royal College. So, my painting was very decorative, and very mixed up with purely decorative design. So I think my painting at that stage was very kind of abstract. And I remember having a joke with Chim Lam because, he said that he also wanted to paint 'abstlact' he said, 'abstlact', and I couldn't resist teasing him about this, and so, we had a kind of code about 'abstlact painting'. And I...so it was very sort of colourful and unrepresentative.

At the same time there has always been a level of my own painting which is very pessimistic and very...sending very gloomy sort of messages. I've always been fascinated by dereliction, by decay, and I think maybe that partly derives from having in my mind's ear the words of the song, of the hymn, *Abide With Me*, the words which stick in my mind are, 'Change and decay in all around I see.' And I became very very fascinated when I was doing Mass Observation for instance in the kind of industrial dereliction and decay in those areas. And when the war broke out I was onto a very good line of completely unsellable pictures, which were to do with architectural decay, with industrial decay, with mysterious sort of wires and, and concealed high explosive, mines, and walls which contained mysterious areas. I suppose I was affected by Surrealism, but there was always that rather, pessimistic sort of messages. And even lately I found myself painting an apocalyptic painting which has to do with, literally the total destruction of the world, with mysterious objects lying around which might be stones and might be bombs, and might be guided missiles, and have mysterious numbers attached to them. Totally unsellable. And, I mean the effect of, of cars and traffic on the landscape, which introduce extraordinary visual language of its own, and which most people manage to keep out of their minds and won't let them, let these, this extraordinary landscape into their visual vocabulary, I like pointing that out. Again, it's completely unsellable, because people don't want to be reminded about these things. But I shall continue to do that. And I shall continue to do it because, after all Francis Bacon gave the most extremely horrific and frightening and pessimistic messages about the human condition, and his painting is regarded as important. So perhaps these will be the only important paintings I do.

*You talked on previous tapes about doing... I can't say it [inaudible], the apocalyptic painting. And presumably the painting you're talking about now is nothing to do with what happened on September the 11<sup>th</sup>, it predates it by quite a long time.*

Oh predates that. But, you're quite right to mention that, because, in fact, the thing that struck me about the September 11<sup>th</sup> incident was, the extraordinary beauty of those photographs, of the huge clouds of glittering, fiery, jewel-like smoke which came out of

the tops of those buildings. [pause] It leads me on to rather a pet theory of mine, which is that sometimes a beautiful photograph, as indeed these television photographs were, a beautiful painting of a horrific subject, can be inappropriate. The beauty of the painting can be inappropriate to the subject. And I think I've mentioned maybe before, the photographs of Don McCullin who is the most wonderful photographer, of the various wars that he has covered, when he is literally dealing with death and blood, and wounds and, utter, utter despair, sometimes are too beautiful for the subject matter of the photograph. The photographs themselves are visually so beautiful that one can't relate them to the subject matter.

*So are you saying he should take less beautiful photographs, or that the subject matter shouldn't be photographed?*

No, I am saying that one should have a kind of extra hidden talent, of making the photograph horrible to look at, if it's of a horrible subject. But that, that is...that's very difficult to do. I mean, I was much too concerned, and I think this has to do with architectural training, I was much too concerned with good composition. In my viewfinder, I had to see a good balanced composition, and I did not relate the composition to the subject matter, and when I was photographing extreme poverty, as for instance for *Picture Post* in covering places like Glasgow and Tyneside and Birmingham, my photographs do the Don McCullin thing sometimes, they're marvellously composed photographs, but they don't relate to their subject. They... It's irrelevant to the subject.

*What about in this context, a painting like Guernica, where do you put that?*

I think Picasso solved the problem amazingly well there, because, somehow by abstract imagery he has with amazing skill conveyed a sense of horror, and despair, and howling agony, yes. I mean the open mouths, the flailing arms, and... The imagery of, of *Guernica* I think exactly does what I would like to do but haven't been able to do.

*And do you think when you're painting your bleak pictures like this, it happens to do with something in your private life that is feeling pretty black, or is it always the sort of visual stimulus? And do you, do you paint these paintings only at a certain phase, or do you paint them alongside other, other's of the images? I mean, how do they go, in phases or...?*

Well, they started by being essential subject matter. For instance when I was doing, in 1937 when I was doing Mass Observation, I saw so much decay, change and decay, in the industrial landscape, that I simply thought, this is wonderful subject matter. And it gets me out of the conventionally picturesque, the... Everybody can define what they find as picturesque, but there is a kind of, Constable kind of scudding cloud, river, the bend of a river kind of painting. Corot involved with great skill in the conventionally picturesque. It seemed to me that I was getting away from the conventionally picturesque. And also that I was, by finding my own subject matter, pessimistic though it was, got me away from being heavily influenced by all the big influences of the day; in other words Picasso and Braque and Matisse and all those wonderful, wonderful painters whom one was profoundly influenced by, had nothing to do with what I was then painting. And, when I nowadays see photographs, because I had the sense occasionally to photograph the painting, of what I was doing then, I wish that the war had not intervened and stopped this style of painting. I think I could have become much more focused and single-minded about my painting.

*But now, how do they, the dark paintings, do they come in phases of months, or are they going along in parallel with other work, or...?*

I think they, they happen in a rather accidental kind of way. My method is to keep a painting in a rather flexible condition by shuffling around cut-out bits and pieces, drawings that I've done, or textures that I've made, and suddenly I arrive at what I had not intended at all in the first place, I suddenly see in what I've done, maybe having left it and come in for lunch and then gone back to it, I then see, my God! that's, that might be a bomb, that's an unexploded mine, and that blot in the sky, in the sky area, top of the

painting, is an attacking aeroplane. So it happens that it feeds into a part of my mind which is very much aware of this kind of, of horrific thing. You see after all, I was born, I was four when the First World War broke out; I was, how long did it last? Five years? 1914 to 1918, four years. I was eight when it ended. I heard a lot, a lot about the trenches, in fact I became absolutely, absolutely fascinated by the awfulness of what might happen. It was...it was a kind of, drug. I couldn't resist thinking about bayonets and being bayoneted, and being blown up, and limbs flying away from bodies and things. And I think that was just the effect of the kinds of conversation that was going on around me. One of my mother's favourite brothers, her very favourite brother was killed in the war, and of course many of her friends' friends and friends' husbands and so on were killed. So, so there was, there was that kind of thing going on. And then we come to the Second World War where the whole, there's a whole, even more horrific imagery of dreadful happenings going on in the world. Though perhaps not quite so bad as the trenches. And so this has always been a kind of background thing. I feel I haven't answered your question.

*If you are doing one of these paintings, would you be likely to do another one of the same mood after it? Would you spend months following this kind of theme?*

Yes. I do them and... And occasionally, I mean people...only recently I had to produce eight paintings for an exhibition which was collecting money to repair a church, and I... When people came to choose the paintings, I had an apocalyptic painting, just on purpose, hanging on the wall, and they all, the people, there were about four people came, and they all thought that that was a good painting, some even a marvellous painting. And I said, 'Well it's only £300.' (laughs) And, 'Oh I couldn't live with it, I wouldn't want it on my walls.' So, there's that kind of thing to be aware of.

*But would you at the same time be working on other paintings of quite different mood?*

Yes, yes I always work on about six paintings at once, yes. Because I find that, the eye can't any longer solve problems unless you give a particular image a rest, so I stop and go

onto something else. This leads to the most ghastly physical muddle in the studio, but I... But I mean, I think my, the whole problem, and I think, stop me if I've said this before, I feel different day by day, I wake up feeling different from what I felt the day before, and therefore I do, I tend to go for a different kind of painting. So I am inconsistent, I am very very inconsistent in my painting, and that is not a good commercial proposition.

[End of F10431 Side A]

[F10431 Side B]

*.....when you go from the house to the studio, do you know which painting you're going to go to?*

No. Well, I know which painting to go to if I have left that painting around, and so I go... If it's the first thing that I see in the morning, I might complete, I might have completely forgotten about it you see. If I've put it away the night before, I might have completely forgotten about it, and start something completely new. I tend to get led by what's going on around me. But if it's there and visible, yes I will go on with it, until I think, well, well now the time has come when I'm liable to do too much, and maybe it's finished already. Anyway I'll put it aside and make a judgement on it. I mean there are times recently I've spent a day in the studio looking at past work and thought, God! I'm just such a...it's just so bad, all of this. I'm going to give it, I'm going to give it up, I'm going to destroy most of it. And I come back and I come in here and I tell Rachel that I'm putting in a box everything that I'm going to destroy, because I think that, lacking the courage to put the match to the bonfire, I think she should look at them and agree with me, or disagree with me, and maybe through that method we will extract about a third of the total quantity. There's an awful lot of rubbish in there. And, I am in the process of, of putting into a box things which I think are absolutely hopeless. And then occasionally I think, well, as one gets older, and this has happened to, I think it happened to Stephen and it happened to many friends, as one gets older one loses that initial kind of, something or other, call it talent or call it...inspiration is rather pompous, but one loses something, and maybe one should stop.

*But do you have days... I mean I find it with writing that I can write something and think it's OK, and go back to it the next day and think how terrible it is, and then the next day because I go back to it thinking it's terrible, I find it's not as terrible as I might have thought.*

Yes, yes.

*Do you have the more positive feeling having gone through that sort of thing[??]?*

Yes, exactly that. Exactly that happens. But it happens in a slightly modified form, that I go back to it and I think, why didn't I see that...there's one more thing to do with it, and that's going to solve the whole problem. So it is important I think to... I mean, I think it's essential to come back to really old work, I mean work which is about ten years old perhaps, and which you've got stuck on, and which you've left unfinished, and come back to them ten years later, and you see exactly what you could be doing. And that leads of course to not throwing away enough. I think I don't... I rather envy writers. I know writers rather envy painters, Stephen always said that he envied painters. But I rather envy writers, because, if they put something away, it's a very small thing which can go into a box file or go into an envelope file; whereas if you've...you go on collecting paintings and drawings, they're big things and...

*It's quite depressing going to yellowing, dusty papers I can tell you.*

(laughs) Yes.

*But... [pause] Oh yes, if you go back to a painting that may have been not seen by you for ten years, do you always remember the doing of it, or do you have a moment where you don't even recognise it?*

Sometimes I come across paintings and I wonder if they are by me. But mostly I remember very well what it was like, and, and how I did it. I'm very involved in technique you see, so I've got to remember about technique, and I'm very...I'm very anxious and worried about impermanence, observing how a lot of my friends do things which are very impermanent, and use very cheap, if they're doing collages for instance they're using glue sticks or Pritt Sticks or something which is very impermanent, or they're using very cheap colour, or even using house paint, and I know that it's not going to keep its colour. So I'm very, I'm very sort of anxious about that, and fairly



knowledgeable about technique. But normally I do remember why I wanted to paint it, and how I painted it, and the kind of effort it took, because, to face a blank canvas, particularly a large canvas, is pretty nerve-racking. And one of my big problems is that, nowadays is that, paper and brushes and paint and so on are so expensive that I find it much easier to paint on cheap paper, because one isn't in danger of ruining a very expensive thing, and so I tend to do my best paintings on the worst quality materials. Of course I don't have that anxiety. Having done something on very cheap paper, I then make an effort by literally building up the paper, putting a cheap paper down onto a good paper, and maybe the thing's going to be fairly permanent.

