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ARTISTS' LIVES

Eric Peskett

Interviewed by Penelope Curtis

C466/31

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F4684 Side A

[Interview with Eric Peskett at his house in Whyteleafe, Surrey, on the 11th of April 1995.]

I know very little about my grandparents anyway.

Well what can you remember of your grandparents?

Well, I only know one side, my father's grandparents, and only his grandfather, who when I first knew him was a bed-ridden invalid. He lived in a thatched cottage in Walberton near Chichester. And, I don't suppose I saw him more than five or six times, but I always have a very strong memory of him, because, a very vivid image as a child of a white-haired man lying prone in bed drinking stuff through a thing with a spout, you know, I can remember that.

Well what had he been?

I don't know, he had some sort of stroke. Oh, what had he been? He was a postman.

A postman?

Yes, he was...I think...and a country postman too, and they used to be very conscientious in those days. They delivered a postcard that only had five words on it for a five-mile walk in the snow, and back. And I think somebody worked it out that he walked more than all the way round the world in his lifetime as a postman.

So your father's father was a postman.

Yes.

And was he from a big family, or a small family?

I think he was...I can't answer that, only by surmise, that he was a member of a fairly big family of Pesketts. One side of another branch which was near Arundel district, and they all had biblical names but I never met anyone, and I never, I mean I know nothing other than what I heard in hearsay from them.

So your father took you to visit your grandfather a few times?

Well, yes, you know, I suppose four or five times. Then I stayed there on one or two occasions as a boy. But my grandfather had married again so there was a step-grandmother there, much younger. He married her when his wife died who, this was before I was born, and upset most of the Peskett family either pro or against this poor girl, and she wasn't a very interesting sort of person at all really. And she had one son by him who was a little older than my elder brother, so although he was an uncle, he was...I remember him reasonably well.

And, so when you went to stay with him, she was the one who was really looking after you?

That's right, yes, in this very, I mean very primitive cottage, what would be considered now, you know. It had one water tap and thatch, and, well, just like a country cottage with a big garden. Very interesting.

Had he been a postman all his life?

As far as I know, yes. In fact he may have been...he may have been the postmaster in the sense of that small village, because one of my uncles who stayed in the village became...he ran the post office in the village, didn't see much of him because he was one of those who were very anti my step-grandmother.

Right. So how did your father feel about your step-grandmother?

Well he was all right, he was a pro you see otherwise he wouldn't have been...I wouldn't have been staying there you see. It's rather silly these family feuds.

And what kind of education did your father get from his parents?

Well, absolutely minimal I should think. He obviously went to school because you all had to go to school in some way since the 1900s, and probably, I don't know, before then he would have been...he was born in 1877 so, to be quite honest I don't know where he went to school. I suppose he went to school, I mean he could read and write, I mean he must have...he wasn't illiterate. But very much a country working-class family.

So, what do you know of your father, what did he start to work as?

My father?

Yes.

That I'm not sure of because I was born in the beginning of the war and as far as I know he was working in the Pay Corps during the war. What he did before I've never known really, except that he's always had some... Well he was...later he was a delivery man from the local, big local pub in Steyning where we were, and he used to take, he used to drive the horse and trap and deliver, and I suppose work in the bar some of the time, and that was what his main occupation was. But he was the one that was caught by the slump in 1929, so of course he was out of work for quite a long time and doing odd, you know, odd jobs and things in the Thirties. But I'm not, I can't be very definite about that really.

But he had obviously left home, I mean he had moved from the village where your grandfather...?

Oh yes, yes. Because I was born in Guildford in Surrey, and my mother came from Wimbledon, which I know because I have a Bible of hers which was a Sunday school present. And the war period was spent in Guildford up to 1922 I think, '20, or a little earlier.

So, do you know why your father, what your father had left home for?

Well no, I don't really, I mean except that it wasn't... I mean, there was probably... No I don't, because I never talked to him to tell the truth. I mean he...

So do you know how your parents met?

No, I don't. The reason why I don't know all this will probably come later, but she served in a shop somewhere, a sweet shop I think it was, and he probably went in there to buy cigarettes, that's as much as...to answer that question as much as it can be I think.

So the other side to your family, it sounds like you didn't meet those grandparents at all?

No.

Because they died early?

No.

No?

No. Yes my mother died early.

Your mother died early?

In fact she didn't die, she committed suicide early, in 1918. So, in those days things like that, rather like cancer and heart things, people sort of tried to keep them in the cupboard, you know, they weren't discussed openly. And beyond that point, I mean, I discussed my mother with people very very rarely, in fact almost not at all.

So, do you know when they had met, your parents?

Yes, well I think they married in 1907.

So, and they had you in 1914?

No they had a brother, my elder brother first, three years older than myself, so he would have been 1911 wouldn't he.

And how many children were there altogether?

Just the two of us.

Two of you, right. And then, at the beginning of the war, your father went off to the war.

Which war?

1914, the First World War.

No, well he was in the Pay Corps as far as I know, he used to work in Woking, because Woking was the first place I knew other than Guildford, and it was a very strange place to be, just Woking.

So when they got married, what did they...how did they set up home?

Well, I mean it was...I remember the house fairly well. It was one on the end line of a row of terrace houses. I don't think...I think it was detached on one side, but the usual kind of town

villa with a front, small front garden with a railing and a bay window and two storeys, the garden at the back with the garageway at the side.

And did your mother give up working when she got married, do you think?

I imagine so, yes, because they did in those...I don't...I do remember her being about the house of course.

Yes. Because you were only four when she died.

I was, yes, four, four and a bit I suppose.

Yes. And, so your father hadn't gone away for the war, he was still...?

No he was at home, he was in the Pay Corps all the time as far as I am aware, yes, he didn't actually serve in the... Well he was in uniform, he was in the Army, in the Pay Corps.

Right, so in a sense you weren't too badly affected by the war.

Not really, I have very little recollection of it, very little recollection.

And it didn't...I mean obviously a lot of people of your generation lost family in the war.

That's right.

Which you didn't. Although you may have lost relations.

No, no. The war didn't affect me in that way at all, no.

So, the fact that your mother committed suicide was not connected to the war?

No.

No.

No. No one ever told me...I imagine it was because she was... She had delusions, I image she was a schizo, I don't know, but I mean, it was never... We were only talking about it the other

day with my wife how extraordinary it was that such an event like that could have had so little aftermath as far as I was concerned.

So where did it leave your family afterwards?

Well, like country folk in those days always did, somebody in the wide range of family sort of comes to the rescue, and we went, that is my father, brother and myself, to live with my uncle who was in Steyning in Sussex, who was a baker, for the time being; I think I was there for about twelve months before we moved into lodgings in Steyning. And, well that's how...that's the only difference that it made as far as my mother dying made any difference to me was, I was uprooted from Guildford and sort of deposited in Steyning, Sussex.

But did it mean that you had...was there a woman looking after you or was it...?

No, I had an aunt, a very generous, very generous motherly soul who, well yes, was just the right person to do that, as far as she could, for as long as she could, a sort of surrogate mother I suppose.

Yes. And did that mean that you were brought up with your cousins?

No, because there was...she had a daughter, who is now dead, who didn't like us being there at all, and I had very little to do with her, practically nothing to do with her.

And so your aunt was keeping an eye on you from a different house?

Well she was feeding us and giving us a bed, and clothing us and that sort of, seeing we got off to school and that sort of thing.

Right. So, how did you and your brother feel, did you feel a bit left out?

Well... Well the strange thing is, as far as my brother was concerned I know very little about him either, because he, presumably as I look back with hindsight, I think he was one of the adored children, the only child, until I came along and then I upset him so much that we practically ceased to communicate. I remember playing a bit with him but he would never let me play with his toys or, he would take me to Sunday school very reluctantly, and as far as possible he would ignore me out of existence. And so I don't know, I mean I can't answer, because I don't know how it affected him to tell the truth, because we lived rather

different...well we lived very different lives in the village. I mean I became a ragamuffin, and he was much more of a gentleman than I was, sort of...it's very interesting really.

And you were a ragamuffin with your own ragamuffin friends?

Yes, not half, yes.

What, playing tricks, being naughty?

No, no not naughty, just roaming the village doing what boys do, climbing trees, playing in the millpond, picking flowers, and you know, all the sort of, all the sort of lovely things that village children could do and can't do now, you know, learning all the time.

In the days before traffic and...

Oh yes, I definitely used to go... I can remember riding down the high street in Steyning on an old soap-box, you know you used to make out of fixed big wheels at the back and steering wheels at the front. The thought of doing that now of course... I mean it was very good, I always look back on those two years or whatever they were as very worthwhile.

And was your father closer to you because you didn't have a mother, or did he just get on with his job?

No, it's very difficult to answer that question. I mean, he wasn't...he was neither close nor indifferent. There were no...no question arose as to what the relationship should be, I mean it was just like that, it was as natural as the sun coming out in the morning, you know.

But did he take you on trips, or have long conversations with you?

Yes, he used to take... No, not very communicative; I don't think I ever had a letter from him in my life. No he wasn't communicative. He used to take us into the seaside every so often, you know, while we were there, but, he didn't need to take us anywhere else because I was out all the time anyway, you know, sort of around the village.

So, you were going to school in the village.

Yes.

And when you weren't at school you were playing around with...

I went to a dame-school for...at the request of my aunt who didn't want me to go to the village school immediately for some reason, but I went to this dame-school about a hundred yards away and learned a bit about reading and something. I remember being very highly complimented by the dame for being able to read the word 'whatever', that's all I can remember. Except that she kept bees, and if she had a swarm, a bee swarm, she used to take the school out to go and look for them with her, you know, it was very casual. And then I went to the ordinary village church school, just like any other boy would.

So, was this a little village?

Well, no, it was a small town, a very small town in those days, but certainly a big village. I think it would be reckoned as a town rather than a village.

But obviously it was quite a community.

Oh Steyning, yes, it had a lovely old Norman church and a town hall, and, oh it was, you know, quite... There were four bakers and three butchers I think in it, so it was quite a...and a grammar school.

Yes. And were you taken to church?

Oh yes, oh my aunt was very churchified, she...and my uncle, who was the baker, he sang in the choir. Yes we had church and Sunday school definitely.

This was Church of England presumably?

Yes, definitely, yes.

And, did you believe do you think?

Did I believe?

Were you a God-fearing child?

Oh, no, I can only remember one or two things. One was, I was very proud of myself because I could sing while I was yawning, whereas the [INAUDIBLE] would stop singing when he

yawned. (laughs) I can remember that, but that's about all. No, it was very...life seemed to happen in a very normal way, you know, not impeding too much. I don't remember being either particularly happy nor unhappy, just sort of, life was sort of natural I think.

And do you remember any particular rules and regulations in the sense that your aunt or your father said, like what was right or what was wrong?

Not really. I remember, there was one incident where he...I had a scooter, a very rudimentary thing with wooden wheels that didn't work very well, but for some reason or other I was breaking some rule or other with that, because he hid it, and I was allowed to believe that someone had stolen it, till I found it about six months afterwards, but I never knew why, why that was.

But, so he wasn't particularly strict?

No, not...not very communicative anyway; I mean I was a bit afraid of him I think, because he was very un... Well although I think he had had a...I think he was all right. I remember that he thought that I was much more likely to be good at music than my elder brother, who everybody thought was a musician, but that's all I can...that's all I can remember of him really.

So when you were free you were playing with other people, you weren't...

Three?

No, when you were...in your free time I mean.

Oh.

You weren't sitting in your bedroom drawing at that point?

Oh, heavens no, nothing like that, no. I hadn't even... Well, I mean I hadn't even known that art existed, certainly I had never heard of anything called sculpture, and the first I heard of that was towards, must have been towards the end of the period in Steyning, I modelled a pair of boots in Plasticine for some reason, and my father saw...and he said, 'Oh, you ought to be a sculptor'. Well I didn't know what that meant. But, looking back with hindsight I can...I was...I think I was an odd child in some ways. Certainly some of the villagers who... The baker's shop was on the corner of a turning, and along the side there was a row of cottages where cottage women, most of them took in washing, but they used to wash in the back, and

they lived in their back yard. They had one tap, they all took in washing and had one tap at the end of the court to get their water from, and they had the gardens to put the things in. And one of them was convinced I was mad, you know, because...and I don't blame her really, because I spent some time painting the inside of my uncle's shed where he kept his long, whatever they call them, things for dealing with the bread in the oven, which was a shed made of saplings, branch saplings with wood nails[??] on the outside, and I painted all that all over with a brush that I found with some mud that I mixed, some clay mud. And she thought, well I can understand I think, I was quite crackers. On my own, you know, not just doing that. And, I can remember the blacksmith's shop and being very fascinated with the blacksmith's nails to nail the shoe on, because they were square and they had a sort of, had this shape, and that really got me, in fact so much so I had to have one, so I pinched one when he wasn't looking. I just liked the shape of this nail. In fact subsequently I made a big version of it to please myself, which was anticipating Oldenburg, you know, with his big lipsticks and things. And I can remember, I would love to be able to see it now, but I made what I called a 'Useless Engine', which was made out of a treacle tin and odd bits of tin and skewers, and something worked, I don't know what, but it didn't work for any purpose except that it worked. And I called it a 'Useless Machine' which of course anticipated, when those things came along in the 1930s, I mean these weren't all that new to me because they were following on this. And in a way a kind of precociousness I suppose, but not in any way that I would flatter myself with it, but it's rather interesting that that...it's always interested me that that would happen.