*And, having seen the images of the World Trade towers burning and collapsing, will that feed into your work? I mean, it's very much in line with the kind of subject matter we've been talking about.*

Yes, it will, very much so. In fact I've, in my own imagination I've been painting a very big painting which involves towers with huge billows of beautiful, beautiful, yet horrific, blood-red tinged smoke. Do you know the paintings of Martin, John Martin? He's I think the sort of great apocalyptic painter where huge natural disasters and historical disasters are painted. I...it's something that should be done I think. Yes, I...I...in my mind I'm, I'm doing this, yes. But at my age, whether I shall... You see it takes a lot of, again, comparing a painter's life with a writer's life, a painting is physically very active, and very tiring, and at my age actually to deal with a big canvas is physically a very demanding thing. I tend to paint smaller and smaller for that very reason. I get very very tired.

*And, leaving the visual side of it out of it, what have you been feeling about the world since September the 11<sup>th</sup>, how have you responded to what's happened?*

Terrified. I'm deeply... I think all of, people of my age who saw appeasement, who saw Neville Chamberlain trying to postpone disaster, and thinking, quite genuinely thinking... At the time of course I was bitterly opposed to what he was doing, but I'm...in the light of

recent knowledge, of documents coming to light, one sees that maybe this was more excusable, and I now find myself wondering about Bush and the power that he has in the world, and how he must be haunted also by the idea of appeasement not working, and therefore pushed into the other direction of making a powerful, of gathering all the power that he has, which is shattering, and making a powerful reaction too quickly. I mean, I find myself frightened on both levels, frightened on the level of appeasement, and therefore allowing the terrorist threat to increase, or to sudden and immediate demonstration of being the most powerful nation in the world, and therefore the possibility of landing the whole world into the most ghastly war. No, I find myself terrified.

*And how much has it weighed on you?*

It weighs on me a lot if I think of my son and my grandchildren, and, and wondering, thinking back to the moment when, dropping through my postal, what do you call it, the slit in the door which lets...

*Postbox.*

Letters. Dropping through my postbox comes the buff envelope which says, 'Report 0900 hours to...' in my case Tidworth station, wondering what will...how they will react, whether they will become conscientious objectors, whether they will rally round the nation's need and that kind of thing. In other words, to what extent their lives will be affected or ruined by what's happening. I mean if you think the extent to which my own life was altered by the war, by five years not being able to do what I wanted to do, then, let's hope that their lives are not going to be interrupted in the same way. So, I mean the worries are attached to this thing, rather than the thought that one's going to be physically demolished, bombed or, or given a mysterious disease, or gassed or otherwise blown up and made miserable. Whereas in the First World War...in the Second World War, I was quite concerned about simply being killed. But I didn't have enough...

*You didn't have enough...?*

I was think...involved in a thought about being a conscientious objector. I didn't have enough courage to be a conscientious objector. That's not the whole reply though, because, I did genuinely convince myself that Hitler was the outward showing of evil. Showing is the wrong word isn't it. The outward, something or other, of evil. And that therefore this was the one occasion when one could kill with firearms, with guns and rifles and things. As opposed to my, not exactly friend but acquaintance, Keith Vaughan, who did have the strength of mind to become a conscientious objector, I thought about it a lot, and the two things combined, lack of courage to become a conscientious objector, and the thought of Hitler as the demonstration of evil, and therefore this was the one occasion when one was excused by using horrible death-dealing instruments.

*Mm. And we got onto this because we were talking about how you deal with grief essentially, as when your heart's broken or whatever. When Stephen died, was that a very dark time for you?*

No. I have to say not, because, we drifted very much apart, we were never as close together as we were in, just before the war, and, and just after the war when Lolly died, then we were very close, and I would have been deeply stricken if anything had happened to Stephen. But after, after 1950-ish, I think we drifted more and more apart. After all he was very much in America you see, and so physically we didn't meet very much. And also, I thought of him as... I... I put him into the category of somebody who was frighteningly intelligent and frighteningly well-informed. In that case I was wrong of course, because he wasn't very well-informed. But frighteningly clever. And I found it more and more difficult. I drifted into...the attitude which I've described to you, I was tongue-tied in his presence. And he, he had a curious quality which, he never never started anything; he always expected me to start a conversational line. He would never ask me any questions. He would never ask me about my life and my problems. It was always me that had to start the whole thing. And I found it quite difficult, I found the relationship quite difficult.

*Was he interested in your life?*

Don't think so, no. Not really.

*And since we met last, your sister died I believe.*

Yes. Going back to your last question, was he interested. Natasha, his widow, has always said to me that he was deeply, deeply concerned about my health, my happiness, my life in general, but he certainly never showed it to me. Sorry, I've now forgotten what you next asked me.

*Well I was going to ask you about having lost your sister, which was this year wasn't it?*

Well similarly, I didn't see enough of my sister. I... She became quite eccentric, because she lived alone. She had cats, and she talked to her cats, and she talked to herself, and she became literally unaccustomed to having a dialogue. So, I used to visit her in a dutiful kind of way, because I thought she needed friendship and affection, and... I found that there could not be a dialogue, there could only be a monologue. So one sat with her, and it was she who talked and talked and talked and talked, and any attempt that I made to contribute to this, to turn this monologue into a dialogue, was immediately kind of, literally physically, with a wave of the hand, was waved away. 'I haven't finished what I am going to say' kind of attitude. And since her life was very restricted, literally in event and in the sense that she was house-bound, and physically became rather lame and frail, this meant that her mental landscape was very restricted, and so, in a way I regarded my visits to her more and more as kind of duty visits. And then she went through a period of being really ill and frightened of being ill, and resentful of hospitals, and she had to be visited in hospital. And the whole thing really became a kind of nightmare, in its own kind of way a repetition of those ghastly kind of visits to hospital which involved...in which Lolly's illness, the last stages of illness were involved. And that I suppose really gave me an absolute horror of going to hospitals. I found it a real punishment to spend

the whole day, it literally took a whole day, getting, getting to London, going another hour's journey to the hospital from London. Going into the hospital was a real kind of physical effort. Getting to Christine's bedside, wondering what to say. Oh no. No, I...it wasn't...it was a relief to me when she died, yes.

*Mm. Where had she lived?*

Oh she had a little house in Golders Green, and, previously she had lived in a lovely, early Georgian house in Holly Place in Hampstead, near the, fairly near the Whitestone Pond, which was really pretty surroundings. And she became, the house that she lived in in Hampstead was actually adjacent to, shared a party wall with the church to which she was devoted, and Christine you see was a Roman Catholic convert, and she got deeply involved in a friendship, relationship, question mark, with a very passionate Catholic lady, and together they ran a charity called St Joan's Catholic and Social Alliance. Which naughtily Stephen and I used to rather joke about, because we discovered on one occasion that they were getting money together to clothe a lot of otherwise naked Africans, and Stephen and I thought that it would be far better if they weren't clothed.  
(laughs)

*And you used to be very worried that you might say something on these tapes which would offend her. I mean even though you, what you are indicating is that you felt quite remote from her, you still wanted to protect her in some way.*

Yes, I think she would have been quite deeply shocked about the extent to which I was homosexual. She knew a lot about Stephen, but not...not enough, I mean she didn't know the whole story. I think she would have been horri... If...if I had...if I wrote an absolutely truthful autobiography, what I would disclose would be quite, in terms of sexual behaviour, would be quite shocking I think. I know that there are ways of describing these things, one can draw a kind of veil by using rather obscure kind of language, and by poeticising and romanticising, but if I had given an absolutely blow for blow account of

the extent to which I have sinned in Catholic terms, I think she would have been deeply shocked, yes.

*And you would have minded that?*

And, I would have minded it, only to the extent that I wouldn't have wanted her to suffer, because the shock would...this would have been a kind of suffering for her.

*So is her death slightly liberating for you in a way?*

Well...well physically liberating, in the sense that I was relieved of very very tiring physical involvement of a whole day of trains, I mean it was a six-hour journey really you see.

*But I mean, I understand that part, but was it also liberating that now you don't have to feel you've got to make sure she doesn't find out these things?*

Yes. Yes, yes it is liberating in that sense, yes.

*And how did she regard you and Stephen?*

Do you know, I...I think with considerable annoyance. I think we irritated her. She let loose quite a lot of... Talking for instance about, about Stephen not coming to see her, she would say things like, 'Oh, he's always so busy, why do people always have to be so busy?' What she really meant to say was, 'That he puts a lot of money-making work in front of the wish to see me.' She would have hated it if she thought going to see her was an obligation, which of course it was, and one had to conceal that from her. She wanted us both to take an interest. She very much appreciated what I did, and I did a lot to help her. I mean I did a lot to help her sort of financial problems, and, and doctoring problems, together with my elder brother's, my nephew, Philip, my elder brother's son, who lived fairly nearby, and who did a lot of the purely practical work for her. But I

mean the thing that I, I dread most in life is, becoming that kind of burden to... Because inevitably as one becomes older, one becomes more demanding of physical help and so on, the fact... I mean Christine illustrated something to be avoided.

*Was she proud of you and Stephen though?*

Yes, I think she was. She was always very interested... If I sent her sort of press notices... There was a big press coverage of the embroidery in, the Maldon Millennium Embroidery, the *Telegraph* came out with a four-page kind of supplement about it. And she would be enormously thrilled about that kind of thing. Yes I think she was quite proud, and I think she used to talk about us quite a lot.

*Mm. And, it's probably time you had a bit of a break. Can I just ask you one question, which is nothing to do with any of this. You mentioned in your previous recording William Clarke Hall, is that his name?*

Yes. He...

*Is he anything... We talked about him, is he anything to do with Denis Clarke Hall?*

Yes, he was his father.

*So did you know Denis as well?*

Yes. It's quite a long story. Can I start at the beginning?

*If you've got the energy, or would you like a break first?*

Yes I have, yes I have.

*OK, great. Hang on, before you do, I'm just going to get another.....*

[break in recording]

When my father died, I was fifteen...

*Sorry, I'm.....*

[break in recording]

*Fine.*

How I got involved with the Clarke Halls, incidentally a very great coincidence, because Pauline, unknown to me, became acquainted with the Clarke Halls and on a different route. Well, my father died when I was fifteen. I'm going to be as quick as I can about this.

*No, don't worry, I just didn't want you to repeat what you'd said.*

My grandmother became our guardian, and she wrung her hands violently and said, 'Whatever shall I do about these dear children? I will get someone to look after them.' And she brought in from, a friendship, she brought in a lady called Winifred Payne, who was actually teaching in a school at Lausanne in Switzerland. And Winifred Payne entered our lives as our kind of substitute mother. Well Winifred Payne had a sister called Clamence Payne[ph], who was a probation officer in the East End of London. Clamence[ph] because a great admirer of my photography, and she asked me if I would take some photographs of life in, a very impoverished life in Stepney where she was working as a probation officer, which could be produced in the juvenile court as evidence of bad housing. Now the magistrate in the juvenile court was William Clarke Hall, so, by that route I got to know William Clarke Hall, and inevitably I got to be acquainted with his wife who was called Edna and who was rather a good painter, in fact quite a well known painter in those days, who used to exhibit at the Leicester Galleries.



*Under that surname, or with a different?*

Under that surname. And now, Edna Clarke Hall somehow met Pauline when Pauline was about twelve, and thought Pauline very beautiful, and she was very beautiful, and said, 'I must do some drawings of you,' and somewhere in a cupboard in there there are some very beautiful drawings by Edna Clarke Hall. Well now, when I was a student... So there was a Clarke Hall contact. When I was a student at the AA, the Clarke Halls decided that, Denis wanted to become an architect.

[End of F10431 Side B]

[F10432 Side A]

*What sort of age was Denis compared to you?*

Denis was younger than me, because, when I was in my third year I think at the AA, I got a message from Clamence Payne[ph] that Denis wanted to come to the AA and would I show him round the AA. So Denis came as an outsider, and I took him round the AA and introduced him to various members of staff, so that he should decide himself whether he wanted to carry on and become an architect. And he did decide to do that, and so he was a student, during my last year he was a first-year student, and so we saw a lot of each other. Well, he was a very attractive man, apparently irresistible to girls, and he created havoc amongst the female students of the Architectural Association. And he emerged as an architect specialising in schools. And there are a lot of very good, for their day, modern pieces of architecture of schools. I think various, he made various basic faults I think, but I don't know what these faults are; I think they were bad acoustically, I think, and I think a lot of them were very badly insulated. But these were minor faults and I think, he got a lot of credit for being a very good school architect.

*And did you stay in touch with each other?*

No, not really. Neither with Edna, nor with William Clarke Hall, nor with Denis, no, we didn't, no.

*Can you give me a glimpse of what Denis's personality was?*

I would say overriding. I think, he gave me the impression of being quite a whirlwind, very energetic, very... That's what I can remember. Do you know about him?

[break in recording]

.....want me to be involved?

*Yes. Tell me who Peter Parker is.*

Peter Parker is a very good writer, who is at present writing a biography of Christopher Isherwood.

[break in recording]

*Yes, that's fine. That wasn't quite where I meant to start, but since we have, when I was last recording you, you were hoping to go off to the symposium about Christopher in America. And over lunch I've discovered you didn't go. Perhaps you could tell the tape.*

The reason I didn't go to the Los Angeles, was it Los Angeles? anyhow, the symposium about Christopher Isherwood, was that suddenly I nearly got septicaemia on account of a bit of wire having been left in my left chest from a pacemaker. And the wire had become a good foundation for the growth of all kinds of barnacles and seaweed and horrible growths and things. And, apparently it was very difficult to get out without quite a serious operation. So, the doctor that I was then dealing with really opted out of considering it at all, and just said, 'Oh we'll carry on as we are.' And it got more and more kind of infected, and swollen, and discharging and so on. So eventually, by a stroke of good luck this doctor went on holiday and I met his substitute who said, 'My God! you must go into Papworth at once and have this dealt with.' And that was quite a serious operation which I thought I wasn't going to come out of. But I did, and I'm perfectly OK now.

*If you thought you weren't going to come out of it, how did you approach it all?*

How did I...?

*Approach it all, what was your state of mind?*

I approached it simply in terms of what they call winding up loose strings, loose things. I had to make sure that my will was all right. And so there was a very dramatic incident when, the night before the operation, because, suddenly it was put ahead by three days, because it appeared to be rather more urgent than they thought, and a motorcyclist carrying my will arrived for witnesses at the hospital, in the hospital, at ten o'clock at night, and I had to find two witnesses, and to my horror there is apparently a rule that the nurses involved in any given case cannot be witnesses to a will, so I had to appeal to the chief nursing sister, who brought with her some functionary in the hospital administration, and I did find the witnesses. So at least I managed to... That whole question rather absorbed me. Otherwise I was, apart from being slightly worried at the mess that I knew to be in my studio, and which I didn't want Rachel to have to be involved in clearing up, I didn't take it as a very serious event. I think I was fairly relaxed about it.

*And you then had a recovery period which has been...*

Well then, the evening of the day of the operation, I was actually encouraged to stand up, which I did, and it seemed to work fairly happily, and the doctor said, 'OK, well you can go out tomorrow.' And then my son arrived and said he thought it was a bit soon; in other words, it was putting rather a responsibility and a strain on, at that stage Rachel. So, they were persuaded to allow me to stay for another night. So I stayed two nights in hospital. But after that it was simply a question of antibiotics and lots of rather uncomfortable absorbent dressings, and someone to put them on and take them off, and it really wasn't very dramatic or uncomfortable. And although it seemed a very long time, now I realised it was a relatively short time, the wounds took longer than I expected to stop being sore, they were sore for quite a long time, and they failed to heal as quickly as I hoped they would. But with adequate surgical dressings and things, they were absolutely all right.

*And when had you first had problems with your heart?*

It must be... I can't remember whether...is this the third pacemaker, or the second? Let's say it's the... I've only had two, and they last seven years, so it would be eight years ago when I first had, I first realised that my heart was beating very very slowly indeed. If I woke up at night at about three o'clock in the morning, I became aware that my heart was hardly beating at all, and I got quite worried about this, so I just simply went to the local GP and said, 'I think I need to see a specialist.' And he attached a kind of tape machine to me, where I walked around for two days, and it registered the variations in beat of my heart according to what I was actually doing. And, he then listened and looked at this, of course there was a[??] screen and a visual and aural thing. And he said, 'You must have a pacemaker sir.' I said, 'Yes.' And that was done. And I was then watched by about a dozen students. And at a certain point, when the scalpel was kind of raised, I said to the surgeon, 'Can I have a hand to hold?' And he... Because, this is going to hurt, because I don't react very well to local anaesthetics, and you couldn't have a general anaesthetic, because you have...half-way through the operation you have to sneeze and cough and so on, to test the wire, possibility of the wire dislocating. And I was given the hand of an absolutely gorgeous young Indian man...(laughs)...who, I think I must have broken every bone in his hand because I squeezed it so hard, because it was very painful.

*Was it?*

It was painful because I don't respond very well to local anaesthetics, and pain somehow works its way through. Also, on those occasions you can, you can hear everything going on. Apart from a television screen, I could see it going on, although I didn't look. And, maybe the imagination gets to work and one becomes very tense. I think I'm quite a considerable coward in that respect. I've always been very very alarmed by the idea of, by pain, by having pain in fact.

*It sounds perfectly reasonable.*

(laughs) I think more than most people, maybe.

*And while you were convalescing this last time round, you had the chance to read the James Stern...*

Ah yes. Coming back here after hospital, they were very worried about a residue of infection remaining inside me, so they put me onto two consecutive courses of antibiotics, and they made me feel fairly dismal, and on the top of them I got a kind of flu thing. And so I was able to read 450 letters from Jimmy Stern to Pauline. And, I don't think if I hadn't had that need to lie on, with my legs up, I don't think I would ever have got around to reading them.

*What did you discover?*

I discovered a very fascinating relationship in which Pauline disclosed a desire to be encouraged, and told that she was marvellous, and at the same time to be very diplomatically and intelligently criticised. And Jimmy Stern certainly proved that he was absolutely brilliant at doing all those things, very politely telling her that sometimes what she wrote was absolute rubbish. Whenever he said that, he also said that a lot of his stuff was absolutely rubbish too, and that he hadn't allowed it out, that he had always suppressed it, so that it was important that if she was going to have something performed or, or published, that it should not be rubbish, it should be good. And, I mean the correspondence wasn't absolutely fascinatingly original or interesting, but it did disclose a very interesting relationship between two people.

*But it was a romantic relationship, or not?*

It was a...yes, I think there was...there was love. I... I find it...I found it very difficult to work out whether there was any physical goings-on. I think probably not. Pauline was a person who, who had to have very intense relationships, one-to-one relationships, yes.

*But just to clarify from our previous tapes, I asked you over lunch how you were so sure that she had had a love affair with Robert Gittings.*

I'm sure about Robert Gittings being a sexual affair, because before we were married Pauline told me that this had happened, and that she had wanted to marry him, and that for some reason or other he had said no, and perhaps she was now glad that he had said no. So I think there was absolutely no doubt about that. And I think there were quite a few... I think there was somebody else called Christopher Freeman, and since the initials 'CF' are the same as Christopher Fry, I rather thought evidence that I had discovered, in the form of inscriptions in books, I thought maybe when 'CF' appeared, I thought it was Christopher Fry. And I think it was in fact Christopher Freeman. Who was a writer of some kind, but I don't know, I think he must have disappeared.

*And presumably now everything that was in Pauline's room has been sorted out, did you find anything else that showed sides of her you had no idea existed?*

There was a big correspondence with Desmond Hawkins, which I really, I did know about, I mean, both these friendships were to a large extent telephonic, and there were endless, endless calls to Jimmy Stern and to Denis Hawkins, more to Denis Hawkins because Denis Hawkins' wife had died quite a long time ago, less to Jimmy Stern because Tanya, Jimmy's wife, was rather inclined to breeze into the room and say, 'For God's sake Jimmy, you've got to stop that. I need the phone.' And so Pauline wasn't so happy about ringing Jimmy Stern. And because of that, I think the correspondence was, was bigger, the whole thing was done by letter. And they met occasionally in London.

*Actually you mentioning London, we've never talked about the fact, you have had a London base until very recently. Could we document that?*

The base in London, what we called the flat, which was in Notting Hill Gate, on the third floor of a, a large late Victorian house. We had that flat because Pauline's mother had a job in London before the war, round about 1935 I think, and it was Pauline's mother who originally rented the flat, which was in Camden Hill Gardens. And Pauline took it over, provided she paid the rent, or provided Pauline and her husband, eventually husband, me,

paid the rent. And so we had this flat all the way through, through the war, we had the use of the flat through the war, and...and up till last year, up to the year 2000. During a lot of this time the landlords of the flat, which were constantly changing, but each landlord realised the potential value in the sense that Notting Hill Gate was socially an up-and-coming neighbourhood, which was gradually and very quickly...actually very quickly becoming very smart, the final touch being put by Hugh Grant in his film *Notting Hill*, and, they were constantly badgering us to get out, offering us quite considerable sums of money to go in fact. And, as my physical, as age affected me more and more physically, to the extent that going up three flights of stairs with a slightly wonky heart, and failing legs, made it not altogether comfortable when we stayed in London, climbing up those stairs, and the fact that we didn't use it really very much, not enough to justify quite an expensive item, I mean although in fact for that area the rent was very cheap, nevertheless it was quite a lot out of my income, and we decided that the time had come to succumb to one of these offers. And so we were, literally we were bought out. At which point we had to decide what to do with the contents, and there were all kinds of, bits and pieces, two of which we were good enough to auction.

*What were they?*

There was a Victorian, I think it's called a credenza, which had belonged to my grandmother, and is now considered...which was rather a favourite piece of mine, although it was high Victorian, high Victoriana, and most people would have hated it, including my daughter-in-law Elizabeth. And a rather pretty chest, a late Georgian chest of drawers, which were auctioned by Phillips. The rest of it was more or less given away, and was, apart from lots of paintings which I've brought back here, there's one by Bryan Wynter there, some John Banting, Cecil Collins, which I obviously didn't want to part with and so I brought down here.

*How much time had you spent in the London flat over the years?*



Time spent at the flat was very meagre really. We used it as a base for going to opera and going to the theatre, overnighting if we needed, and going to exhibitions. And sometimes we would spend, say three nights or so there, feeling always slightly nervous about leaving the Ulting house unoccupied. But certainly we... It was luxury. From the word go I realise that it was an extravagance and a luxury, but it was rather marvellous to have it. And we could give little dinner parties there, and invite friends for evenings.

*And who might they have been?*

Mary Trevelyan, Julian Trevelyan. Going through the list of all my friends. Some...some favourite members of staff at the Royal College.

*And who would that be?*

That was Frederick Samson, who was at that time very friendly with Irish Murdoch. Have I talked about Frederick Samson? A lovely man. A refugee from Hitler. Very conscious of being...very conscious of being physically unattractive, and a Jew. A very neurotic man, but really loving and, and lovely man. A tutor in psychology in the general studies, or complementary studies I believe it was called, at the Royal College of Art. And other members of staff like my own colleagues in the surface design, textile design department, John Drummond – not the Scottish John, not the Edinburgh Festival John Drummond but another John Drummond. Barbara Brown who had been a student and became a tutor in the Royal College.