So in fact you were making things then rather than drawing?

Yes, I don't...yes I suppose so, although really I was learning. I mean, when you say making things, you would go and play in the local stream and divert the water and make ports and things and that kind of thing, you know, and using bits of stick, anything that came to hand. Very good for the use of material, very good. But not...I don't remember doing any drawing at all, but I expect I drew things like aeroplanes and air battles like kids did, and railway trains, but I don't remember doing it particularly. It was later on when I moved to Brighton that I did more of that.

So, it sounds as if, when you weren't at school you were playing outside really, that was...

Playing outside?

Yes, is that right?

That's right, yes, I was...all day was outdoors really.

And, high days and holidays might have been a trip to the seaside?

Be counted as a holiday, just a sort of, you know, rather fun to go to the sea, and, yes.

Did you ever go to London?

Not from there I didn't, no. I don't think... Well that would have been at Shoreham, which was the nearest coast to Steyning, and beyond that I don't think I went anywhere. No, the first trip to London came much later than that, in fact it was the Wembley exhibition of 1924, that was the first time I ever went to London.

Right. So, the next step after Steyning, where did you go then?

Well, my father married again, he married a war widow who lived in Brighton, and I think they had some intention of opening a shop in Steyning, which they would like to have done, but I think financially it didn't work out, and we moved to Brighton.

How old were you then?

Well that would have been in about 1922, I would have been between five and six, near enough six I should think, but I don't remember what time of the year it was.

And did she have children?

Yes, she had a daughter.

So then, there was you and your brother, and her daughter.

That's right.

And how did you all get on?

Well I used to get on all right with my step-sister. My elder brother just didn't exist, neither of us existed. He had a whole different set of....[BREAK IN RECORDING] Now where were we?

You were talking about your brother not getting on with your step-sister.

Yes that's right, yes. As I said he had a very different circle of friends. People who liked him didn't like me, and vice versa - well like, I say, you know, weren't very interested.

So you moved from a little, or a small town to Brighton.

That's right.

So life became much more urban, did it?

Yes, very much more urban, I didn't like that particularly.

Were you living in the centre of Brighton?

No, not quite. It's much more central now, but then, in those days it was more or less on the outer suburbs, very near the...well, the outer suburbs yes. You could still walk to the coast, to the sea.

So was the sea a plus? I mean presumably you enjoyed the sea?

The sea? Well, all kids like the sea don't they. Oh I used to like building sand-castles, constructive, constructive play like that really. But other than that, it was just like any other town.

So, Steyning was really quite a brief interlude in a way?

Well yes, from the calendar month point of view it was quite a short period, but from the impressionable point very much stronger. I mean, well I was, you know, I've always been glad of that two years or whatever it was in Steyning for...

Yes. So was Brighton just less distinctive?

Well, it was more ordinary, because I mean it wasn't...it wasn't the country, I was very much circumscribed in what I did, you know, go shopping for the family, and used to go and play in the park with my sister but that had a park keeper, that wasn't at all like being in the country. And then when I had a half-brother, as my father had a son with his new wife, he used to take

the baby out in the pram and all that kind of thing, and... No, I don't regard it as, well, of any great significance really, the period.

And did your father's new wife want to take a hand in your education and your upbringing?

Well, my step-mother was very capable, a very capable woman, a very capable dressmaker, and like a lot of people looking up rather than down socially, you know, wanting to be up, or considered to be up, and terrified of being thought to be down, you know, so, it was a kind of snobbishness really. And she tried to get me into the nearest elementary school, which was much better, you know; although it was equivalent it was much better than the one which was furthest away, but it was so much better that everybody subscribed to this one and left the other one half empty because it was in a much less good part of the town. But although she stood out against the school board man who used to come round in those days if you weren't at school for several weeks, but in the end she had to give way and I had to...I was dispatched with my father this time, she wouldn't even go with me to that school, to see this other one you see where I had no trouble in getting in there at all. And, I suppose it was all right, it was just an ordinary school like any other school, I mean, no...

That was the beginning of your secondary schooling?

No no, no this was still my...I went to about seven schools in my life, but this was what they would call elementary school in those days, the standard...you had to go to school by law, and these were the schools that were provided, unless you paid fees you see, which we wouldn't have even considered, you went to the elementary school. But the possibility of escape from that was getting a scholarship from it to a second, what they called a secondary school in those days, which was more like the grammar school standard.

Right. And did you do that?

I did that, yes.

You did that?

Yes. Much to everybody's surprise. (laughs)

So your step-mother must have been pleased?

I don't...yes I think, secretly I think she was pleased, but she was always more fond of my elder brother because he was a little gentleman and he was...and he was the clever one too, I mean he had already got a scholarship, he had got a scholarship to Steyning grammar school while we were there, and it was transferred to Brighton, so he started off as a grammar school boy you see.

End of F4684 Side A

F4684 Side B

.....good at everything.

Yes, and I was...I was the one who was bad at everything, I couldn't, you know, I couldn't dress myself properly, I was always dirty, my hands were never clean, and the hair was untidy. And my mother was, step-mother was very keen on having family photographs, so every year they had a photograph, and every time I ruined it, every time I was lectured, 'Don't do this, don't do that, don't do this and don't do that,' and every time I would wreck the whole issue. (laughs)

So your family ended up with your elder brother, you, your step-sister and then a step-brother, so there were four in the end.

Had everything, yes. My brother, half-brother and step-sister. (laughs)

And did you go on family holidays all four of you?

No no, didn't have family holidays in those days. We used to go and stay at Steyning with my aunt every so often for a week or so. No, never had a family... In fact my father fell out first of all with my step-sister and then he fell out with his wife, so I mean the house was full of dissension there and all the rest of it.

What were they doing? What was your father and his wife doing?

Well she was just a housewife, although I think she used to...she was a great chapelgoer, and I think she used to dress-make for a number of people. She was a very capable dressmaker. And he, I think he used...well he carried on his association with the hostelryes, pubs, you know, and he used to work for one or two of them in Brighton while it lasted.

What kind of thing was he doing?

Well just serving in the bar and generally being a [INAUDIBLE], you know, working around the place I suppose, nothing elevating, you know, in the pub, or any distinct place[??].

But that means he had to be quite amiable, get on with people and have a good [INAUDIBLE]?

He did?

Yes. Isn't that right?

I suppose so, yes. Yes, he was... Generally speaking all the Pesketts got on well with other people, because they didn't have any what you might call side. The sort of thing, well I'm as good as you are, you're as good as I am, why do we have any distinction, that kind of thing you see. But I wouldn't...I don't know, he kept very much to himself, very much to himself.

So while you were living in Brighton, did you finish your schooling?

Well, you see the thing...the thing was, I shattered them all by not only getting a scholarship, which I wasn't expected to get because I wasn't supposed to be clever enough, but I also got, I got the top marks of the whole lot you see, which meant I was the Brighton Scholar. And, passed over my head. I remember it was a kind of funny dream world, you know, but... That meant that I could go to the grammar school instead of the local secondary school, because the Brighton, Hove and Sussex grammar school took a certain number of the best, the best scholarship students from all the best of Sussex and one from Brighton, and offered them places there you see. So I spent the five, from 1924 until 1929 I was at the grammar school, so that was my education.

Right. So, you walked to school, did you?

No I used to cycle to school.

You would spend all day in school.

That's right.

When you came home, did you have lots of homework, or what?

Oh I did homework, yes.

Yes. Was this a more kind of solitary life by then?

I suppose, well yes. I used to play with my step-sister in fact quite a bit in the garden, various odd things; we would go and play around in the park. Yes, it's not a period I look back on with any great pleasure or displeasure really. I know that, a thing [INAUDIBLE] one thing I

did which I was...what quite in character was, she had a doll's house with nothing in it, so I furnished it for her, you know, made the beds, and it was about an inch to a foot scale I should think, and got a great deal of experience and interest in the varying qualities of all kinds of materials. When, after the war I know students suddenly discovered that there were things called materials that they could use, I mean it was old hat to me in that sense, I mean I had gone through that stage, so that... That was, I think I was always making things in that sense. But also, as I also mentioned, one thing that I did which was out of character, not so much out of character but confused people was that I got this interest in collecting wild flowers, and wild flowers were, you know, not boys' subjects at all, they were, girls did botany, I mean you didn't do girls' subjects. And I was continually being lectured in wasting my time, because I ought to be working on something like arithmetic or some kind of physics or something to get a scholarship you see. But I can realise now that, sort of looking back with hindsight that I wasn't really interested in flowers at all in that sense because I didn't want to grow them, I wasn't a gardener, although my father was a very keen gardener, was a very good gardener and he grew flowers; I didn't want to do that. It was because I had to find these things, I had to go and find them you see, they weren't...you couldn't get them unless you made the effort of going to find these things, and when you found them, each one, and they had a different name of course, but it was a different kind of shape, and a different kind of shape because it was in a different kind of...a different kind of habitat you see. And the whole thing I can see, what was interesting me was this sort of, this quest of finding something, finding something that was there, rather than not, you know. And...

Did you know the names?

Do I know, did I know the names?

Did you know the names?

Well I had to be interested in the names, because I mean that was the way they were distinguished really, but not... No, it was always the fact that here was this thing which grew independently of me, it would be there whether I was there or not. It grew in its own place because it wanted to be there; they were very nice places for a country lover, you know, by the side of streams. And of course the country was much more countrified in those days, they've killed nearly all the wild flowers off now, but, there they were to be found, and sometimes with, you know, quite considerable difficulty, and always a sense of, you know, exhilaration when you found a new one.

And did you cut it when you...did you pick it?

Well, yes, although I...this is the extraordinary part of it. I mean anybody that collected wild flowers, in order to keep them you had to press them you see, which I did rather reluctantly, because I mean I had to do that but I mean that was completely out of character with the reason I wanted them for. But of course you get a sort of collectors' mania once you start collecting anything, one new thing is always worth...you have to sort of have a collection which you can unfold. But I'm quite, you know, I'm quite sure that was very much in character with what happened afterwards from that point of view.

But you weren't drawing them then?

Not drawing them?

Mm.

No, not...when I was at Brighton I had much more time in the evenings of course because I wasn't out and about in the country. I used to...I began to copy things from books, you know, and might be...well it wasn't specifically flowers, anything that was interesting I used to make a copy of. And so I was doing a lot of, well you could say a lot of drawing then, and not...not sculpture, because I mean nobody knew what sculpture was. I mean it was a sort of unknown quantity really, one wouldn't think about... Although of course the doll's house thing was really in that line of country...definitely I think.

Mm. So, you finished grammar school in Brighton. Your brother had obviously already finished before you.

Yes, he was at university.

He went to university? Where did he go?

The London University.

And what did he become?

He was a mathematician, yes, maths.

And did he become a mathematician?

Yes, well, he became...he applied for several jobs in this country without much success, but he got a very big one in Jamaica in the end, so, although, you know, everybody was sorry to see him go it was decided that he went to teach at Munro College in Jamaica where, you know, one of the prime public schools in Jamaica.

So that was a kind of parting of the ways, you didn't...?

Well that was goodbye then. Well it wasn't goodbye because I didn't have anything to do with him.

Obviously you never went to see him?

Not in Jamaica certainly, no. Well, I mean there was no... I mean we were quite amicable about it, we didn't fall out. He used to knock me about when I was smaller but I mean no more than elder brothers do, but, it was just, we didn't quarrel or anything like that, it was just we had nothing whatever to do with each other.

Yes. So, both you and he had a lot more education than your father did.

Oh Lord yes, good heavens yes.