*What was she like?*

Barbara? Very, very...as a student, madly attractive. Very very difficult to deal with. Extraordinary story. She had been left in... When she was two weeks old she had been put into a basket and left at Paddington Station, and the stationmaster – shall I go on? – had picked up this basket, and said, ‘Dear little thing,’ and somebody – it would be nice to know what the stationmaster did think actually – somehow managed to find, by getting

the police involved, by various clues, managed to find who was Barbara's mother. So took the baby back to Barbara's mother. And then the following night Barbara was put into the basket, whether it was the same basket I don't know, and taken to another station. Did I say Paddington? The first one. I think King's Cross. And at that point, she was picked up by...and handed to social workers, and the rest... The following twenty or thirty years of her life, no, the following, the following twenty years of her life, were spent in foster homes. She always told me that she had had thirty, about thirty-one different foster parents. So she was a...she had a background which made her into quite tricky, psychologically quite a tricky person. And she became quite a tease, she became quite a, a torture. A lot of people were mad about her, and she teased, madly teased, me included. But still, we remained very good friends. And she's a very good friend to this day as a matter of fact, in the year 2001, aged now about sixty-three I suppose.

*Did she carry on at the College?*

She was a very very clever student, and she had quite a success with designing fabrics for Heal's. And, there came a time when we needed another tutor, and the professor, Roger Nicholson, said to me, did I know anyone who I thought would be a good tutor, and I immediately said Barbara. And so she came back as a tutor. Now another very odd thing. My life has been incredibly like an Irish Murdoch plot. Barbara, in the years after she was free of foster parents, when she was seventeen or so, she was able somehow to buy, to rent a house opposite Olympia, and she paid for this by letting out rooms to students. And one of the students was from the Royal College of Art, and he was a graphic design student, and he fell in love with Barbara, and they were going to get married. And it was then discovered that this young man had Hodgkin's disease, the same as my first wife had. At the same time as having Hodgkin's and making life very complicated on that level, it was discovered that he was also having an affair with one of Barbara's students at the Royal College. So, oh, the whole thing became utterly and awfully complicated and miserable. The young man with Hodgkin's died fairly quickly, so that part of it was solved. At which, at the point of his death, the student claimed him as her, the student's, property, not having known, the idea not having seemed possible,

not having known that he was also engaged virtually to Barbara. So, in a way I had to deal with that kind of problem, and be a kind of confidante to Barbara about it all, a comforter to Barbara about it all.

*Did she carry on teaching at the College?*

Yes, she did. She's a very good teacher, and she remained there after I left. She was a very tough person, and she...she couldn't bear kind of, complicated emotional excuses not to do any work from students, and she simply went round saying, 'Do some work for God's sake, get going. I mean what...what the hell do you think you're doing here?' And, 'There's nothing...you've got nothing to show. Do something, show it to me, and I'll talk about it to you.' And on that kind of level, as opposed to rather high-flown aesthetic criticism and so on, she became a very valuable tutor.

*Can you just say what the department became known as?*

The department, when I joined it, it was called the Department of Textile Design, and eventually it became... I'm not absolutely certain of this, but we all used to call it the Department of Surface Design, because, it was teaching, and all the staff practised, in designing wallpapers, carpets, textiles, both dress and furnishing textiles, and decorated plastics. Like Formicas.

*And, can I just get clear what we were saying over lunch, that when in your sort of c.v. it talks about work with plastics, one's really talking about the Formicas that we've talked about in the past. It's never three-dimensional plastics?*

Yes, I never...I never became involved in any way with plastic bowls or cups or anything three-dimensional. This was always the decoration, which in many very ingenious and cunning ways was applied to Formica. Formica is in fact a kind of sandwich, and the pattern on the Formica is sandwiched in between two layers of plastic, under pressure and heat.

*And while we're talking about fabric designers, did you come into contact with Lucienne Day, was she part of your life?*

I hardly...I was a great admirer of Lucienne Day's work, and I think she was a very influential designer, but in fact we never met. I never met her, no.

*And Robin?*

I never met him, no.

[End of F10432 Side A]

[F10432 Side B]

*.....Iris Murdoch, did you know her?*

No, I didn't know her. I was introduced to her by Frederick Samson, and, Frederick used to tell me how irritating she was to him, and how reactionary she was, and he used to get really quite angry about her. The story I remember best is that he bought a painting from one of the students at College, a student called Adrian Berg, a very interesting painting, and I think he's become quite a successful painter, and he hung it on his wall, and Iris Murdoch, not knowing that he had bought anything at all, walked in and said, 'Frederick, you simply can't have that dreadful thing on your wall.' And, he became very cross about this. So they, they were on what must have been very interesting, lively and excitable terms I think, because he was constantly complaining about how reactionary she was, and how she had absolutely no taste of any kind at all.

*Were they a couple?*

It emerges from, what's the...Bailey, Bailey's book, which I...mm, in a way dislike more and more, it emerges from that book that he might have been her lover, yes. Because she had, she...there's a whole range of very mysterious lovers who Bailey hints at in writing this book, and Frederick might well have been, yes.

*And who else might have been to the flat as part of your...?*

Incidentally, Frederick's...Frederick's, I think ex-wife, was a very well-known musical composer, oh gosh, she lives in America now. She's very famous. How awful to... Being old means forgetting names. Sorry, I interrupted you.

*It might come to you while we're talking. Who else might have come to the flat as part of your sort of dinner party world?*

Well really all my... It would mean going through lists and lists of even quite casual friends, and...

*I mean the sort of regular ones, the major ones.*

Julian and Mary came quite a lot, I think they would be regular friends. Frederick came quite a lot. John Drummond I think came quite a lot. I think those are...

*What was John Drummond like, when you talk about him?*

John Drummond was incredibly handsome, and still is at the age of about seventy-five. Or maybe more. No I think he must be about eighty now. Described by, someone whose name I forget, inevitably, said he was one of the most beautiful people that he'd ever met, ever seen. And, Irish. A talented designer, designed a lot of wallpapers, of a rather curious kind, wallpapers which made a complete kind of mural painting, generally of classical scenes involving naked Grecian types standing around with urns and, and drapes and flights of steps, and porticoes, and columns and things. And, he became a very great friend of mine. We, I suppose loved each other in a kind of way. And still are very, we're...I'm still very friendly with him. He's tied up with someone called David Day who is one of the directors of, Francis Day, the big big musical company, and they live together in Brighton, and they have a flat in Chelsea, and they also have a pad in New York. So, add to that the fact that John Drummond himself is in love with India, and is always sort of, in and out, darting in and out of India, you can see that he has a life in several geographical locations, New York, India, Chelsea and Brighton. So he probably doesn't have very much time to do any work. In fact I think now he could be described as a dilettante. But he has that kind of Irish charm, and, he is a very loyal friend, he, he rings me up and, and takes me to very delicious lunches at the Arts Club in Dover Street, and at the, something, there's a club called the something and Colonial, not the Home & Colonial, that was a grocery store. Something and Colonial Club. And sometimes we meet in the senior common room of the Royal College.

*And, going back to the Royal College, we mentioned over lunch Elsbeth Juda, who, when you mentioned Hans before I didn't know who he was, and I wondered now I do know if you could tell me a bit more about them both.*

[coughing] Sorry, I've got a frog. I can't remember how I first met Hans. I think it was because I did a lot of work for the P&O Orient line, through Colin Anderson who was a director at P&O, and I think Colin Anderson was a great friend of Hans Juda, in the sense that they both collected Henry Moore. Incidentally, Hans Juda had arrived apparently penniless and without any property as a refugee from Hitler, and somehow established himself, via a fashion magazine called *Ambassador*, and became wealthy enough to start collecting paintings by Graham Sutherland and Henry Moore and people. And I think the connection was through Colin Anderson, and I might have met Hans while Colin Anderson...while I was with Colin Anderson, and we were discussing various design projects that I was doing for the P&O line. Then, the *Ambassador* magazine ran some kind of competition... Ah, I'm getting mixed up. It was quite a highbrow...it wasn't only involved in clothes and fashion; it was...it had art features in it. And somehow or other I got involved in the magazine, *Ambassador*, and more and more with Hans Juda, and eventually of course I met his wife, who I immediately thought of as a very powerful, slightly intimidating lady, and never really came to like her very much. Although I recognised that she was quite important in the world of fashion and design and textile design, and her tastes ran on the same lines as my own tastes, so to that extent we were friendly and had interesting discussions. But there were things about her that I didn't like.

*What?*

(laughs) One, I didn't like the way she... I don't want to go into it in detail, but I didn't like the way she treated my students, because she was a sufficiently powerful character to engage my students' interest, and they liked her, and they imagined that she was going to be very helpful to them in their own...that she had sufficient power to push them into the

right track for their own profession as designers. And in the end, although I don't want to go into details about it, I think she rather let them down.

*And what was Hans like?*

Hans was a sort of, I thought of as a big teddy bear kind of cuddly, cuddly teddy bear kind of character. With quite a big intellect, quite a good intellect.

*And what was the standing of the magazine?*

Ah. It was very expensive, so it couldn't become available in a very big way to students. One of the problems at the Royal College was that, there was a school of fashion design, which were very, obviously very much involved in the designing of dress fabrics, and the fashion design students used to treat the textile design students rather as slaves who would produce designs according to the fashion students' instructions. And Elsbeth was on, in both camps. She was regarded as a very important figure in the fashion world, particularly in regard to things like jewellery, and what are called...what's the...what's the umbrella word for handbags and... Accessories I think, yes. Fashion accessories. So that, Elsbeth had to play along with both textile students and the fashion students, and that was one of the ways in which I felt that she was not treating my own students very badly – very well, because I think she tended to regard the textile students as existing to carry out the instructions of the fashion students, and I didn't think that was a good idea at all.

*Wasn't Ambassador magazine to do with export though, wasn't it a sort of ambassador for British design?*

Well, quite honestly I don't know. I used to...it had... It featured quite a lot of, of art objects, in fact it featured that big dish up there at one stage, with a full colour... Not knowing that I had that dish myself, it...



*What is it?*

It founded[??] in the British Museum, it founded[??] in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

*What is it?*

Oh, it's...in fact it's a wedding present from the Darwin...from Darwins to the Wedgwoods. When the Darwin family tied up by marriage to the Wedgwood family, Wedgwood produced that dish with the lotus pattern on it as a tribute to the Darwin research programme involvement in the Galapagos Islands.

*Going off at a Darwin tangent, what was Robin Darwin's wife like?*

I never...never knew. I can't...in fact I can't...I can't remember a thing about his wife. Can you remind me what her name was?

*No, I don't think I can. So she wasn't part of college life?*

She didn't turn up at college, as far as I knew, at all. Mind you, I didn't see very much of Darwin at college, only sort of lunchtime and... I had a very complicated reaction to Darwin, who was...who was again a kind of teddy bear, a rather cuddly character, but at the same time could be very unhappy-making, and dictatorial, and anti-Semitic and, impossible in fact.

*Elsbeth had a bad time there in the end didn't she with him?*

I think so. Probably, yes, she probably did.

*And you think that might be to do with anti-Semitism, or not?*

I think so, possibly.