So, where did that leave you afterwards? Did you feel there was a gulf, or...?

No, not in the way that it's been dramatised since the war, you know, of miners' sons that have left, gone, come back home from college and found themselves cut adrift. Never as extreme as that. Began to be a bit aware of different social class of course, but not in any way that, nothing very strident in that way.

When you were at school did you feel you came from a different background than the other...?

Oh heavens yes. I didn't like it, I didn't like it at grammar school for that reason. In fact I often wished I had, you know, not done as well and gone with the others to the...that's where I should have been I think. Because this was a fee-paying, largely a fee-paying school, and the daughters of doctors and the local expensive tradesmen, the master butchers and all the...you know, sending their daughters and sons to the place, you know, as the nearest they could get to a public school. And, they're very snobby, a lot of them were very snobby.

So it was a mixed school?

No.

No? Just boys.

They had a parallel school and that was where my wife went to. She got a scholarship to the girls' high school in Brighton which was on the same way, that they had a selection from the scholarships, which creamed off those to take to the girls' high school.

So you met her very young?

I what? No I didn't, I didn't know her then.

Oh I see.

No. No it was just that it was a parallel experience that she...she didn't like it, the difference of social class was rather upsetting on occasions.

Were the boys and the girls allowed to talk to each other in the schools?

Oh no, nothing to do with each other in those days. Well I mean not officially, I mean I think, in most of these, the butchers' and the bakers' sons had sisters, their sisters would get there and so of course they did hob-nob a bit privately, but not, nothing mixed in an official sense.

So if you were a shy boy then you didn't meet girls at all?

Didn't meet girls at all. No, I suppose I didn't, not in any...well my step-sister's friends used to appear, but not...not really...no great impingement there, no.

So did your...your father and your step-mother were kind of watching you and your brother do better and better?

Yes, I suppose so.

Do you think they were proud of you? Did they show that?

Oh I expect, well certainly my step-mother bragged about my eldest brother. Whether she ever...I expect she bragged about me too, especially...because, you see there was...although I had a choice of going either to the grammar school or going to the secondary school, Brighton secondary school, which was a very good school, it's where my brother went, in fact he was still there, she, when it was a question of, do you want to go there or to the grammar school, there was no question [INAUDIBLE] grammar school.

And how did her children do? What happened to them?

Not very well. Not very well. Been rather a chip on my blood-brother's shoulders.

What became of them, what did they do afterwards?

What, my blood brother? Well he became a teacher, he...he was a, what do they call it, had to do National Service, which he did it in the Air Force, and had the opportunity of extra training as, in some profession when they left, you know, I'm not quite sure how it worked out but he was able to get a job as a teacher of biology which he quite liked to do. But, no I think there was always some regret there. I don't know, I don't think my sister regretted it much, because she got married anyway, so... No.

After you all left home, did you all meet up again for family reunions? Were there kind of like Sunday lunches or parties?

Not anything that you would call a family reunion. No, I think that's when I... It depends what period you're talking about. I mean, what we're talking about would end in 1929, or 19...well, 1935 possibly, because after the grammar school I went to art school you see for, and I was there for six years. Was it six? About six. And I was still living at home then, I hadn't left home to go to art school, not like they do nowadays, they leave home immediately they go to their foundation course. Much better if they stayed at home really, but still.

Why do you think it's better if they stay at home?

Well, I think...what I would say that, because if they're going to do anything in an art school seriously, it's not...one of the usual things that happens in life is, it's got a touch of readjustment between lifestyle and what they're doing, more so than serving in a shop or anything of that sort. I mean there is...some change has got to come about, and to combine that with the equal change of leaving home and going somewhere else is too much for them I think. You know, one thing at a time would be much better for them really. And insofar as

one can generalise, which I try and avoid as a rule because I mean, there are so many exceptions to these generalisations. But I would say that, they are coming back to that now because of the grant situation; they're trying to get people to stay at home and do their early training at home, and it's not really as bad as it sounds actually, it's both, both things have drawbacks of quite serious...

So, you must have got another scholarship to go to art school, did you?

Oh yes I did. Well, yes, I did and I didn't. I left school without any intention of being anything at all except earning money, you know, because I was...a working-class family, the father more or less out of work, and what can you do except think, well as soon as you get out to earn something the better. But I was too young. I went all the way up, you know, this, being top boy scholarship related very much to my youth. Had I been a day older or younger, whichever it is, I would have been in the next year's lot, but I must have got maximum full allowance for age you see, and so I went all the way up in the grammar school younger than my peers, you know, eighteen to two years younger than my peers. And when I went to, I think I went to at least one insurance company, which my mother, step-mother thought would be a good start, you know, and I just, I had got all the qualifications but I was too young, you know, they didn't...you know, I had got matriculation and the rest of it but I was too young. So anyway, it so happened that my cousin, who, the daughter of the baker's wife, had a friend who was an accountant and he thought, oh just what I'm looking for, somebody I know who I can have and train as an accountant. And, oh this is very, this is very good. Quite useless really because I'm sure I would have made a rotten accountant. But anyway, it was all decided for me that I was going to see this man at 10 o'clock. Well beside that, I had been back to see my old art teacher, because nothing seemed to be happening, I thought, well you know, see what I can do with regard to art. So I went to him and I said, 'Do you think if I went to evening classes I could get a scholarship to the art school?' you see. I don't know why or how that occurred to me, certainly it just occurred to me, I don't think anybody suggested it. And he said, 'Oh no, you're too good for that sort of thing.' He said, 'You could get into the art school straight away.' So he fixed an interview with the principal for me, which was exactly at 10 o'clock on the same day as the interview for the... It rather reminded me of that last week when I was due at the hospital and seeing you at the same time, the exact minute, you know. And, he said...so he fixed this interview, and I had to decide, what will I do? You know, this is it, either one thing or the other you see. And in the end, I don't know why I made up...well I suppose I do really, I thought I would probably like the sound of the art school better. But I didn't know much about it, I mean, nobody in our family knew what an artist was in that sense, or knew what the prospects were or anything except that they were

always regarded as being pretty dim, you know. I had no relation who was in any way remotely connected with art in the professional sense.

This is Brighton.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] Right, this is Brighton School of Art. I don't know why that stopped then. We'll continue with Brighton School of Art.

Well, as I said I had made up my mind to go to that interview and not the other one, and it seemed to unfold as being a matter of fate after that, because it was too late in the...it was too late in the year for me to get a scholarship for that year, but the principal said, well I could have one for the next year if I didn't mind waiting you see, or if I could afford to wait until the next year. And while he was saying that his secretary, who virtually ran the school of course, they did in those days, said, 'Oh,' she said, 'that reminds me, we've just had a return of a loan that has come back, a floating loan of £15.' And he said, 'That's available, so...so, oh well that's all right, that'll pay your fees for the first year,' or something of that sort. And then they discovered how old I was, and my youth came into it because being as young as I was the fees were less you see, my age was being of benefit here, as the fees were reduced because of my age, under 16 or something, that I could go to the college, the school, virtually for nothing and have a bit left over for some materials, which was as good as getting a scholarship. And it had a very big influence on what happened afterwards because it meant that when I had gone through the usual three-year scholarship, at the end of it all I had a year of scholarship unused, because I started off with this you see, and it was in that unused year that I first started doing modelling, sculpture. And without that I would have been a painter, if I had got to college at all it would have been as a painter, but, so that it was very very critical that wait.

When you were saying that none of, no one in your family knew any artists, had you ever been, like to Brighton School of Art - sorry, Museum, to look at paintings?

No.

No?

No, used to...I seem to remember [INAUDIBLE] was there more than anything else I think.

And presumably, did you have books of paintings, or illustrations that you liked?

Well, I suppose, I suppose one must have been aware of the fact that there was, you know, art galleries and things, but not...you could very well live without them, you know, they didn't...

So there wasn't a moment, you don't remember a particular moment in your childhood going to the art gallery for the first time, or seeing a book of paintings?

No Lord no, nothing romantic like that. 'Oh I must be an artist.'

It all came really from your teacher at school, that you...?

Well he was very instrumental in that he said, 'No, you're not going to waste your time with evening classes, you go and see the principal straight away.' I mean if he hadn't said that, I don't know what would have happened really. Well, no, I don't know what would have happened.

But obviously those were classes you had particularly enjoyed at school?

Yes, I was good at art in the way they say that. I got fairly high marks in the matriculation. But I never...no, I don't think I had ever thought that I would be an artist, you know, I'll take it up. In fact in many respects it might have been, I was very keen on languages, I would have, you know, I've always regretted that I wasn't a linguist who could speak seven languages, you know, I would like that, but...

So by the time you had got to your, the end of your third year at art school, were you then thinking that you were going to be an artist?

Well, you see, instead of having...they used to be graded out, parcelled out in periods according to the particular examination, and to get a scholarship to the art school you were automatically in the teaching training, that's what you were getting the scholarship for, to be trained as a teacher, which meant you did two years of drawing exam, two years at painting or design or modelling, and one year teachers training you see.

And this would fit you up to teach secondary school children?

Yes, it would have been...it would, theoretically it enabled you to teach in a, qualified you to teach in a secondary school, but in fact it would almost certainly mean you would be... Mostly I think teachers in secondary schools came from college, you know, ex-college, not from... I suppose it all depends upon where the school is and how, its reputation, but I don't think... The Art Teachers Diploma as it was then called was not really a rival of the ARCA, which was the college thing which was a further, which was a further practical training.

And did you get that qualification?

Which?

To teach in schools?

Oh yes. Rather an amusing incident there is that, that we did because we were very fortunate in the fact that the Brighton Art School was a centre for teachers training, so we could follow that, we didn't have to go somewhere else to do that you see, which meant that it was almost inevitable that's what you did, and that's what we were expected to do, some kind of teaching somewhere.

But before you did that, you started doing some sculpture?

No. No, after.

After that? Right.

Because I took the...see, I took an extra year, because it seemed to be advisable with regard to my youth again and also because I wasn't all that good, to take three years over the drawing exam as it was called instead of two, and then you could take the painting exam in one year, which I did, so that I caught up again. And then after that, which is the four years, I did this year's teachers training, and the full five-year course you passed out with the ATD you see. Well after that, I had this spare, I think it was just said almost casually really, well, Alan King who was two years before me in the school, had been in the same position for some reason, but he said, well he just added another feather to his cap, you know, he took the modelling exam as an extra thing you could teach you see; 'Why don't you do the same?' So I said, well, I'll do that.

So that was still with a view to it being something you would teach in a school?

Well yes, it was just, it was...I took up sculpture because, I mean I had no reason, I mean I was a jolly happy painter, I would have been a landscape painter like Constable, I never wanted to do anything else. But I mean there was this, you know, might as well get an extra qualification because it meant extra starting salaries and all that kind of thing you see.

Yes. So can you describe what you were taught that you should teach? I mean how did one learn drawing, what were the principles of drawing that you had to absorb?

Well, how you were taught to teach, what you were taught to teach?

Because in a sense you were learning drawing, so as to teach drawing.

Well yes, I mean, it was a terrible year really, I mean nobody liked it. One term was fully practical doing it as an unpaid teacher at the school, you know, it was ostensibly learning from the teacher there, but really being left in charge of all the worst classes while they were covering for somebody in the staff room, you know. I mean it was all terribly theory and a lot of, every time you took a lesson you had to write what your aims were, what the results were, whether it was satisfactory or not. And give a blessed demonstration lesson in front of the inspector. Well these academics, they love that, because it's a test, they sort of feel happy when somebody's being tested.

So what kind of aims might there be?

How do you mean?

Because I can't quite...it's so different from what I know that I can't quite imagine what... If you're doing a drawing, what are you going to say as your aim.....

End of F4684 Side B

F4685 Side A

You were saying what do I mean by teaching art, I had got to find out, I had to know who[??]
I was talking to, do you see what I mean, because it alters what I had to say about it.

No but I suppose it's just this idea that, you were talking about an academic training in
drawing, in which you would describe the aim and whether you achieved the aim, I was
wondering what that meant in drawings.

Are we on?

We're on, yes.

Well, I mean the...I don't know what it is now but as far as I know it's still much the same, if
you want, if you do a practical art training it doesn't...it used to qualify you to teach but if you
had a teachers training you were far better qualified to teach you see. And that meant you
went into the history of theory of teaching practice, teaching practice, practice and theoretical
you see, which means somebody somewhere has sat down and codified what it means to be a
teacher, and you learn that and you practice that, and you then answer the exam questions on
that, and then if you're lucky you pass out with the qualification. But what they do now,
because I mean teaching, especially in art schools, has got so dreadfully slack that I don't
know what they can need to be trained in to tell the truth, and probably don't even bother. It
may not have bothered because if you got to college in those days, then that was reckoned the
equivalent for teaching salary purposes to an ATD, which you would get without going to
college, and so that mostly they didn't bother to take the ATD because they were going to
[INAUDIBLE] practically[??] you see. But I took...by sheer accident you see, I had already
got this ATD, and then after the war one of the few old art college, art students I went to, I
was talking to a girl there who was an ARCA who I knew slightly in the Air Force, for the
same reason as I was there, and she was proud of the fact that she was the only student that
had ever done the teachers training course before she went to college, so that she could put
ATD before the ARCA. And I said, 'Well I'm sorry to disappoint you, but you're looking at
one who did the same thing.' So there can only have been two of us at that time who had
done that. It's really more necessary for teaching in, well, quite necessary I think as an
introduction to teaching in the secondary school rather than being pitchforked straight into it
from college; I should think a teachers training, well it always counted as a year's
advancement in salary anyway.

But even when you were learning to draw, were you learning to draw and also how to teach drawing?

No, I mean, learning to draw...at secondary school level you mean?

No, when you were at Brighton School of Art, you said you did two years...

Oh yes.

Drawing. So what did that consist of?

Oh, a really good training that. I mean life drawing, that is drawing from... Well, really if you like to put it that way, copying, say copying, because that is what...it was always drawing from something, except for memory drawing which was drawing from memory, but I mean it was always what they would call figurative now, it was before the age of Abstract Expressionism or anything of that sort. I mean you know it was, how to draw with a pencil, you know, how to hold the pencil even, how to measure with it and shade with it, and all the technical side of it. But if you...you see the thing is that that went out of fashion after the war, rather stupidly they cut it out of fashion, because they didn't know what I knew. But it didn't have the slightly effect on your aesthetic, or if you like the Abstract Expressionist side of it, because different students were better qualified in that kind of thing. There was one girl at the art school, whose name was Betty Cox, and I often wonder what happened to her, even the thing which most people thought was a corny old thing like perspective drawing, she, her perspective drawings were the most magical quality, and antique drawing, which was copying old plaster casts of things. I mean she got 98 per cent marks for her antique drawings, and I don't wonder because she had...I mean she could...I mean she was doing it but really there wasn't any evidence, you know, what's the difference between, you know, one thing and another. And she was quite outstanding. And I mean I don't know whether, nobody would have taught her that, and I know nobody taught her that because when I was teaching myself I knew jolly well that there are certain things that students did when they really let themselves go, when they were talented, were better than they were going to do when they felt they were doing it properly. And it comes out you see.

So what did your drawing course consist of, life drawing, drawing [INAUDIBLE]?

What at art school?

Yes.

Oh I can tell you that. There was drawing from life, drawing from antique, architectural drawing, which was the Corinthian, the order[??] thing, perspective drawing, which was rendering of the perspective, and the memory drawing.

What memory drawing?

Well, you're given an object, like a, I think mine was a telephone booth, you know, draw a telephone booth. And you either, I mean, I suppose testing your powers of observation more than anything else, because I mean...

So you weren't given a picture of it and then it was taken away?

Oh heavens no.

You were just asked to...?

No no. Men would be drawing from men really, in other words you're drawing from mixed... It would be much better if they call it drawing from experience, because I mean if you've never seen a telephone box you couldn't draw one from memory, could you?

So did you do a bit of all those things every week, or was there an order...?

Oh a timetable, yes, a timetable with different things on different days.

And was life drawing always at the top?

No, not necessarily, but it was always regarded as very important. If you couldn't draw from life, and I wasn't terribly good at drawing from life, as I discovered why later on, because I mean it was always taught by painters; all the teachers, all the drawing, mostly the teachers in art schools were painters, or would have been painters, would have been doing painting if they had had their wish. And sculptors don't look at things in the same way as painters, and they have differences in drawing, in getting it to look like what they wanted to look, which had nothing to do with the painters, and the painters are trying to get them to draw like painters you see, so of course they're not very good at it. And as a matter of fact I was very glad of that personal experience of being bad at it later in life when I came up against students who were suffering from the same thing because I knew what was the trouble you see, because I had personal experience.

Although at that stage you weren't thinking of yourself as a sculptor, were you?

No I wasn't. I mean I think, well we... I remember there was a chap called Hazel who had been at the school two or three years before, who was astounding everybody by making some mark as a gallery artist, but it was considered to be, you know, one of those pipe dreams that you have that you would ever be an artist as such in the Bond Street sense of the word. I mean they weren't two a penny like there have been since the war, I mean it was a very, very very different...very different.

And, were you going into the art school every day for kind of 9 to 5 and just drawing the whole day?

Yes, and the evening too. We used to work very hard.

And for three years you were just using pencil and paper?

Well, brush and ink and wash, but not...no, oil painting was reserved for when you, the next stage. We used to do watercolours, watercolour still life, because I mean using a brush, pencil on cartridge for the life drawing and things, but perspective, washed in, memory drawing you would use wash, usually a monotone wash, not colour.

And then you had one year doing painting, and then you had one year doing teacher training.

That's right.

And then, you came to modelling.

Yes.

Yes, and which was still modelling for teaching?

No. Only in the sense that it was modelling to pass the modelling exam, because if I didn't pass the modelling exam I wouldn't have had an extra feather in my cap, so that the intention only was, as far as I remember it then, at the beginning anyway, was to get this extra qualification which would have made it easier to get a job, and might get a more interesting job you see.

So what kind of, what was modelling like when you learned that? What did you learn?

Well, in those days, and this is the 1930s, there were very very few art schools that did modelling; in fact the modelling exam, which was a matter of examination papers, they didn't have enough students to even bother to get the print in, they were done in that gelatine cyclo[ph] style thing you see. There were only...there were five students took it in the whole country the year that I took it. It was exactly, based formally on the painting procedure, you know, the history papers and practical work and the practical tests, I mean all that kind of thing, but it was put into clay which was cast rather than oil painting which was not cast.

So, the material was clay, and what did you make? Figure studies?

I had to do a life modelling, and I had a portrait model, and design, what are they called, design, which was really some form of architectural feature. Well that's decorative, largely decorative you see.

And how long did you have to do that?

Every Monday. Every Monday was design. Some of the best training, many times I've seen students and I've thought, if you only had the fortune to have what I had on that Monday, you'd be better off for it, because I was given a subject in the morning by the modelling teacher, who was the only one who was concerned, at the beginning of the morning, and a day to do it in, and at 4 o'clock he would come along and criticise it and say this, that and the other, and then I would take it all apart and put it all back in the bin. So I had nothing, nothing to show for my Monday's work at all.

But what kind of subject might you be given?

Design a figure for...a capital, might be a capital, or a relief figure for the outside of a building, or, well those...one of the photographs I sent you, you've got the one that I did as a testimony which was a rather elaborate sort of Corinthian pilaster cap[??] with two pares[ph] coming out of it. Architectural features really.

To go on churches or...

Well yes, churches, or anywhere, any, what might be called architectural sculpture.

Right. And when it came to the exam, did you just have like four hours to make a design?

That's right, yes. They were always like that.

For a particular subject.

Yes. You went in like any other exam student, you sat down, or you went somewhere, and there was this question paper, and the adjudicator sitting over there seeing you didn't cheat or something. So you didn't know what it was going to be until you got there.

And you were making it in clay?

And you would model it in clay, yes.

Right. And then, there was also a written paper about the history of sculpture.

Yes.

So what might that ask you?

Well... Well there would be questions about the history of art, I mean, there would be a methods paper which was about the methods, you know, describe the tools they used in stone carving, and then 'What do these tools mean to you?' and a list of tools, describe and the rest of it, and you answered that or... The other would be, the history would be just what you might learn from, you know, reading books on the history of sculpture, for what it was worth, you know, I mean all you could do really is to take other people's estimation of what's good and what's bad, and write[?]] as much as you could.

And where did all this leave carving? You didn't do any carving?

Yes I did. I mean, what do you mean by carving?

Because you were describing this as a course in modelling.

Well, the testing material that they used naturally was clay, because that is the medium, the nearest they could get to the painters' medium, which is oil paint, and the sculptors' medium is clay. And although the painters might do etching and aquatints and related things, so a sculptor might do carving [INAUDIBLE] stand as a related thing. I expect, I must have done a certain amount of carving, but mainly it was model exercise, yes.

Do you think...did someone teach you to carve wood and carve stone?

Well, yes, I had a...the one teacher who dealt with it, and let's put this in perspective, Wolverhampton, that was the one school which had the name for taking sculpture seriously, in other words it took students right from the first stage up through to the modelling exam as being the serious thing in life[??] and not as an alternative to painting. And...you see I've forgotten what question you asked me there.

Learning carving and related things.

Oh, well yes. The teacher, the one teacher at Brighton was a man called Perry Hill who was a Yorkshireman, and a very quiet, rather reserved person, but a very good teacher and a very good sculptor and he knew how to carve both stone and wood, and he was a very severe but very just critic, he was a very fine teacher. And I had him to myself, I mean he just...I mean I was the only one. In fact I wasn't really properly catered for at the school, you just had to do the casting down in a sort of lower room which was the sort of open drain for the rest of the college I think. It was...they were very very ill-equipped for modelling, it wasn't a sort of choice subject at all. Art schools were for painters, and painting was art and all the rest wasn't.

I suppose the good thing about that was that you had this one-to-one relationship with the teacher.

Oh, well that was...yes that was quite something, yes. I mean, well I can't complain of that, can one really? It would have been terrible if I didn't get on with him, I mean if I hadn't...if I hadn't...if he hadn't been a man... In fact he became, he and his wife became quite close personal friends, subsequently.

Right.

But if I...I mean I suppose it would have been all right, but I met one or two...I know of one or two who taught at Brighton immediately after the war when I left with my...and some of my students, one or two of them used to go there to do their teachers training you see, and I could realise then that if I had had that teacher when I was there I wouldn't have been anything at all. I won't mention the chap's name because I don't believe in that, but I mean, I mean he wasn't even a good teacher.

So, you finished your year in modelling and you got your exams.

Yes.

And were you still thinking then that you would be teaching, or had you begun to think that you might not teach and look for a career as an artist?

What, when I went to college you mean, when I had finished?

I mean at the end of Brighton.

Ah, the end of Brighton, well that was different you see. Rather... What was obvious to everybody was the fact that I was good at design there, and there were quite a number of sculpture students who were good at copying in clay but weren't very good at design, and I was better at design than I was in copying in clay, if you understand the distinction there. And it was decided that if I got a scholarship to the College which I was going to, because I was the only one, they only gave one from Brighton and I was the most eligible for that, again because of my extra year you see, because although I had been in the running for a painting scholarship the year before I didn't get it, there were three of us and I wasn't the one that got it. So that's how I had this extra year you see. And the next... could get to College, but this is very extraordinary, this is hard to believe now I think, but during the summer I decided that I wasn't going to do design, I was going to be a...I wanted to be a sculptor. I can't think, I don't remember the occasion when that brilliant idea came to me, but I didn't tell anybody about it and when I went up to the College I went into the intake for the Sculpture School you see, and I remember Percy Jarrett[ph] who was sitting there, it was his first day as the new principal, looking very prim there, and Garbe, Professor Garbe, the sculptor, I said, 'My name is Peskett.' Professor Garbe looked down, and he hadn't got a Peskett on his list, and I thought, gosh it's all gone wrong, you know, I'm not here after all. And there was a bit of a kerfuffle, you know. 'Are you really...?' I had completely forgotten all about this, I can't...it sounds incredible now that I could have, you know, been so unaware of things like that; I had so made up my mind I was going to be a sculptor I had forgotten all about the design.

So they had you on their list for design?

No, you see, Garbe, I wasn't on Professor Garbe's list, but Tristram, the design teacher who was a bit sleepy, you know, he said, 'I think I've got a Peskett on my list,' and he looked down and I suddenly realised, of course, that's where I should be. So Jarrett[ph] looked at me and he said, 'Oh well, have you changed your mind?' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Oh, well, what

about you Garbe, have you got enough to...?' 'Well no,' he said, he had only got five students or so. He said, 'I can take him over [INAUDIBLE]. Do you want to change over?' I said, 'Yes please.' And I mean, when you think of all the tutor[??] forms that you fill in nowadays to make a change like that, and it just happened you see. So, and I'm very glad about that because the Design School, although, you know, if you wanted to do things like silversmithing and the various allied crafts, it wasn't the best place to be at because mostly they used to go and do extra work at the craft side of the Central School which was much more craft-endowed you see and I...