*Mm. And, if we can move away from the College for a bit, I'd like to talk to you if I may about some more of your work, starting with the work you did for Pilkington's. How did that come about?*

Quite how the connection with Pilkington happened, I've forgotten. I think it was Margaret Casson, Hugh Casson's wife, who was asked to organise a lot of...a lot of objects and mural...not exactly mural paintings, but mural coverings, using Pilkington's products of glass. And since Margaret Casson was very much connected with the College through her husband, she naturally tended to employ a lot of staff at the College. And I think it was she who asked me, suggested that I might like to do this, and I immediately said yes, because, glass had always fascinated... I'd never been involved in it in any way, and I really wanted to get involved. And, so she chose Robert Gooden, who was Professor of Jewellery; John Drummond who was my colleague; myself; and the bloke who did...Hutton, John Hutton, who did the engraved glass at Coventry Cathedral, as a team, to go up to, where is it now? It's up north somewhere, St Margarets I think it's called. And we were all given an area of wall space to deal with, and shown a lot of the products of Pilkington's glassworks, which were absolutely fascinating. And simply told to come back in about a fortnight with ideas for mural...for having these sort of objects, decorative objects using Pilkington stuff, having them around. So we all went away and did our respective things. And, I designed something which involved... The back of the glass was coloured, and reflected...it was a two-layer thing, so that there was a gap of about a foot between the outermost layer and the inside layer. And the back of sandblasting or etched glass, or even mirrored glass, was painted in a colour which reflected in the mirrors behind it, and produced a very mysterious and sort of puzzling effect. And they liked this very much, but they came up with the practical objection that the whole thing was in the form of a flat box, two surfaces enclosing a space, and that that would be a great temptation to spiders, moths, earwigs, rats perhaps, mice, unless it was vacuum-sealed. And they couldn't guarantee ever to make a vacuum seal of such a large area.

*What colours had you used?*

I used a wide... I used mirrored white glass with isolated areas, a pattern of mirroring. What you can do with a mirror is, you can remove, by screen-printing caustic soda onto the mirrored surface you can remove the silvering from selected areas, so that you can make a positive pattern seen from the outside of a mirror, a mirror which takes the form of... Think of it as silver paint, you're making a pattern out of a highly reflective silver paint. Now the back of that mirroring, invisible to the view from the front, was coloured, and it was the back of the mirroring which was reflected in the glass, in the continuous mirror behind. Well, you can make, you can put a silvering onto any coloured glass, so if you put silvering... I'm just going to...I can't get up, can I?

*No. You need to put it into words for the tape as well.*

I'll show you a piece where, somewhere or other there, which I've temporarily put away, there are examples of, of silvered coloured glass. So I wasn't always using clear glass, I was occasionally using coloured glass. So that was one idea. But that was shot down, sadly, they liked it. And so in the end I did a, a mural which really amounted to a kind of collage of different types of glass, some of which had been mirrored and some of it that was simply sandblasted, or patterned in various ways. The glass that you see in old world, late Victorian pubs involved sandblasting and cutting and polishing, and about three other processes of which I've forgotten the names, before you get to the highly decorative surface. There's a little example in the lavatory behind you. And so I simply played around with a lot of things you could do with glass, and made a kind of collage, which was I suppose about eight feet by, eight feet by ten feet. And then I made another one. There's something you can do with very thick glass which has been mirrored. You can cut it up into shapes which when put together make an interesting design in terms of the lines along which they join. And you can then take the individual piece of mirrored glass, which might be, let's say six inches square, and you can then take a sharp hammer and hammer the edges. I'm talking about before it's been silvered. You take the glass,

plain, unsilvered glass, and you then...there's a technical term which is oyster, oyster cutting I think it's called, you bang the edge so that it makes a very curious appearance of being oyster shells when you look at it from the outside. And then you can silver the whole, each individual piece can be silvered, and the whole lot can be stuck together, on a background. And you get a big mirror which is interrupted by the lines of contact of the individual pieces. And it's, it's that, it's the lines of contact which make the pattern on it.

*And that's what you did?*

That's what I, one of those. So I did three things. And then, Margaret Casson asked me to, I think she liked those things, and she asked me to do the, do a glass mosaic for the showroom in London. And so I did, I think there were three altogether, which were simply attached to certain parts of the wall, one of them I remember was a curved, was a kind of curve, but where you turned a corner in the room, and there were, I think there were three altogether. And that was simply making a mosaic out of pieces about the size of a thumbnail.

*And where was the showroom?*

I simply can't remember. It was in London. I don't know whether it exists any longer.

*So those were made for that room. What's happened to the other pieces you were just talking about?*

Let's hope they're still there, I don't know.

*At the showroom too, or...?*

In St Margarets I think. Oh, St Helens it's called isn't it.

*Mm.*

Yes.

*And did you ever do any other work with glass?*

I didn't do any work for Pilkington's. I went on doing glass mosaics, which I sold really as paintings. I mean I used to, if I had a little show in the flat for instance, or anywhere, I would simply put a glass mosaic up and treat it as a picture really.

*I didn't know you did shows in the flat.*

I didn't, I just had...I didn't have shows which were... I invited friends up to see what I was working on. And it's wrong to say they were shows of any kind.

*You mean that you would invite them singly, or they would all come on one evening and...?*

No, I just had people around and occasionally they liked them and occasionally they bought them.

*And, you did something for the Chemical Society.*

Yes. One of my proudest achievements. This is a building on your right as you go into the Royal Academy, and, an architect whose name I have forgotten asked me to design carpets for the council room and for the library. And this was a very big, expensive, well-paid commission, which took me a long time. And I had to supervise the, the actual manufacture of the carpet, and this was done in Ireland, and there were all kinds of problems about lighting and so on. And this was in the council room for a long time. I think now, because, being a council room it was constantly used for public occasions where people were tramping around holding their glasses of, in a rather wobbly way,

holding their glasses of sherry and wine, and so much stuff got spilt onto the carpet and so many sandwiches were trodden into it, or, crisps and things were trodden into it, that they had to give it, that I think it's actually not there any longer. The one in the library I saw only about, oh three months ago I think, which I'm still rather proud of.

*What are they like, the two carpets?*

Very bold and colourful. Very... The council room was a kind of blaze of colour. And, done on a system called rotating repeat, so that you take a square, divide it up in terms of light areas and dark areas, and then the next square is rotated through ninety degrees, and the next square is rotated through ninety degrees, and after...that's the second. The third rotation brings it back to its original placing. And so you're doing it on that principle. And if you're clever enough with it, it'll...every time you rotate it, and put it edge-to-edge, it's going to merge into the next pattern.

*So, sorry, these were squares that were subdivided into different colours, or what?*

Yes. And therefore into different tones, different lightnesses and darknesses. Different colours and different tones.

*Can you give me an idea of the colours?*

Yes. They were, they played a lot on very dark orange, burnt sienna, very dark purples, and blues. It played really on the whole idea of, of complementary colour. They played on the idea of being very fully saturated, which means very bright. Took a risk of people on the whole not liking bright colours, because English people don't like bright colours in their homes. But apparently it was a great success.

*Do you know what your starting point was for it?*

My starting point was, having trained as an architect, I went into the, I stood for a long time in this council room, which is of the Burlington House architectural style, which I date at about 1780, maybe later. And I thought very heavily about scale, and the actual size of... Well scale is the only word I can use really, the actual scale of pattern, and I decided that it should be very large in scale, because it's a very lofty, large area. And so, that was my... And then I just thought, well, I want it to be... The room is rather, the space is rather gloomy in terms of, particularly in terms of colour, so I wanted this to be a blaze of colour, in contrast to the lack of colour everywhere else.

[End of F10432 Side B]

[F10433 Side A/B] CLOSED TO ALL ACCESS



[F10433 Side A/B] – CLOSED TO ALL ACCESS

[F11187 Side A]

*I wonder if as usual you could just tell me your name and what today's date is, and where we are, because we're actually not in the same place where we've done any of the rest of the recording.*

Yes. Starting now? Yes.

*Yes please.*

Humphrey Spender is my name. And we are recording in the British Library.

*And it is the 22<sup>nd</sup> of January 2002. Did you have anything special happen to you at Christmas and New Year?*

No, nothing alarming, except a few lacerations due to carelessness in the studio.

*What are you working on at the moment?*

I'm working on lithographs which have been asked for, commissioned, by someone who is very slow in taking any action, and leaves all the initiative to me. Which really leads me to doubt whether he really has confidence in them. So that situation is a bit tricky, but I've persuaded myself that I shall go on working confidently and willy-nilly.

*Is this for an individual or for a museum, or...?*

Well, the whole thing has been, it's a request from an individual, but I think he is putting together a collection of lithographs for nationwide sale so to speak, and it will continue work by other, it will contain work by other artists, I think, that's the idea.

*And what are your images?*

My images are... I'm going to... He's asked me to do six lithographs, so I want to vary, as is my nature, I'm rather inconsistent in my mark-making, in my pattern-making, in my subject matter, and I want to get away from what I have now come to regard a kind of, almost a cliché of people doing semi-abstract things in which there are vague signs of recognizable features. So, the one that I've more or less, the lithograph that I've almost completed goes back to classical sculpture and, takes imagery from classical sculpture, particularly heads and faces, and puts them into what are meant to be rather ironic surroundings, which refer to the present day. So you, you've got a mix of classical, early classical sculpture which partially describes the life of that time, and a context of modern times, which can be rather pessimistic in terms of change and decay and, and ruin, and disintegration. That's really the idea; whether I ever succeed in getting that across... But the first one I've done, I think I rather like. Rachel absolutely hates it, so I have to work against... And I do take a lot of notice of what she says, because, it's much better than somebody constantly saying, 'Oh isn't that marvellous,' and that's what Pauline always used to say; everything I did, without really looking at it, saying, 'Oh, how exciting, isn't that marvellous.' Rachel is extremely critical and really makes me think two or three times about things.

*What does she not like about it, and what do you like about it?*

I like about it that it's unusual, that it's very much myself, that it's relatively uninfluenced by other artists' work. And also, it's very inventive technically, in terms of technique it's very inventive, it's making use of a process which luckily has happened, but if it hadn't happened I would have invented it.

*And what is it?*

It's...the process is very considerable use of photocopying, but photocopying of my own work and not other people's imagery. The photocopy, if it's done on the right machine, if it's using the right kind of deposit of carbon on the paper, can be turned, can be placed on

the plate upside-down so that the image is next to the metal. And then painted with a highly toxic liquid called toluene I think, which you have to be very careful about if you're allergic to vapour. That deposits the photocopy onto the metal plate in such a way that it will print. And I've done some, with the bloke who's commissioned these things, who is very generous with materials, and so on, but not so generous with his, keeping his promises and his time and so on, I've done some test, test pieces, using this method, and they are absolutely marvellous, and that's very much the answer to what I'm trying to do, because I'm very much involved in texture, and I have invented various processes of recording, graphically recording textures, particularly textures on three-dimensional surfaces. Which has been a long and tedious process involving much patience and much failure, and at last I've got this perfected. So I have a whole kind of book-full of varied textures ranging from, sort of magical textures on shells, through the bark of trees, through, invented textures of my own and so on. And so, this lithograph will involve something which as far as I know is, I am the only person who has done, so I hope they'll be rather individual.

[break in recording]

*.....the imagery, what would I see if I looked?*

What you would see is, classical heads, chosen with great care so that they're...originally of very beautiful people, so that... I wanted to introduce that kind of, unworldly kind of beauty into it. Set into a texture, I hope cunningly, and adequately, set into a context of other textures, which suggest present-day life. I've made various textures, from pressing parts of carburettors of cars, and bits and pieces which are obviously mechanical, and present-day, bits of computers, and my process involves pressing these into Plasticine and then, from then on one can get a, a flexible, rather like a piece of paper but it's actually polyvinyl acetate. So that I hope to produce a kind of tension between classical art and the modern day. It'll... I think, obviously comes across to me, and I think...other people I've shown this to, they are very intrigued by it, and I think it's that kind of contrast between two ages, the classical and the present-day, which is going to be rather

fascinating. But of course also, these have got to sell, and they've got to be framed pictures really which people want to have in their living area. The paintings can be so frightening. I've had one painting returned and exchanged for another one, because the typists, it was bought by a business firm, and the typists in the typing pool said they felt very threatened by what was going on in this painting. Which was very...a mild hint at present-day aircraft and, the way in which traffic, and traffic control has changed our landscape in terms of painting the roads and erecting signs. Admittedly some of the signs that I've put into that particular painting could be very kind of, threatening in a way. I mean they could have... I have left the exact meaning to the imagination of the person who's looking at the painting. Anyhow these presumably girls got frightened by what was in that painting, and the firm came back and said, could they change it for another? And they took a much more decorative painting.