If you had gone to do design at the Royal College, then you would have ended up not being a sculptor?

Oh no I would have, I think I would still have been a...but I would have been a letter-cutter, I would have been a letter-cutter sculptural craftsman. I would have been exactly what I was partly afterwards, you know, the sort of jobs that come along and that sort of thing, like coats of arms and lettering inscriptions and relief, memorials and things of that kind, I would have done that. I wasn't changing my...I wasn't changing myself in any other way, except that I might have been inveigled into that because as I say they tended to be rather dilettante about it and never really got down to anything to the real nitty-gritty as you might do...

So, here you are, this is the first time you've left home.

Yes.

You've arrived in London.

Yes.

You arrive at the Royal College in South Kensington.

Yes.

And, did you have somewhere to stay?

Well yes, I had...my aunt, the baker's wife, had a friend who had a son who came from Bath, he was the son of a headmaster of Bath Art School, and he was just finishing at the College as I was just going, and by chance, you know, they happened to have some communication with each other, the two aunts, I mean, and she told me about this digs in Bramerton Street in

Chelsea that were vacant, so I slept in his bed so to speak, I just sort of transferred to Bramerton Street.

So that was all quite easy?

That was no difficulty, no, except jolly hard, felt terribly homesick I remember that. Two or three days it was a bit... Well a good experience really because it's, you know, it clears the mind considerably, you know.

So this was now 1935.

Is it? Yes it would be '35, yes, that's right, September, October '35.

And so you were 19 or 20 by then?

'35 I was 21. 1914...yes, 21, yes.

Yes, 21. And how did London strike you?

Well, I did...London was all right, it was just the fact of, you know, having to get used to the fact that...I had only lived at home until 21, it's a big wrench to suddenly find yourself on your own. It didn't last long, a week or two, you know, I soon settled in, but...well, when I got used to it I mean I thought London was jolly good, I mean it had everything I wanted. I used to use the museums a lot.

The British Museum, or...?

Yes, the British Museum, the V & A, all of them I used to. Maybe the British Museum and the V & A I used to go drawing there on the weekend, Saturdays, just, not as part of the...not as part of the course but just sort of voluntarily work really. And Kew Gardens, I used to cycle to Kew Gardens, because I yearned for a bit of country and of course that was about the nearest you could get there and very nice too, I got to know that place very well.

So what...presumably you arrived in the autumn, and you immediately...you were taken into the sculpture department, and Richard Garbe was your teacher.

Yes, he was the professor.

He was a professor. But did he also teach you personally?

Well, I don't think they did any teaching, not as you would regard it as secondary school teaching. It was admirably loose, and yet admirably stern, you know, you couldn't get away with murder but you weren't dictated to as to what you should do. I mean I think, you couldn't have been a rebel student like in the Sixties in those days. As long as you, not exactly toed the line but that you were there and expected to get on with it without waiting to go touching teacher's apron strings as to what to do, you know. And they, like all establishments that had to do with sculptures they always separated because they were reckoned to be noisy and dirty. They were always put, you know, having to suffer their existence but not really wanting them to get in the way, so that, I think a number of [INAUDIBLE] that used to worry the students on the main College on the other side of Exhibition Road never came our way at all, I mean it was...very good really, I mean. And we never had a syllabus in the sense that none of these ghastly form things that they produce nowadays that are all down in black and white. But one thing that was quite obvious from the start, that if you were going to be there you had to know how to model, that is copy from life.

From a life model?

From the life model, and not just playing at it either. You had a model three days a week, morning and afternoon, was absolutely de rigueur. Well I mean, that was what you were supposed to do; if you weren't there, nobody came and rapped you on the knuckles, but I mean that was what you were there for, to get aware of whatever the figure gives you you see, and not just a couple of days like you might have done at art school or possibly a week, but for six weeks, and it was long enough to, you know, start and get right through it and get fed up and get...I mean to really get down to... And extraordinarily good training that is actually, extraordinarily good training. It doesn't matter, the fact that it's figure, I mean it could have been anything that you were copying assiduously, but the figure as such.. But from the point of view of copying, it makes a parallel that's very difficult to equal.

Was that six weeks with one, the same model?

Yes, the same model, the same pose.

Would that be male and female?

Both, [INAUDIBLE]. It was mainly female because the males were rather hard to come by, but it was mostly...supposed to be, you know, one...half and half.

And by this time were you less isolated, and were there more students alongside you?

Well yes there were five of us in that year.

Still just five?

Five, yes.

Any famous names then?

I've never heard of any of them since. Well that's strictly not true. One of my companions was a very stiff and starchy, a very...I was going to say not exactly fit, but as an artist he was completely unendowed, but as a copier and as a craftsman he was very well endowed, but he had no aesthetic feeling at all. In fact I remember saying to him once, 'There are some jolly fine clouds up there.' He said, 'I'm only interested in form.' (laughs) And, extraordinary... No, I don't know what happened to them to tell the truth, because I mean they may have been all killed in the war for all I know. But they were a very rum crowd, and they didn't work very hard either.

Did you work hard?

I worked hard, harder than...well much harder than they did, yes, I could say that.

And when you weren't modelling from the life, what else were you doing?

Well we had the same as...Monday Tuesday and Thursday we had for life modelling, and Wednesday and Friday were for anything else you liked to do. Either design, you know, design in the architectural features, or carving, which I naturally took. You could do wood or stone carving, but you never did both for some reason; there was a demarcation line there. The girls all did the wood carving mostly and the boys, or the men rather, did stone carving, as far as, if they did anything at all. But they weren't...my particular year, I think I was the only one who was interesting in carving as such.

So again, did you have a teacher almost to yourself?

Well, not quite. There was a man called Barry Hart.....

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F4685 Side B

Very skilled, he was a very skilled letter-cutter and carver, and, if he was interested in you he would tell you, you know, you could learn a tremendous lot from him; I learned a lot from him. A very non-arty critic too, you know, a real...no nonsense about him. But we used to, that was on a Friday, his day was Fridays, and we used to get one or two from the main college, the Design School, doing letter-cutting and, what are they called, stone carving, and so, oh, we wouldn't give him our full attention but...

But presumably there would be a different space, a different studio where you did stone carving?

Yes, yes it was all covered with stone dust instead of clay dust.

Yes. So there might be someone doing some lettering, and, what would you be carving then?

Well I was carving... Well, I mean, I was...I'm trying to think what I did first of all. Mainly, I think it was, in those photographs I sent you there's a first-year one I think of a horrible thing with a, I think it was a figure of Judas Iscariot hanging himself or something, in a kind of very Gothic fashion, and I ended up by carving, and the last thing I carved as a big arum lily, a wild flower, a lily and two leaves. And I had done a big relief column with a figure on the top, you know, figurative. Mainly figurative but they would be more, generally speaking they would be for... And the other students were doing decorative fountain figures, the sort of terrace fountains as much as anything else.

Could you choose what you wanted to do?

Oh yes, yes I didn't...there was no... You weren't even obliged to do it. I think one could have gone through the College and been nothing more than a sheer good copier of the human form, and why not? After all if that's what you... I mean that...you don't... I mean if you take that seriously and you are serious, and you're honest with yourself when you look at your work on the figure, you can't...you don't need a teacher. You used to find out subsequently when under the National Diploma in Design with students that they had two years to model from life you see, and the first-year students they always, you never had to...they never had their work cast or so, they never wanted it, because they had seen the work that the second years, they could...it was obvious, you know, what they had still to do from the point of view of copying what was...or at least getting the proper gist out of...not just copying, because I mean that's what you're not doing, but it looks like that, and to a large extent it is based on

what's in front of you, but... No, it was...very free actually the College was, delightfully free really, and being small, it didn't really matter that there was that freedom. I mean, I've known certain mornings when the rest of my companions would be sitting there playing cards all morning. Though they were doing work, in fact one of them got the Prix de Rome, much to his surprise and everybody else's I think, but he...

Who was that?

I think he's dead now, the chap, because, mention his name now I suppose, a fellow called Poutney, who was teaching at, was it Birmingham? Somewhere in the Midlands, for a long time. He became quite a good head of department, but he hadn't an ounce of art in him; he would tell you that, he said he didn't know about art and he wasn't...all he knew about was modelling, and he was the product of the school in the Midlands, and he modelled, he modelled the pellet method of putting little bits of, like a cobbled [INAUDIBLE] all over. And he never, he didn't want to do it, he never meant to be a designer, he was, you know, he was quite happy to do his figures and things like this. So when the Prix de Rome's competition was for a George and the Dragon, you know, whereas you can understand the trap that most people would fall into doing St. George and the Dragon, he just did a figure sitting on a horse, just stationary on a horse, like a...very very similar to Donatello's famous equestrian in Venice. I mean it was beautifully modelled, you know, and it was...it wasn't pretending to be anything except this copy of a man sitting on a horse. And I mean he didn't think he was going to...you know, he just did it because all these, all the products of the school he came from always took the Prix de Rome and mostly got it, though it's a very famous sort of period of, everybody came from...

Wolverhampton?

Wolverhampton, yes. And he was going in following the traditions, and he got it. I was there when the letter came, I've never known anybody so utterly shattered by it. Quite genuine, I mean he really didn't think he stood a chance, because it was, you know, all this sort of, dragons flying all over the place, and spears and all the rest of it, and he just had the man on the horse.

But you didn't apply?

No I didn't, I didn't... I don't think I wanted the...I didn't want the Rome as a matter of fact. I can't think why I decided I didn't, but I didn't.

So when you say that a lot of your colleagues didn't have much art in them, they were just copying, did you find some people somewhere who were inspiring to you, who you could talk to?

Oh, well yes.

Who were they?

Yes, there was...I was...yes, as a matter of fact I can remember... The nephew, I think he was a nephew of Rabindranath Tagore, you know, the Indian poet, he was for a time a student of, he was with my group, and he could float a, what I would call float a flowery, leafy thing all over this sort of span of...in a way that was absolutely beautiful, you know, and so unlike anything I could do, or even thought of doing, because it had no structure in it, it wasn't... Well it had no structure, what I would call structure, it just floated these forms over. And they were really...and he sort of laughed about it in the end, a great sort of, you know, no sort of sign of, no sort of, I'm big, I'm good; he was sort of almost, well absolutely nonchalant about it. And there was a girl there of the same year, although we didn't...we were separated, the sexes, and she could do that too, she could... It was a kind of decorative quality that...well instead of putting colours, you know, right in there, you know, decorative work, they could put lumps of stuff, and they would be connected in a way that I, you know, I couldn't, I couldn't do that.

So what did they think you were good at?

Well I don't know, I've never asked them. I don't think...I don't know. I think they thought I was good at carving because I did more than most, and, I don't think they would have thought I was particularly good. Except perhaps in this mysterious thing called design, because I think my reputation in that preceded me at college because this chap Alan King who is dead now who did at Brighton exactly what I did, he had a scholarship over and he took the year and did modelling and went to college as a modeller, and he was there for the one year, my first year there was his third year. And he apparently had reckoned that I was good at design. I mean it sounds funny now doesn't it really, but, you know, being good at art at school. Anyway...

But by then was carving becoming fashionable? I mean was...you know...

Well sculpture was never fashionable before the war.

I mean when one reads about Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth in the Twenties and Thirties, there's this sense that for the first time carving has become a bit of a thing, you know, truth to material had started.

Ah, well no, you see, I mean in that sense yes.

Did that come through to you?

Oh yes of course because you see my previous, my art school teacher was a Yorkshireman, he knew all about Moore, and he came from the same part of the country, and to him I mean Moore's weathered rock-based sculpture would be part of his sort of blood like they were Moore's. I mean he understood Moore. But, if you... I mean carving as such before the war would...if you were a sculptor you were an architectural mason really, I mean that was...you weren't...you weren't in the art bracket in the same way quite. There weren't galleries which showed so-called sculptors' work [INAUDIBLE]. I mean you went to work, if you hadn't gone to an art school or if you had gone to an art school you went to work as an assistant to a man who made public monuments, and that was either carving or modelling or for ponds, or the lot really, and you learned your trade there, you learned how to do it properly, because I mean it had to be done properly, because they were very expensive articles and they had to be, you know, they had to not fall to pieces in the first shower of rain, you know, they had to be made. And there were no galleries as such in the way that we have galleries now, and sculptors weren't really considered to be artists at all in that sense, I mean, the artists were always painters. I mean, Sir William Alpern[ph], you must have heard of him, I mean he wrote a book called 'The History of Art', you know, with the title on the cover. When you opened it, it was a history of painting, mainly English, since 1900. (laughs) I mean, history of art; I mean art before the war meant painting really in the schools. You could do a bit of craft if you like, you were tolerated, or you could be a commercial artist, but generally in schools, art was painting.

So, as you, being a student at the Royal College doing sculpture, where did that leave you? Did you think things were going to change, or not?

Well actually I went...I decided that I would make sculpture like architects wanted, you know, like Mestrovic and Carl Milles in Sweden, and to a certain extent Eric Kennington in this country, had those that did public sculpture, you know, and the better the job you got the more your reputation increased and the better job you got next, and I mean, so you could get the top of a professional tree, that was quite lucrative and quite worthy, you might even be elected an RA as a sculptor, because they did have them anyway.

When you were doing carving with Barry Hart you were thinking of possible public sculpture in the end, you weren't thinking of carving small pieces for [INAUDIBLE]?

No, no we used to call those 'little pretties', and they became very fashionable just after the war, and the Arts Council got interested in what they call 'sculpture for the home'. And, you know, we did them, I mean the girls at the College make 'little pretties', one girl used to, and was very good actually, did a beautiful alabaster polar bear I remember. No, the...it was really the 1946 Education Act that changed the world for sculptures in art schools, that's the big change, and the trouble being of course that it wasn't allowed to...it was never quite important enough to make enough weight against the sort of painting influences of the colleges.

So what did you think of someone like Henry Moore at that time?

Oh I liked him all right, I mean his Mexican carvings. I never saw at that time one of the most remarkable things he did. They had that show at the Academy some years back, they had a head he carved in stone of a Madonna's head, it was absolutely thoroughly Italian style, it was quite, quite terrific, you know. As a student, I mean that must have been quite something, you know.

But you didn't take part in all this new fashion for stone, the kind of...? I mean when I read about things like truth to material and direct carving and, you know...

Well that wasn't Moore, that... The one who established the, or at least...the truth to material was Eric Gill.

Mm. Did that influence your thinking about stone?

Oh yes, because my art teacher knew, lived next door to Eric Gill on Ditchling Common, and I mean he knew, his wife knew the Gills, and I knew all about Eric Gill, and was taken to his...you know, he took me to show me Eric Gill's carvings on the underground building and the one on the old Broadcasting House. Oh yes we knew about that.

So, was Eric Gill an influence on you?

Oh yes. Oh definitely, yes. I mean they...that, you see, towards the Twenties and the Thirties there were other sculptors, there was Lambert, Mestrovic, Carl Milles. Quite a number of

very good sculptors, you know, had come beyond the sort of, or developed out of the Renaissance tradition without throwing it overboard. They had a Renaissance integrity but they changed the style to what they said was truth to material, which was a Bauhaus idea actually, it wasn't...that's where it came from, the idea that you didn't...that there were forms which were natural to stone and you didn't carve one... I remember a design teacher at the Brighton school always using these alabaster pots that they put in the tombs of the Pharaohs with long slender hands which are like miracles of craftsmanship, to do that in alabaster, and she said this is bad you see, this is not good design, because it's not natural to alabaster to be carved in... I mean, natural or not, someone had done it, and it was going to be stuck in a tomb so it wasn't going to suffer from damage very much, but...

So you were being told that kind of thing already at Brighton.

Well, yes, we knew about it. And of course I agree with it up to a point; I mean there was no...it was much nicer to have a stone head look like stone than to look like the Sleeping Beauty. I mean we didn't want Canova treatment of marble, I mean that just wasn't it, it had to be the formal. If you like the more sculptural elements was brought to the fore at the expense of the figurative, but not denying the figurative. It had a lot of the discipline of the figurative but not the sort of plagiarism of the, you know, exact resemblance.

So that was quite commonplace by then, was it?

Well it was...it was...yes I think, Lambert was working in 1930. I think it was...yes, accepted in the world of sculpture. I mean the kind of freedom from intense Renaissance. I mean Bourdelle, who, earlier French Bourdelle, and Despiau would have had a great deal of influence in that way.

But Bourdelle and Despiau were not famous for carving.

No. No, but I mean it didn't...I mean, the carving, I mean sculpture is limited to carving isn't it. I mean...I mean a bronze, a portrait head of Despiau has the same, shall we say simplicity and formality in it that a Gill carving does.

Oh yes, I agree, but I'm just talking about, my readings of the 1930s is that there is this quite fierce debate and that someone like Henry Moore or Barbara Hepworth at that point would have made a point of saying, I am a carver, I am not a modeller.

Oh I see. Ah well, yes, the distinction between modelling and carving. Well there is a distinction of course, strangely enough one found it in the schools. When I was teaching sculpture properly after the war it was obvious that certain first-year students, you know, didn't take to modelling; I think some of the girls found it rather messy anyway, and others didn't take to carving. And the thing was to find out whether it was a real sort of antipathy to it or whether it was just the fact that they didn't like the medium, you know, because, to find out... Because there was a difference I think between the way a student thought from if you like the design or the creative point of view between the form which is there already but is shaped, and the form which is not there which is built up. It's the difference to the matrix that's all. In one you're starting with nothing and you build up; in the other you start with the matrix already there and you knock it, you cut it down. In a brief sense that's the different. And according to temperament, the mysterious thing they call your temperament, some students will form one thing or the other.

But you would be happy doing either?

I was...I think probably in a Moore-ish sense I was happier carving, because I liked making the thing, and with modelling you had to do something with it, you had to have it put into bronze or cast at least into plaster, and that was, you know, somehow it wasn't...it wasn't quite the... That was...the casting of figures in bronze was similar to the pointing of figures in marble, pointing, that is measure the...was not considered to be good treatment of material in that sense, you know. Clay wasn't as good as carving because actually, it's rather interesting, on Professor Garbe, who didn't approve of this truth to material idea, not a hundred per cent anyway, and his reason was, he said, 'Well, what of it?' He said, 'What shape are you true to in a lump of mud?' Well I mean, what shape are you true to in a lump of mud? You can't make sculpture true to mud, which is what clay is really.

What kind of work did Garbe make himself?

He was, well he would have been remembered mostly I think for ivory carving, and he carved, well I suppose to a certain extent he carved 'little pretties'; I mean he used to carve marble birds and...in a very straightforward, quite good but very...they were rough enough to be liked, but they were too... It's very difficult to describe this. I know, I came up against it when I worked for Reid Dick, and he wanted, he gave it...I had to do some rampant lions, heraldic lions on some shields for him, and I did it in the way that truth to material does it, I made it the shape of the material. In other words where the hair tufts came down I made them sort of rather straight and geometric, and he wouldn't have that. I had to do those again, and I made them with my hair. They had to be the same shape because they had to look like hair

you see, and I mean that's the difference. It doesn't really make... I mean if the work is good, if it's really good sculpture it doesn't matter a damn about that, but if it isn't of course it matters. And the truth to material, well it was the school of Paris were breaking free, during the Twenties they were breaking free from the slavery to the Renaissance figuratism; I mean it didn't become non-figurative but they didn't believe in being anatomically figurative.

In fact Richard Garbe, he carved, but he was teaching modelling.

No he wasn't, he wasn't teaching anything.

He was just Professor?

Well, I mean he was just...he was the figurehead in charge of the college. I mean he didn't teach...he never told me what to do, or...

So he wasn't influential as a teacher?

Well yes, he...he would criticise, he would let you know what he thought of it, but not cruelly so, I mean he was very...he wasn't ruthless in his criticism.

So, you would say he was quite open, you mean, in the sense...?

He was open?

Mm.

Yes I think so. There was only...there was himself and a man, his understudy called Palliser, who was a tremendous admirer of Harvard Thomas and his bronze nudes over that period. There was Barry Hart, a chap who taught wood-carving, I've forgotten his name for the moment, became quite well-known. That's all.

What kind of work did Barry Hart make himself?

Well he was...largely I think he did letter-cutting commissions. He was a very very quick and very good letter-cutter.

And he didn't do, he didn't make figurative carving?

Well he would have done relief carving as well, yes. I'm not sure to tell the truth because I don't...you know, I don't know what he did, other than his letter-cutting. Which one didn't you see, because it didn't...you did these things and they were contracted, they were contracts, I mean it was always done by contract, you were contracted to provide a certain thing for a certain sum of money, and by a certain date, and you did that, it was on the building and that was it. I mean there wasn't a media interest in that sort of thing, except on occasions when somebody like Epstein came along and what he put on the building was a gift to them; I mean Epstein was a gift to the media before the war, and he was all they needed really.

But you're talking about someone like Barry Hart, but someone like Richard Garbe would be making small-scale carving in his own studio?

Yes.

And then he would try and see if he could sell it, would he?

He would sell them yes, if he could, yes.

Would he show them in a gallery?

Well he showed them in the...he was an RA so he showed them in the Royal Academy. I mean if you got up to that point, which you could get, you could become an RA on your architectural commissions, but having got that you could show in the...well you got your six pieces per year, which you could show, and they did of course because that increased the reputation of...you get bigger commissions if you were an RA, and the people were having their work for the church or their chairs[??] or something done by an RA, well it was far better than not having it done by an RA.

But would someone like Richard Garbe look for commissions?

Oh yes.

Yes. So what commissions would he have?

Well, that, it might mean somebody wants a couple of...putti for a fountain, or, you know, for a garden, or something on a pedestal on a terrace, or a bigger one, I don't know what perhaps he did in the way of bigger commissions. I don't...I think he was...he was in some senses I suppose, although I shouldn't...I'm not, you know, I shouldn't say too much here because I'm

not talking from real knowledge, I'm only talking from what's emerged. I think he probably made more of the ivory carving and what we called the 'little pretties' than he did of big com... I mean I've never heard of a big commission, but then I wouldn't have heard of it because it never...he wouldn't talk about it, and the press wouldn't talk about it, and it wouldn't come in the art magazines, and it wouldn't be heard about you see. So that it doesn't mean to say it doesn't exist.

Right. So at that time, the Royal Academy was still the main window every year to see what people did.

It was the main, it was the only prestigious window for sculptors who wanted to be considered themselves as artists, could show. The Lefevre Gallery, and another one whose name I've forgotten; there were...there was one that showed Epstein's heads, and an Epstein carving once a year, but there were no galleries as a whole, there weren't so many of them anyway for painters or anybody else; they weren't interested in what one might call speculative work, that is work which was done in the hope of selling, because, and in any case sculptors weren't interested in speculative work either in that sense. I mean what they wanted more than anything else was a prestigious commission, and if you got that I mean you were well away.

But did you go to the RA exhibitions? How did you feel about the RA then?

The RA? What, in the 1930s?

Yes.

I don't think I was terribly impressed by... The RA was very conservative, and the general air of sort of go-aheadness which was getting around in the Thirties, you know, especially the truth to material meant that the RA, well you know, it's a bit, terribly conservative, and...

So you thought that already when you were at College?

Well I expect I did, yes. I don't...I mean I...I mean not...I wouldn't go so far as to say I never saw anything in the RA that I liked, but I would... We always thought the RA Schools were more conservative, more traditional, more conservative than we were.

Yes. So if you wanted to see sculpture that you found exciting, where did you go?

The British Museum.

And in it was there any contemporary work you could see that you found exciting?

Well not...yes, because... Eric Gill.....

End of F4685 Side B

F4686 Side A

I was asking you about which sculptors you were interested in when you were at the Royal College of Art.

Well, I did answer that one didn't I, I think.

You said Eric Gill, and then...

Eric Gill, Henry Moore, Mestrovic, Bourdelle, Carl Milles, who was Swedish, I don't think you hear much about him now, M-I-L-L-E-S, Milles. Epstein, some parts of Epstein. A sculptor called Hardiman, who did an equestrian in Whitehall. I think they would have been my...because I didn't know terribly much when I was at college, you know, we didn't know a lot in those days, there wasn't...there wasn't an awful lot of books, illustrated books were non-existent really. I mean all the study I did for the history of art at Brighton Art School was done, except for what happened in the last year when I was doing the teachers training, was done with unillustrated books, not even black and whites. Certainly no colour illustrations. And there was one, the three-volume works by a man called Pijoan, a Spaniard, P-I-J-O-A-N, Pijoan, who had little coloured reproductions of European paintings. It was really quite...one book, and it was a good library actually, it had plenty of pictures but not illustrations of paintings.

Mm. What kind of social life did you have at the Royal College?