*What was the name of the painting they returned, do you remember?*

It was called *Hi-way*, h-i hyphen way, and the words are actually in the painting, in the painting, coming out of the mouth of a bimbo type girl who is greeting motorists into the area into which they are driving. But the area into which they are driving does in fact look very, potentially dangerous by the signs on the, on the road. There are a lot of arrows, and arrows at cross purposes with each other, leading into, to directions which are obviously leading them straight over a precipice and that kind of thing.

*Do you remember when you did that painting?*

Yes, it must be...must be about fifteen years ago I think.

*And do you know what triggered it?*

Yes, it was triggered by, having been sent to Turkey by the National Company of Weavers or, that may not be the correct title, to do a bit of research into cottage industries in Turkey. And, I joined up with an American who could speak the language, and who

could drive a very ropey old Volkswagen which was hired to us but which constantly broke down. And so we drove around in Turkey, and, I got the idea literally from looking at the menacing, the rather menacing landscape which you sometimes get in Turkey. And the potential sort of sandstorms. And the fact that on one occasion we had to take cover in a wardrobe because there was a minor earthquake. (laughs) So I felt a bit menaced I think by Turkey.

*So in a way it was rather gratifying that people reacted so strongly to it.*

It was, yes, I think...you're absolutely right, I think I was quite pleased that anybody had even looked at the painting.

*And where is it now?*

It's now in my studio, waiting for a retrospective show somewhere. I'm hoping, I think I'm going to, I'm going to have an open day this year, 2002, and, although it's rather a large painting, and I've got not really enough space to show such large paintings on open days, I hope to have it out and, together with a lot of other. Curiously enough, all my fears were contradicted recently by having somebody in the studio, a comparative stranger came into the studio wanting to buy, and asked me direct, what did I think was my best available painting? And I took my courage into both hands and said, 'Well, my best painting is, probably it's one which is really, apocalyptic painting, which in a curious way looked towards September the 11<sup>th</sup>, and is a painting of total world, end of the world destruction and menacing smoking, bombs and, people kind of creeping around rather than walking around. And I really can't expect anyone to want that painting on their sitting room wall.' My usual self-destructive effort. And they looked at the painting and said, 'Well you're absolutely wrong, this is the one I want.' So... One should be...one should take those risks, and one should... And I must admit, I move more and more towards, particularly since September the 11<sup>th</sup>, I move more and more to apocalyptic kinds of paintings.

*And this person, was that an individual buying for themselves, or...?*

That...this was an individual I think buying for themselves, but possibly, you never know, they... I would think it would be a big risk buying for daughter's wedding present for instance, and I think...I think he must have been buying for himself or he wouldn't have taken that risk.

*And just briefly before we lose it, was the trip that triggered the frightening picture that we, the bank or whatever it was returned, was that visit to the cottage industries of use, did it...?*

Yes. I wrote a report which the Worshipful Company...I've remembered the name now, the Worshipful Company of Weavers, was very interested in. I found a lot of child labour. I found a very interesting situation where, a lot of very earnest ladies in Ankara who are the equivalent of Arts Council ladies in this country, were very horrified because ICI and CIBA were introducing to all the people who were making, the cottage industry, making carpets and doing machine embroidery, and knitting socks and scarves and things, sitting outside their cottages in a charming way, they had been supplied with absolutely brilliant, fully-saturated colour, to me, which to me was absolutely marvellous, and which was the source of great enjoyment to the people doing them, and the earnest ladies in Ankara were bitterly disappointed that they were no longer dyeing their own materials in natural dyes, this having been the tradition up till really about this time I think. This must have been, maybe twenty years ago. Now, certainly now if you go to a bazaar, or even a tourist trap place, and you buy work from the cottage industries, it's wonderful, brilliant, enjoyed and enjoyable colours. As, whereas before, it was very muted and very tasteful. And, I mean there are times when it is inappropriate, but on the whole I think it's been a big improvement. And of course ICI and CIBA and so on had absolutely no conscience about destroying this wonderful natural dye thing going on in the cottage industries. It's...it could...it can still be argued about. I can see what the ladies mean, I mean, the natural dyes were producing very very beautiful things.

*So why is ICI involved? Are they taking goods from this...?*

They're selling the dye. You see what...

*But they're not forcing it on them, it's just it's become available?*

No no no. No, the interesting thing was that, that the people working on machinery, which after all is a modern-day thing, they had, they had embroidery machines, the people who were working on these machines had been used to pushing natural dyed wools and silks and cottons and so on into the machine, and the resulting thing was a very tasteful, muted colour. But the people themselves doing it were absolutely delighted. They held up the swatches of wool and cotton and silk and said, 'Look how marvellous, wonderful colour,' wonderful magentas. Where I think ICI and CIBA might have been rather naughty, I hope I shan't be had up for slandering ICI, is in giving an assessment of permanence of colour. Most natural... No, actually that's not altogether true. Natural dye is, is more permanent than artificial modern dye, simply because natural materials like, like grass and so on, tend to retain their colour more. Whereas modern dyes demand processes of fixing, like steam and hot ironing and so on, which the others don't demand, and so that it would be an extra bit of, area of work you see for these cottage industries to do. The carpet making, all that applies of course to carpet making, that they were using, not always very low saturation colours, but on the whole they were using rather tasteful, muted colours. Well now, one can see this going on in, in shops which claim to be selling kayleem[ph] carpets and Turkish carpets, in places around Piccadilly, the colours are very bright, and possibly not all that permanent, they're quite fugitive the colours. So, so I mean this is a big development going on, I mean, maybe now has more or less come to a point of where it can't go much further.

*So was the report commissioned with a view to going back to the producers of the dye, to investigating this, or was that a by-product? Why did they want the report?*



They wanted... I never quite know why they wanted the report. I don't know, I can't answer that question. I mean, my comments about child labour, about bad light, they were often working in artificial, very poor artificial light; permanence and impermanence of colour; the use of dyes, I suppose in general is of interest to weavers, and the Worshipful Company of Weavers maybe put out some kind of literature which used my information.

*Are you a member of that company?*

No, it was simply that, as a member of, as a teacher, as a tutor in the textile school of the Royal College, there was money to give away supplied on a regular annual basis by set-ups like the Worshipful Company of Weavers, and my boss, my professor, Roger Nicholson, thought that he'd like to give me a break I think. And so he, he...he got onto the weaving people and said, 'Would you like it? Do you approve of Humphrey going there?' And they said, 'Oh yes, yes.'

*And did you ever do anything else that was comparable to that?*

The only... Comparable is perhaps not the right word. It's a totally different area, which I had meant to tell you about anyway, was that, after the war... I had spent the last year of the war, or more, doing photo-interpretation. Have we talked about this?

*We have a little, but the other thing is, if it's to do with photography then it should logically have been covered in the interview you did with Grace.*

Well the bit that I'm probably going onto hasn't very much to do with photography.

*Right.*

I was asked by the War Office, or by the Government or whatever, to...because I spoke German fairly well, to go to Germany immediately after the war ended, literally still

smoking, towns were still smoking, and write a report on German photo-interpretation.  
Have we covered this?

*I think we did.*

We did. OK, well I'll stop there. So that was...it's the only comparable thing. I don't think I've ever done any kind of report to do with art apart from my own sequence of lectures on photography, which are in a way the same kind of thing I suppose.

*And, just pinning down small details. The painting that the institution brought back because it frightened their staff...*

Mm.

*Which was the institution, do you remember?*

I can only tell you that it was a big office block, and it was, I should think possibly something like insurance or... Very much a money-making, City thing. And it was the fashion, and maybe still is, for big industrial interiors, partly on the basis that it might be a good investment to collect works of art, to have a lot of art hanging up, just as now hospitals have a terrific lot of art hanging up. And so maybe this is partly from the point of view of investment, and partly to cheer people up, which mine didn't do at all.

*But was it your impression that there was some individual in the company who was really excited about painting and who was making the choices, or...?*

Yes, what actually happened was, a group of ladies, who were the wives of rich industrialists, and quite possibly didn't have very much to do, because they had gardeners and cooks and servants and secretaries and things, three of them got together with the explicit intention of buying paintings for business, and they would come round to the studio and say, 'Let's have a look at what you've got,' and take six or seven paintings

away you see. And then they would flog them, they would take them around big businesses, and say, 'Here you are.' And I mean, I wouldn't have been the only artist, there would have been plenty of other artists.

*Do you remember who they were, the women?*

Yes. Maybe, since I've given a description of them which they might not fancy, I'll tell you privately. (laughs)

*OK. And, going back to the work you're doing at the moment, I was asking you what you liked about it, and you told me that. Where were the classical images from, where did you find them?*

I used to be a great collector of anything which I thought was a bargain, and this is partly my Jewish descent coming out, and this covered ceramics, books, particularly illustrated books. And in all the jobs that I had, wandering around for instance for the *Daily Mirror* when I was lensman, and doing the coverage of the big towns for *Picture Post*, I used to make the point of going into a kind of shop which now no longer exists, and it was really a junk shop as opposed to an antique shop. Or, as in Tyneside for instance, or in Nottingham, places like that, you could be surprised to hear that in around 1938 there were...there was always an out-of-door, or...two, three, four, five, ten out-of-door bookshops which were simply books put onto a barrow and left in the road, and one could... You could buy books for not more than sixpence. And so I used, did used to spend rather a disgraceful amount of time, probably eating into my working time, looking through these. Well I found an absolutely marvellous book of engravings, beautiful, beautiful engravings – the book itself was dated about 1821 I think – of Greek antiques. And it was from there that I got most of the... And these are drawn in, entirely drawn in the most beautiful line, a line which thins and thickens and is very expressive in itself. Now, I did the most awful thing, because in those days I hadn't a clue that the books were quite valuable, and at the same time I had a lot of work doing murals, mural painting of various kinds.

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And into the mural painting I was talking about, into these mural paintings, I used to put photocopies of, of this kind of thing. And I used to build up a word out of letters cut out of various books, because, the early typography, right up to middle Victorian typography, was absolutely marvellous, the shapes of the letters and things. And to my present day horror and regret, I used to cut these books up. I had a book called the, I bought a book called *The Penny Mechanic*, which was bound editions of a journal of the same title, and these were absolutely beautiful machine engravings of cross-sections of pumps, and steam engines and things. But the quality of engraving gave a really enjoyable image. And I used to cut these up and use them in various murals. I did for, I think maybe I've talked about the first of the café, of the espresso bars, have I?

*Is that where you had lettering and shipping imagery on the bar.*

That's right, yes. In the Formica.

*Yes.*

Formica mural, and the table tops were also covered. Well these resulted from cutting up these valuable books. And I now pick up the books, I've still got them, with bits and pieces missing, and think, goodness, how stupid could I be?