The Royal College?

Yes.

What, me personally, or the whole lot?

What did you have? Did you have a group of friends? What did you do?

No, very much a longer I think really. I used to...well I used have weekend walks with various students, girls mainly I think, because there were more...there seemed to be more of those than there were men. But not...I didn't socialise in the... I didn't drink for one thing, I never have been partial to alcohol, and I didn't like the pub atmosphere, so I didn't get much...that was where I would have got most of the male company. But when I was first there, in digs in Bramerton Street, the landlady was a rather lonely soul who had a grudge

against life, her parents had her late in life specifically because, they told her so, for the fact that she should be there to look after them when they were dying, but when they were dead she was just left, you see. She ought to have married and had a family, but they wouldn't let her marry you see. So she was a mother, she used to mother us rather, she had about five or six of us in this boarding house. And I was, you know, not keen to...I used to go out and walk around London quite a bit in the evening, but generally, especially in the winter, I used to stay in and she used to invite me down into her basement sitting-room you see, and then gradually I began to...she got me to set myself up there with a large wooden tray so that I could actually do some carving down there, so I did a lot of small wood carvings, which meant I never did any wood carving at college, I just did that. So that took up most of my evenings. But Sunday afternoons I used to go out with various people from time to time.

Did she give you breakfast and dinner in this boarding house?

Yes, yes. Huge meals. Didn't want anything else to eat. Could go right without lunch at college. Breakfast used to last round till 7 o'clock at night, extraordinary.

So, at what time had you met your wife? She wasn't already your wife?

She was...no, I met her...she was one of my years of students in the art school, she was parallel with me going up, so I suppose I met her first there, but not with any great interest in the early stages. In fact as far as I remember there was one I was rather more interested in than she. But, we didn't get married until I'd been to college, you know.

So when you left the College, did you get married after that?

Very soon, yes, just...same year as...well the same year as I left college, because we went...we were really combining the honeymoon with the first leg of the travelling scholarship that I got from the College, and so we went over after the 19th of August, which was our wedding day, and came back a fortnight later, because war looked imminent, so that that was as far as that went.

So, you had graduated from college, you had got a travelling scholarship.

That's right. I had four years at college, I graduated in '38, and I got a...I should have had the traveller that year, but Garbe wanted to give it to another chap who was then in his fourth year because he thought he ought to have it, but he thought really I should have it that year, because I was better than he was, but that if I waited, if he gave me a fourth year, as he

wanted to, I could have the travelling scholarship myself at the end of that year, and this chap could have it while I was having my fourth year. And I remember thinking, well many a slip twixt the cup and the lip as they say, but, well what can I do except say, well that's all right.

Because in theory, how long should a travelling scholarship last for?

Well as long as you can make £125 last.

Which some people made last for a year?

Well strangely enough it was exactly what I was living on for a year as a student, £125 a year.

So you were hoping to go abroad for quite a long time?

Well, we weren't going to have a honeymoon of that length, I expect Marjorie would have come back. But I was certainly going there for longer than a fortnight.

So when you got married, what was she doing at that point?

Was she teaching?

She was teaching, yes.

Teaching art in a school?

Well she was...yes, she had a...she didn't like teaching at all, was very miserable. Well she had been doing that, but of course she then, she was taken into National Service as all women were after a time, to be an AID person, that's looking after screw threads[??] and general inspection, the aircraft inspection, something or other. Then we had a baby in which case she was just...well, the end of the war we were just married, but when the war, through the first year of the war in the crazy, what they called the crazy war, we were living in Walton Street simply as a sort of, well, as a married couple. I was teaching and she was just home as a housewife. She didn't have to teach, I was earning enough to keep us both just about.

So where did you go for your honeymoon?

Well, most of it was Normandy cathedrals, except Chartres, I'm not sure whether we got to Chartres at that time, but Amiens, Rouen, Laon, a sort of circular tour round the Normandy cathedrals.

Was that the first time you had been abroad?

Yes. The first time, yes, the first time I had been abroad.

Right. So I suppose things must have changed a lot, because you left the Royal College thinking, I'm going to go abroad, and you had just got married, and then suddenly the war came.

Well not quite as simple as that, because you see I'm not...I mean £125 was a nice lot of lolly at the time, but I mean, to go and spend £125 on the Continent and come back to a wife and not have a job or anything wasn't a very wise prospect. I mean we were a bit more circumspect in those days, you had to be, because it was before the welfare state or anything, you know, you had... So that I'm not sure that I would have done that £125 all in one go, I probably was expecting to come back to some teaching, I'm not sure about that, it's rather difficult to...everything happened very differently from what one saw as prospects when the war broke out, you know.

Yes. But at the end of the Royal College you, if anything, you were going to be a teacher rather than a full-time...?

No, not...no, no. My intention, my self-imposed curriculum at the College was to find out all I could about being an architectural sculptor, that is working for and with an architect for commission work, as prestigious as possible, and that was what I intended. The teaching that I was doing was intended to be part-time teaching, as it had been before. And it was quite usual in those days for designers, ex-College designers and people like that, to make up with part-time teaching what they couldn't get before they were established as designers you see, that was quite usual, and that would have... But as I think I said in my notes, he was...what changed that was the fact that, well, one or two things; partly the fact that the war upset the building that architects could do anyway, so that I mean there was no architectural, no architecture, let alone any architectural carving. And also the realisation that as a designer, designing as work and designer-cutter, it was going to be impossible to earn a living let alone a good living with only one pair of hands. You would have to employ assistants, you couldn't possibly do it any more than Eric Gill had done or any of them had done it without some kind of larger workshop and a group of assistants. And I thought, well, that would mean that I am,

instead of teaching a class of five students how to carve I'm employing five student types to do my carving for me while I get the work to carve you see. And I thought, for them, I've got to pay them, whereas at least I'm being paid, somebody else is paying for these, so I thought, it doesn't seem, you know, it didn't seem...it didn't seem good enough to commit myself to entirely, and as I thought, well I'll still be available for any architect that thinks he wants me and I can fit in, I could still work for him, with my own hands and perhaps[??] one assistant, and that's what I've done you see. So I really gave up my old ambition, which was to become a properly established architectural sculptor you see without... And most of those, and Reid Dick for instance, whom I worked for in my fourth year at college, he despised teachers of sculpture in fact, because, when I was working for him I had to ask him for a day off working for him, as I was going teaching you see, and he rather grudgingly said all right, but when he came as the visitor for the travelling scholarship in the year I got it, and when he heard that I was going to be given this, it was Barry Hart told him I think, he said, 'He can't have it, he's a teacher, he teaches'. He was disgusted that I was teaching, you know, because his idea was that if you were a sculptor you worked as a sculptor and that was it; letting the side down to go teaching.

So you were allowed to get some paid work while you were at college?

No, not ostensibly. What happened was, under the fourth-year scholarship, which carried £100 as against £125 I was getting from Brighton, but as I was being paid by, I forget how it was now, I thought that as I had got a fourth-year scholarship, nobody knew that I was actually earning money teaching, and I thought, it was written for me [INAUDIBLE] have any other forms of money...

Income.

'Will you tell us what they are,' you see. So I thought, well I can't really take £100 maintenance grant if I am earning money when they ask me that. So I thought, well I'll sign that I'm doing a day and a half teaching. And, what happened was, whoever the authorities are, I don't know who they are, but they decided that if I was doing a day and a half's teaching I couldn't possibly be fulfilling the value of a fourth-year scholarship, so they not only took the £100 away, they took the scholarship away. They allowed me to continue without paying fees, but they took the fourth-year scholarship away.

So you had to find a way of making money?

Well yes, I was teaching to make the money. You see I mean...

What were you teaching then?

Well, I was teaching at Bromley, you see, now when would that have been? That was in 1939.

So are you saying that you were teaching before you finished the Royal College?

Yes, I was...while I was...when was it, November 1939 I started teaching. That doesn't work out.

'38 perhaps?

My fourth year would have been '38 to '39, so...no, it must have been November '38, that was in the first term of my fourth year wasn't it, that's right. So that's why, when I knew that I was doing that, I took it over from this fellow student at Brighton, the one that did the same as I did, taking the extra year, Alan King his name was, he was doing this, and he handed it over to me. And it was very difficult to get the part-time teaching in those days, it was quite a, you know, something...because it was very useful because it pays very well, it would pay the rent of a studio very much.

So, at that point then you mean, you were free to work for Reid Dick, because you had no scruples about doing that?

No. Yes, I was then, but that actually came about, Garbe got me, Garbe would never have taken the scholarship away because I was working for Reid Dick because he would have thought that was jolly good experience and a way of earning, a way of using your fourth-year scholarship, because... It so happened that a man called Newbury Trent, who knew I was quite a capable carver, had got a commission for the front of a cinema that was being built. There was a long frieze of flat reliefs, actually thought[??] of Jaggars[ph], he was another one of the architects[??], Jaggars[ph], particularly [INAUDIBLE]. Anyway, this fellow Newbury Trent was offering me a job for so much, I don't know what it was now, and I thought, well I'd better go and tell Garbe what I was going to do, you know, I can't just sort of go off and work like that. And he was quite incensed, he said, 'You're not working for Newbury Trent,' he said. 'You will just work your guts out if you do, and you won't get much for it.' So, he said, 'If you want to do that,' he said, 'it would do you much more good,' he said, 'in fact I think you had better do that,' he said. 'Reid Dick was in this morning.' I had never heard of Reid Dick mind you. 'And he wanted an assistant, so you go and work for him.' So, he

pushed me, and if he hadn't, if it hadn't been for Newbury Trent I don't suppose I would ever have been pushed into do [INAUDIBLE] of Sir William Reid Dick, but...

So where was Sir William Reid Dick based, where was his studio?

Well he was up in Maida Vale.

So you arrived at his door and said, 'Hello...'

I saw him, yes, he just took me on, half a crown an hour.

So what kind of studio set-up did he have?

He?

Yes.

Absolutely palatial. He had three, he had a workshop studio which was bigger than most people's studio; a middle studio which was big enough with big enough doors to take a lorry in to get things in a lorry in the studio rather than out in the rain in the studio; and then a smaller one but still quite big one, of his own private studio at the top of the steps.

And how many people worked for him?

Well, while I was there, he always had a man called Warner, who was an absolute mine of information as a studio assistant who'd been a studio assistant from the age of fourteen, and worked for one of the big sculptors, the Victorian sculptors, one after the other, and he knew everything, everything about making architectural sculpture. Oh he was a marvellous man. For the price of a drink he would tell you anything, you know. And he was there all the time, and there was, some of the time I was...well when I was working for Reid Dick on the plinth of the sarcophagus in Windsor Chapel, I think it would be for, either for Queen Marry or for George V, they were all done before either of them died, and he had an Italian in the studio carving one. Well, I mean he modelled in Plasticine, I mean, [INAUDIBLE], he sort of...extraordinary sort of set-up.

So it was very efficient?

Well I suppose, I mean, I didn't learn a thing.

So you modelled something in Plasticine which then an Italian carver carved into stone?

No it was cast in plaster first, and the plaster was [INAUDIBLE]. What had happened was, Reid Dick had had these plaster planks made ready for the heraldic detail, and in his view they had been cast too flat, they needed to be raised, wanted to put more belly on them. He was much of a Scot, he spoke with a very Scottish accent. And what I had to do was to raise the middle of the shield an eighth of an inch in the middle, it was about a foot wide, and then tape it off in Plasticine to fade away into the edge. A most terribly laborious task, and quite useless really, I mean nobody in his senses would do it that way, but that's what he was paying me to do.

So you were doing a very big job in Plasticine, or quite a big job, in Plasticine?

Plasticine?

Did you say Plasticine?

No.

No.

Not for him.

What were you making it in?

No this was...this was the little lions in...it was in...

Shields.

That was on the plaster, which was then, the belly was cast again in plaster, and the stuff on it, and then it was cast, he used as a prototype for the Italian to carve the stone from it you see. But what...the thing I did in Dick's studio, which you may be remembering, is, when I made a bust of Lord Kitchener that I acquired from Reid Dick, that was the only big thing I did there.

So, how did Reid Dick treat you?

Well, do you want it in detail? He was all right. But he couldn't understand how I could take his temper I don't think. He used to...at times he was testing me out to see whether I would lose my temper, because he apparently had a series of students, assistants that couldn't take him and they would swear at him and clear off, you see. And in fact the more he tried to make me clear off, he couldn't understand why I didn't clear off you see, so he increased the testing time, you see. And he used to come and, sometimes he would ask you up, he would ask you up into his studio you see, and he used to have a packet of 200 Gold Flake cigarettes, always a packet of 200 always at a time, and I used to have a packet of 10, and he would always ask me for a cigarette when he came round. He would never offer me one, never offer me one. When I went up to him he must have owed me packets of cigarettes you see.