*Well except, isn't it quite good that they were used in that way, they've had another life?*

It's a good way of looking at it I think, yes. I mean the only...the only other, the only regret is that, if my descendents are short of money, they will find the usual situation where auntie has said, 'This is the most beautiful piece of Delft, which is very very valuable,' and when they come to sell it, somebody looks at the bottom and says, 'Oh well this is a modern version.' Or it's very badly cracked and very badly repaired. So, that's my only possible regret.

*But surely, although from an investment point of view it might be rather wonderful to be able to hand these things on, what's the point in the end? I mean in a way, it's probably not the only copy of the book in the world.*

I think you're right, yes, I think you're right.

*So is the book you are taking the classical images from at the moment, is that one you've used as a source an awful lot?*

Yes, yes. But then of course it can never be absolutely direct. You find the most marvellous profile of a classical head, Narcissus or something, and it's the wrong size, and the density is wrong, and so on. So, from that moment having... Nowadays I take a photocopy rather than cut it up you see, but in those days I didn't have a photocopier. So then you've got to square it up, and reduce it or enlarge it, or thicken the line or, or even eliminate the line and change it according, you know, according to the way it fits into the context of the other parts of the lithograph.

*And with the images that you're using in the current lithograph, are the classical references purely to do with each individual head or whatever it is we're talking about, because you find it beautiful, or is there any story with classical references?*

Well, what I've hoped to convey is, that... Say that there's a head on the left and, a head on the right and a head on the left, and they're both facing inwards, I've hoped to establish some kind of communication between the eyes or the lips of the two heads, and then, in other parts of the area I've put other images, other classical references, like a broken column, or flights of steps, or architraves, or architectural references, which add to it. So I hope that it isn't a purely decorative thing. I am hoping that people will really look at these things. One of, I think a great difficulty and a source of depression and cynicism is the fact that, people might look at a painting in an exhibition and like it enough to buy it, and they might buy it and put it up on their wall, and for the first two

weeks perhaps they might look at it, but then maybe they never look at it again, ever. And this is illustrated by something that happened to me, which maybe I've told you? Going out to dinner, finding myself faced with one of my own paintings, done in the early years of the war, using very cheap wax crayons from Woolworth's I think, I looked at this painting and thought, there's a, there's a whole area there which used to be red and is now white. And, I was right. And I took the painting and re-did it, because I couldn't bear it as it was. But the sad thing was that the owners had not noticed it. It was so gradual that the red turns to pink and then turns to grey and then disappears altogether.

*Once you'd mentioned it, did they then recollect, or not?*

They just said things like, 'Well you did the painting, you must be right.' So, I...I mean I said, 'I would like to do the painting again, and do you mind if it's not exactly the same?' And they said, 'No, we don't. No, that's OK.' Provided the colours are permanent. They'd learnt that by this time.

*But, going back to the classical references you're using at the moment, from the point of view of anybody thinking about what you might have been thinking about as you did it, identifying who those classical heads are is irrelevant, they're there, visual images communicating with each other within the painting, but it doesn't matter whether it's Narcissus or anybody else?*

I think, I think that the... I mean, there are people who will say that that's rather a naughty implication. I've, in this particular lithograph, I've tried to imply that there's a, there's a sort of pick-up going on, that there's a twenty-five-year-old bloke, very handsome sort of Narcissus type, who is picking up a rather younger boy who is looking very naughty, and so they are kind of looking at each other in a way which says, 'Oh I'd like to know you better.'

*And does that have any references to anything in your life, any real people? Is it a metaphor for anything? I mean I know we've talked generally about the way people pick each other up and everything, but it's nothing specific, no...?*

No, no, it's...possibly it's a desire to make people say, 'Oh Humphrey, you are really being rather naughty,' I think that could be...

*And you'd said that Rachel has got criticisms of this piece. What are her criticisms?*

She's never really analysed it very much. It's a good point, I'll ask her. She just says, 'I just don't like it, I just...' It could be, because of the implications there, I don't know. I've had to be really quite, quite strong-minded to... I mean I do, I am very easily influenced to the extent of literally tearing things up, and throwing things away.

*And if say somebody had said something which made you tear a piece of work up, would you be very...*

Sorry, could you start that again? I didn't...

*Sorry. If somebody had said something which made you tear up a piece of work, would you be very grumpy about it, or miserable, or would you just be philosophical and move on?*

I'd forget. Yes, I'd just be very philosophical and move on. And literally forget. I mean, one of the more alarming things of getting old is this thing of, if you don't...if I don't finish something, if I'm laying out a collage, and not making the final sticking up process, I can stick it down temporarily with Blu-Tack and then put it aside, and then I'll forget completely. And later on I find it, and I look at it and think, 'Oh, is it really worth going back to this, and completing it?' That is becoming a real difficulty. I've got just piles of stuff, boxes of stuff standing on top of each other, full of half-finished ideas, and that's going to be very difficult.



*And where will these lithographs actually go to be printed, where will that take place?*

Ah, this is one of the practical problems. The person controlling the whole thing has not yet found the answer to that. I mean there are plenty of, there are quite a few answers but they've all of them have got disadvantages. And that, he needs to find an area which he can hire, and then find a press, as opposed to going to, let's say Gainsborough's House in Sudbury where there is a printing, a teaching, printing set-up, and there's an etching press and a lithographic press, we could go there, but then the time is limited and, and you have to pay of course quite a lot.

*Mm. But you would obviously be there doing the printing [inaudible]?*

Oh yes, oh yes.

*Or would you actually do the printing yourself?*

No, I... I mean I'm very... I've got these metal plates, and a whole lot of materials, and I'm absolutely longing to, to get experimenting on them. Oh...

*Sorry, you've put your hand over the mic.*

Yes.

*But... But you can't without more machinery?*

I can't, because I haven't the time. I've got so much else going on. So many half-finished things to finish, and also, oh, things like washing up and putting things away, and...

*But do you enjoy printing and lithography or whatever else, is it something...?*

I love technical processes, yes, I absolutely love... I love accident, I love the thing... An artist I very much admire, Elizabeth Frink, went straight to a lithographic plate, or maybe a stone, I think a plate, and simply relying on accident, poured or splattered or sprayed unsympathetic liquids on top of each other in restricted areas, and, wonderful, wonderful effect, but accidental. The final image is that of a cormorant I think, raising its head into the air, and it's absolutely beautiful. And a lot of it depends on the, the kind of accidental textural quality, which has to be appropriate to where it is of course. And since I'm dealing in this lithograph with the world of, the antique classical world, the textures of decaying stone and half visible decorative elements are very important and I hope will come in.

*And what about colour in this image?*

Now that's another important point. The more colour you have, the greater the number of plates, therefore the more money you're spending therefore the more expensive the final thing is. So you've got to be very cunning with colour, and make three colours out of two which can be overlapped to produce a third colour. And curiously enough you get a difference. If you, you're talking about overlapping blue and yellow to make green, that's fine; but if you put the yellow over the blue, it's different from putting the blue over the yellow. So in away you've got four kind of different things happening. So you've got to be rather skilful and rather cunning about that.

*So have you got much colour in the one you're working on?*

I will have three plates altogether. The dark colour which isn't necessarily black but is near black, and then two colours which in fact are blue and yellow, which then produce a green. And the green may be predominant, so that the yellow and the blue come out in a rather singing kind of way out of a green thing. Although I, having said that, I can hear the voice of Julian Trevelyan when teaching painting, telling a number of elderly ladies,

his students, 'Why don't you spend a fortnight, not using any green at all, cut green out of your life, there's far too much green.' And I'm breaking that rule.

*And he meant that specifically for green, or did you think as an exercise people should...?*

I might, that might not be my final choice, because there are so many lovely things like... I'm looking, orange and magenta for instance, which when overlapped can produce a middle kind of red, which can be lovely. No, on the, the final original design they are, at the moment they are blue and yellow making green, but they might not be in the final thing.

*Mm. And, one of the reasons we're meeting again today is that we've established that we're going to close the tapes that we made, the two tapes we made last time, talking about Rachel, until a time when she's comfortable with it. And, Rachel's already come in to today's recording in terms of her comments about this lithograph, and we've mentioned her in passing throughout. So I wonder if we could now carefully put on tape who Rachel is in relation to your life, in a way that's going to be comfortable for her to have as an open tape.*

Yes. Well, I suppose, yes I've known Rachel now for nineteen years I think, so, let's generalise and say, about twenty years ago, more like eighteen perhaps years ago. A girl comes up... I'm in the garden; a girl comes up the drive wheeling a bicycle, and starts by what was intended to be a plausible excuse for having come up, and saying, 'Where am I, who are you, what is this? I saw the sign "studio" in the road, so, I'm interested in painting, I'm interesting in photography, and I would like to know you anyway.' And, she seemed to me to be exactly the kind of person that I like, very straightforward and very honest, not beating around the bush at all. And so I said, 'Come in to the studio,' and from that moment we became very good friends, and in fact started to love each other. And from then on, which covers the last eighteen or nineteen years, she has been a constant companion, supported by the fact that she's mad about music, which I am; she plays the clarinet, not terribly well but adequately, well enough to be able to teach it to

schoolchildren. She wants to do all kinds of things, like etching, and painting, and is involved in exactly the same kind of intellectual world that I am. Anxious to read, anxious to know, to know everything. And, well the long and the short of it was that it was exactly the kind of person I found sympathetic. So, we have more or less been together, going to concerts, going to opera, going to theatres, going to exhibitions, for the last eighteen years. I think that really shortcuts the whole situation. Includes of course a physical affair. The age difference didn't really seem to make very much difference, because there is, ninety-two minus thirty-six, which is how much, age difference?

*Don't ask me.*

And one expected a lot of people to be very disapproving, and one expected a lot of eyebrows to be raised, and indeed there have been of course, and my imagination is fairly fertile in terms of what people in Maldon who know us both might be saying, but it doesn't worry me very much I must say.

*And are the eyebrows mostly raised locally as opposed to among your friends?*

I think, probably locally, probably...probably in terms of suspicion about Rachel's motivation. I mean, we're both perfectly aware that people probably go around saying, 'She's a gold-digger,' and things which really don't worry me very much. I mean I'm only too happy to spend... I mean I am obviously very much better off than she is, and I'm only too happy to share what I've got.

*But have you found, not looking so specifically at the moment to do with you and Rachel in a sense, but looking at it as an example of a relationship between two people of different ages, the fact that you've got longevity together, has that not altered people's perceptions, or do you think they just stick with the basic headline facts as you were saying earlier?*

Oh, I didn't quite understand the fact that you've got longevity together.

*That you've been together for such a long time.*

Yes.

*I mean, the traditional thing of thinking that a young boy or a young girl, whichever way it's gone, is interested in the older person because of what they're going to get out of it financially, or in some other way...*

Yes.

*If they're together with that person for twenty years, it suggests that they're not a gold-digger, that there's, you know... Have you not felt that people's attitude has changed because you've been together for such a long time?*

Certainly. I think people were much more suspicious, and many more eyebrows were raised to begin with, and gradually people have realised, partly by seeing us together and being, maybe being, having a meal with us or something, and, and seeing that that relationship works. I mean my own, speaking from my own, my own kind of comment about age gaps is that, as one gets older... I'd better speak for myself. As I get older, I get far more tolerant, and that's to say that, aged about thirty-five or so, and watching my wife or girlfriend or partner washing up, say, had I thought that they were doing something wrong, I would have said so, and said, 'Look, there is a better way of doing this.' But now I realise that I may be wrong, and that my way of doing it is not necessarily the right way of doing it, and that the best way of keeping a relationship going is not to be critical. Because it seems to me that a lot of relationships that surround myself and Rachel, I mean Rachel's own relations, cousins and friends have relationships which are breaking up, purely on terms that each partner, each partner thinks that they are right, and, why is it so important to be right? I mean I think as one gets older it becomes less and less important to be right, so that one isn't constantly either being aggravated by

what one thinks are inadequate, imperfect ways of doing things, and one accepts things more, and I think that gives a very good relationship. I think the danger, I mean the.....

[break in recording]

*OK, we've just taken a little bit out.*

A danger of the age gap is obviously that the relationship can't last, and it seems to me that an attachment might become so strong that the death of the older party is going to leave the younger person with a gap which is very difficult to fill, and I feel this really quite alarmingly when thinking about my relationship to Rachel.

*For people who haven't experienced a relationship with a big age gap, what about the fact that the literature, the social world, the values that you, say, grew up with are very different from those that Rachel grew up with, how much do you relate to each other in terms of those contexts, how much can you share in that sense? I mean you might make a reference to a writer she's never heard of and she might do the same to you.*

I think the difference in values between my youth and my upbringing and her youth and her upbringing are one of the things that holds the relationship together, because they are a constant source of interest, and a constant topic of discussion. So that I find we are always, I am always comparing my very privileged background and upbringing with the things that she had to put up with as a child, and the kind of schools that she went to, as opposed to the kind of schools that I went to. The privilege for me and the lack of privilege for her, and the character and intellectual quality of her parents in the way that they differ from the same things amongst my parents. I mean these are all subjects for discussion which make life rather interesting.

*Mm. And, just thinking about some of the people you've had really important relationships with in your life, I mean, two wives, Eddie, whoever, I mean, do you feel that each one of those relationships have been with people who knew you in a very*

*different way? Could you, say, have had your relationship with Rachel at the time when you had it with Eddie, and vice versa? Are you the same Humphrey, and are the relationships comparable?*

I don't think I could have had the same relationship aged twenty-five with Rachel of the same, much the same age, say twenty, simply because at that age, I'm slightly repeating myself now, I was very arrogant, and sure that I was right, and I would have been very critical, and that criticism will probably have been very unhappy-making to the other person. I mean, the relationship with Eddie, we were having, constantly having the most terrific rows, which nearly broke things up but didn't quite break things up. So maybe the equality of age is something that keeps it together, purely physically I think. But I don't think I could have... I think that the kind of relationship I now have with Rachel simply couldn't have happened when I was younger.

*What would the rows with Eddie have been about?*

To a certain extent what I was talking about, about the right ways of doing things. And we were both very much involved in photography, we had different attitudes to the techniques of photography, and, he tended to say, 'Oh, mind your own business, I know what I'm doing,' that kind of thing. And me saying, 'Well look at the results of what you're doing, I mean they just aren't what I think good.' 'Oh well, you're a perfectionist, and people don't always demand such perfection.' And so on, I mean that kind of row. And then, the other thing unfortunately was that, Eddie had absolutely no money, and I had relatively, oh well a good deal more than he did, and so, I didn't like the idea of what I would then have thought him sponging on me, rather than my present-day attitude of, I'm quite happy to share with him. And, that kind of thing.

*Do you think of the relationships we've mentioned, that those people have all been equally close to you, or are they differently...are some of them less close than others, or were they close to different bits of you?*

[pause] Can you repeat that, because I...

*Well I was just thinking randomly, not having planned it, of the two wives and Rachel and Eddie, and wondering whether they were all equally close to you, and whether they were close to different bits of you, or whether they were close to the whole Humphrey.*

Curiously enough, although they were...I suppose love came into it in all of them in equal ways, though different ways, the most understanding relationship, or rather the relationship which I have made most effort to understand, has been with Rachel. And that's one of the ways in which getting old means relationships are easier. I mean provided one isn't an absolute pain in the neck in terms of physical disability and so on, what I.....

[End of F11187 Side A]



[F11188 Side A]

*If you can start that, will you?*

Yes. The thing I fear most, and I won't allow to happen, provided I'm sufficiently mentally fit to make the decision, is for Rachel to have to nurse me, and lug me, carry me, lift me out of bed, and help me on the loo and that kind of thing, that I really have told... I've told Rachel that she's not to let it happen, and that I, other means must be found of getting that through.

*And one thing that you mentioned to me on the whole about needing to add to the recording was something to do with your teeth, I believe in childhood.*

Yes, when I was about ten something very uncomfortable was happening in the roof of my mouth, like...which seemed to be cutting my tongue and scratching my tongue. And my mother duly took me off to a sort of top dentist, who gave it one look, and he said nothing. He went to a drawer in this desk and took out a photograph of a face where a tooth was coming out on each, on the side of each nostril, left and right, and he said, 'Well, we have the same kind of situation here. The boy has a tooth coming out of the middle of the roof of his mouth.' And my mother, as she tended to do, had a kind of hysterics and said, 'What can we do to the darling boy?' The 'wee sleekit cowering timorous beastie' she called me. And the doctor said, 'Well there are various things that you can do. We can fit him... We can let the tooth grow bigger, which of course will be very uncomfortable to the tongue and so on, and then we can fit a plate which has a very strong spring, rather expensive I'm afraid, because platinum has to be involved in order to avoid corrosion, and gradually over the years the tooth can be pushed across the roof of his mouth, and eventually we shall make a gap in the front teeth and push the tooth into the gap.' And my mother said, 'Ooo....how long is this going to take?' And he said, 'Well, it's going to take a number of years, I mean, it'll be...he'll be sixteen or maybe seventeen before it happens.' So there I was, landed with this wretched plate with a strong spring in it, which did in fact gradually, very very gradually, push the tooth

through the roof of my mouth, and into what was...he was aiming at a certain tooth in my mouth, which was somewhere there. And it was highly embarrassing because, in spite of being partly platinum and, an alloy of two non-corrodable methods, the saliva in my mouth proved to be so, either acid or alkaline, I can't remember which, that in fact it did corrode, and this bloody spring plate kept on flying out my mouth. And on one... It was occasionally quite funny, because on one occasion... These are the days of open-top buses, one sat on top of a bus, and we were going past Lord's cricket ground, and we wanted to get out at that point, and I got up from my seat, and this plate suddenly collapsed and the whole thing flew out of my mouth and over the side of the bus. But it landed by coincidence in an open car...(laughs)...and hit the passenger. And, they kind of stopped, because they had to stop because the driver wanted to see why his girl started to shriek. And there was my plate, landed in their car. So I was able to retrieve it. And on another occasion, we had these very very, socially grand cousins, the Schusters, to whom we were the poor relation, and we used to be taken by my parents to play tennis dressed in white flannels, and me always wearing the hand-downs from my older brothers, and feeling very inferior. And the boy...there were two boys, both of them incredibly handsome, one of them really beautiful, with whom we played tennis, and they were far better than we were. So it was a kind of torture chamber. And on one occasion when we were playing tennis, my plate flew out and flew over the net, and hit one of these beautiful boys. (laughs) So, there were various occasions like that. But then the end of it was that, the tooth reached its destination when I was about sixteen perhaps, fifteen perhaps, and they said, 'OK well we'll, we'll take a tooth out for the gap, and we'll push it into the gap,' and they did this. And the tooth got into the gap. It then started to decay. And they tried to get it out, and they couldn't get it out. And so it had to be quite a nasty surgical operation to, with anaesthetic and all that. So all those years of pressure. (laughs) And so that's, that's the tooth episode.

*How old were you when it jumped out over the bus?*

I'm trying to remember, and to be honest I think it could have been fifteen, nearly fifteen.

*And did you feel distressed by having this plate? Was it a...?*

Acutely embarrassed, yes. Yes, yes, yes I really hated it. I mean it was a, it altered my speech, and, it altered my life altogether. It was very uncomfortable, and sometimes painful. And, you see it had to...it had to claw onto other teeth, it had to be anchored, and that was uncomfortable for the cheeks and the other teeth. Dentistry was not nearly so sophisticated and comfort-making as it is now.

*It must have made you hard to kiss.*

Made me...?

*Hard to kiss.*

(laughs) I think probably it did, yes. Yes.

*Were you anxious about it from that sort of point of view?*

It very much affected my life, that's all I can say. I was anxious that it wasn't going to fly out, and hit somebody in the face, or... I mean just the sheer embarrassment. I... Maybe it's a generalisation, that one is embarrassable when one's young, but I was acutely embarrassable when I was young. I was embarrassed by my father's behaviour, I was embarrassed by, perhaps not conforming to social obligations, I was embarrassed at hearing... Oh, life was acutely embarrassing. Stephen always used to laugh and me for being so embarrassable. My older brother Michael was extremely embarrassable, and used to get kind of wedges of cotton wool interrupting his speech when he was embarrassed. I suppose it had similar effects on me. But embarrassment is a very strong thing in my life. I... Yes. Well, we'll stop there.

*And since then, has your dental life been pretty straightforward?*

Oh absolutely horrible. During the war I was attached to the American Army, and put into SHAEF, the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force, in Bushy Park, and they had very very strict medical kind of inspection and control, and immediately they said, 'You must have your teeth seen to.' And, I was an officer then, and I was fetched in a staff car, driven by a wonderfully good-looking young American, who turned to me and said, 'Oh teeth is it? Teeth. You should have what I've had done, have them all out.' And he was twenty-three or so. And he'd got a perfect set of dentures. That was the American attitude. So I was taken in, and I became a kind of object of critical interest, because apparently one of... There's a natural order of teeth, and I had a reverse of that order. Some... B was in front of A, instead of A in front of B. So a whole group of American distinguished dentists came round and took photographs and X-rayed and so on, and said, 'You are a real interest.' Well then, they took most of my teeth out. And after that, when I came to the age of about forty, my own dentist said, 'Well look, the Americans have really...why do we leave anything else in?' And so I had to have everything out then. Major operation. During which time I had one of those strange hospital experiences when a bloke... I did manage... You know, up till, up till the 1950s or so, whatever operation one had, for which one had anaesthetic, they always shaved one's pubic hair. Whatever. So I got to this hospital, and I was having this operation in my mouth, and a little old man comes around with a razor and says, 'I've come to do your pubics' you see. So I said, 'This is absolutely absurd, I mean this is up here.' So I got the surgeon to come to me, and I said, 'Look, is it really necessary?' He said, 'Of course it's not necessary, what are they thinking of? They shouldn't be doing this.' So he stopped that happening. But two or three hours later a bloke wearing a white medical outfit comes in with all the appropriate things hanging round his neck and says, 'I've come to do a catheter.' And I said, 'What do you mean, a catheter?' And he said, 'Oh well we've got to extrude all your urine' or something. And, this was a wandering maniac. And I was...I was nearly kind of raped by this bloke who was going to do all kinds of things down here to me. So that was the story, the story of my teeth.

*And you couldn't stop him?*

I did stop him, yes. I said, 'This is absolutely absurd, I mean, if you want to do a catheter on me, then...' he had to explain what he was going to do, 'then we must have the surgeon approve it,' and I...he went out. I think he probably wandered round the hospital to all the gentlemen... (laughs)

*And which hospital were you in?*

Gosh I can't remember. It was fairly posh, it was sort of, a nursing clinic sort of, Harley Street kind of thing, I think.

*Did you have medical insurance all your life, did you go private, or...?*

Yes, I went private very early. And, I mean I've spent much more than I've made, but it's always been... I mean in recent times, I had this decaying wire which you, I think you know about don't you, the Papworth thing, and if I hadn't been private I think I wouldn't have made it, I think.

*And what was, what made you go private in the first place, did you have a bad time in the NHS?*

I can't answer that question. No, I can't. I think it was just a question of having to wait, yes.

*Mm.*

[end of session]

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