(laughs) I think he did that on purpose, waiting for, I think he was waiting for me to swear at him sometimes. He was just curious, and I'm sure that's what happened later on, because he did all the royal portraiture and he was doing one of Queen Marry, and it had a, like a choker, a pearl choker, five rows of pearls, which he had to hide her dewlap, he told me, you see. And he wanted to...he didn't to put the dewlap on this one, he wanted to modify the dewlap himself and put a double string of pearls, once round there and once round there, of tapering pearls, each with a knot in between. And so he came round here twice and vanished[??] away in relief, overlapping in perspective, with the knot showing where they came round here, gradually diminishing in two rows, in clay, on the smooth clay base that he had done, you know. I don't know if you've ever modelled in clay, but you would know what that means. We started at 12 o'clock on one day, and he said, 'Oh well let's try those down there[??],' you see, and I would model them round there, you know, all with the knots in. Not just rough them in, I had to model them in to see that they looked all right. He would come along and say, 'Well, no, I don't really like them. See if we can move them.' And he knew damn well you couldn't move them. I knew. But he would get a model doing... 'Oh...', he said, 'But somewhere like that,' he said, 'I've spoilt a bit[??].' And he put the stuff in. So he [INAUDIBLE] all the way round again, and he went all-out for four hours that afternoon, and then it was a four-hour shift I was working for him, and four hours the next morning, and by the time that, you know it was coming round to 12 o'clock lunchtime he had got...you know, he said, 'No,' he said, 'I don't really...' I said, if he does this again, I'm off, you know, I can't... In fact, he looked, he stopped there, and he said, 'Well, I suppose that's the best we can do.' And I thought...he was paying me half a crown an hour for just having fun, because I mean it was quite useless all this business, he could have done it himself. But I mean, that was...he was a very strange man. I should imagine quite difficult to work for for very long.

So how long did you work for him for?

Well, several weeks I suppose, all through one August, and...yes all through one August. Instead of having a college vacation I worked for him.

And the bust that you mentioned, you did that all the way through from beginning to end?

Which?

The portrait bust?

No no, he had done that. Had to be...he had already done the bust, it was only just the necklace I was concerned with.

But, the one for...was it for India? Somewhere in the colonies.

Oh, no, the Kitchener bust came after that, that came in, that was while I was doing something or other in, I don't know what I was doing, the present Lord Kitchener, the late Lord Kitchener's secretary came along wanting this bust of Kitchener for somewhere in Egypt, and there were very few of them about, he was a very unbusted man if you know how to put it that way. And I was working in the studio and Dick called me in there and said, he said, 'Would you be prepared to make a bust of the late Lord Kitchener for £125?' Just like that. So, well what could I say but yes? I mean that was a whale of a lot of money, £125 was a whole year's, been living on that for a whole year. And I got that. But he didn't...but he said that the condition is, you've got to do it in this studio, you've got to do it here under my tuition,' you see.

And did it go out as a work by him or a work by you?

By me as far as I know.

And how did you do it? Did you start from another bust to copy?

I had a photograph or two, one or two photographs. And, it was bigger than life-size. But, well anyway I had to do it in his studio, and that was in the January, January to February I think it was. Jolly cold, there was no heating on in the studio either. And Warner, this man, was still there, but he...he used to come along every so often and see what was happening, he didn't do very much[??], until when it was done, I thought it was done, he was going to have these two to see if it was all right. And they came, and, oh yes they were quite pleased with it, said, 'Yes it's very nice,' you see. So I thought, oh well that's jolly good. But when they'd

gone Dick came out, he didn't like the fact that they liked it, and so he said, 'You don't want to take any notice of people like that,' he said, 'they don't know anything about sculpture.' He said, 'You've got to think of your reputation.' He said, 'This isn't good enough.' I thought... 'No,' he said, 'you've got it too full in the cheek area, cut a slice off both cheeks,' he said. 'That's more what he...' And it wasn't...I mean he had nothing to go by because he hadn't got any more than my photograph, and he just did that I suppose out of spite, because all I could do was put it back again. So, you ask me how did he treat me, well, I don't know, pretty variously I think really. I mean, very odd.

So in the end the people who commissioned that bust were happy with it, and, was it cast in bronze and sent off?

Yes that's right. I had to pay for that.

You had to pay for the casting?

Yes. I didn't...I don't think I paid for the casting, I think he was generous enough to let Warner, that's his man, do the casting, as he always would for anything he did, it was quite straightforward, but I cast, I paid for the bronze.

Where was the foundry?

I think that was Morris Singers, which still functions. They didn't make a terribly good job of it either, but I didn't know. I mean I...I was learning in those days, you had to be jolly careful about bronze founders and what they do to the work when you weren't looking. Warner was telling me a lot of things that bronze founders did to work if you weren't careful.

But while you were doing that, did you.....

End of F4686 Side A

F4686 Side B

...blessed bloke, I mean it was a very chancy business, I didn't know...

So you didn't scorn that kind of work when you were doing it?

No I wouldn't have scorned any sort of work because I mean, I always reckoned that I would be all right, I'm going to be a professional sculptor, I'll be a professional sculptor, and that means I offer my services to anybody who wants them. You were paying me for them you see, that was my attitude to that. I mean I didn't have any...in a way I don't think any of us had any great aspirations to be a gallery artist in the media sense that nowadays, in the name, the name-making, the sort of, the fame of...the American...

Andy Warhol?

Yes, his, you know, fame, famous for fifteen minutes. I mean that sort of, I don't think it...it wasn't very high, if it existed. I mean one knew about promotion and pictures in the magazines, but it wasn't...didn't have the same sort of weight that it has, seems to have built up after the war, and for obvious reasons I think because it had yet to have the American influence, post-war influence which I always regard as the American flood, you know, that terrific wave of non-European traditional attitudes that came over, it changed a lot of things, and not really for the better either.

So, in fact the Reid Dick and the Kitchener commissions were the last things you did before the war?

Yes, yes.

The last commissions.

Yes, the Kitchener had just got there in time. And, well, yes they were the last things, because during the crazy war I just, well I just, I made sculpture, before I was called up I made one or two small sculptures. There was no architectural work that I knew of.

So what kind of war did you have?

Kind of war?

Mm.

Well, I can't really complain in a way, because I wanted to be a conscientious objector, most of my friends were conscientious objectors, but I couldn't find anything to really move my conscientious objection to being a conscientious objector; in other words I couldn't make any sound basis to that kind of activity. So I thought, well in that case, if I can't make my own mind up they must make their mind up for me you see, so that I didn't bother, I'll just wait till I'm called up and that's it you see. And it was never certain whether I would be called up, because teachers, even some part-time teachers weren't called up, it wasn't inevitable, but I was, and found my way into the, or at least found myself, in the Chemical Warfare branch of the R.E.s, which is what those, about the nearest they could get to somebody who happened to be a sculptor in civilian life deciding the best place for me. I don't know who...

What's an R.E.?

Royal Engineers.

Royal Engineers, right.

Which isn't a bad, quite a nice, practical company to be in, but not for chemical warfare.

So you never had to see any, you never saw any fighting of any kind?

No, fortunately.

And were you always living in London?

No, because, we lived in Walton Street for the first year of the war, and then I was called up just three days after they started bombing London at the beginning of the Blitz, and although I had a lease for three years there was no, you know, the landlord just said, 'Well, you know, there's nothing you can do about it.' What he didn't know and I didn't know is that the Government would have paid for the lease if I had only known, but no one told me that I could, you know, count it as a necessity. As well as my pay, it would have made it up. But nobody told me, so I just, he just said, 'Well I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do about it.' So he said, 'No, of course there isn't.' And that was it. So my wife went back to live with her parents you see.

With the baby? No.

No, we hadn't got a baby then.

Not then? No.

No, no.

And where did you have to go and live?

Pardon?

Where did you go?

I was in the Army.

But where was that?

Oh that near Winchester to start with, all over the south of England largely. Then I applied for a transfer to an instrument mechanic's job because I thought I would much rather do that than chemical warfare. Advised very strongly by everybody not to do that, because that would have...I would have separated myself from my trainee confrères, you know, which I would be very sorry about afterwards. But anyhow I went through with it, found myself made into a radio mechanic, which was the last thing I should want to be really. And that really took me to Rugby in a civilian training college there, in digs, still in the Army but sort of seconded out to civilian life as a trainee radio mechanic, the second half of which I had no understanding at all, and neither did any of us, it was such a crammed course it was impossible to take... You know, your ordinary wireless theory you could take but not advanced television, you just couldn't do that. And that was in order to be sent out to deal with radio communication stations somewhere in India or anywhere in the far flung thing, so I was more or less having got myself into, by asking for it I got myself transferred overseas you see. But it so happened that I never got there, because while I was hanging about in the camp in Warrington[??], having been at Chorleywood and various places up north first, but I had this, I was transferred...got a message from the War Office saying that I was to report to RAF Medmenham immediately, provided with rations and warrants. And there was a transit camp at Warrington[??], they were used to that sort of thing, but they had never had a direct order from the War Office before, and it put them into a real tizzy, you know. They couldn't...do I want sandwiches? What sort of sandwiches? They couldn't do too much for me in case I'd complain. (laughs) Really, but I said, 'What am I going for?' And they had no idea, they

couldn't tell me, but it was just this direct order so I had to. And, they gave me this warrant and sent me off to Carmington[ph] Camp, but on the way there people would say, 'Well where are you going?' 'I'm going...' 'Oh,' he said, 'what for?' 'Oh,' he said, 'you know what they're going to do, make you a rear gunner.' Yes, shortage of rear gunners. 'Have you got matric?' 'Yes.' 'Oh well, you'll be training for a rear gunner for a plane,' you see. So, nobody knew what was happening. And when I got to Carmington[ph] nobody knew who I was or where I had come from until, even though I had got this order, they didn't know what it was all about. Then I think I was there, oh, several days if not several weeks, like in a bed in a hut, you know, with a lot of other, what looked like sort of rookie intakes for the RAF to me. And then they got round to managing to have us all in a hall to tell us as rookies I suppose what we ought to do. What we do about wives' allowance, and what we do about this that and the other. And I was right in the back of the hall, but I couldn't...nobody could hear at the back what was going on, but somehow you got moved up to the front. And when I heard, you know, enough of what was going on, I thought, this is no good, I shouldn't be in here, so I went up to the chap and told him, and he didn't...he looked as if he had seen a ghost, because he had never seen an Army uniform before, he'd been seeing successions of RAF uniforms you see. And he said, 'Oh,' he said, 'you'd better go to Room 100,' or something, somewhere or other. So, I went to Room 100, knocked on the door, and then, 'Come in'. I opened the door, and the chap sitting in a room about this size, sitting behind a desk, 'And where in hell have you been?' you see. 'You're Peskett, aren't you?' I said, 'That's right.' 'Where have you been? I've been looking everywhere for you for the past three weeks.' And he was getting terrified about this blessed War Office order you see, he couldn't find me. I don't know how hard he looked, but, anyway, I learned that I was to begin [INAUDIBLE] to go to RAF Medmenham at once you see. So I did, so I got kitted out in an RAF uniform, I had to salute all the RAF officers where I'd not had to before being in an Army uniform. And got to RAF Medmenham, still not knowing what I was going there for, and had to find another Room 100. He said, 'Go down and find...' It was a big private, big old Victorian private house in, not far from Henley, Henley and Marlow. And, went to Room 100, knocked on the door, it was pulled open. What I saw was, almost like being back at college; there wasn't a chap in a smock uniform, and he was covered all over with clay and plaster. And I knew his name, because he had been a second-year behind me when I was at college. And I suddenly found that I was in the model-making department of the very hush-hush bowels of the RAF making terrain models for...that's where I had been seconded to you see.

And was it he who had got your name?

No, what happened about that was, that when I was at art school there was a man called Edmund Thring who was a nice member of staff there, who used to teach perspective. And

while I was in the Army the wife went in to the school for something or other, and speaking to Girling[??] who was the know-all secretary in the school there, and he said, told her, 'Oh, Thring was in this morning,' he said, 'looking for applicants for a new hush-hush job they've got in...' in somewhere or other, he said, 'for art students.' He said, 'You'd better get your husband to apply.' And so I wrote a letter to him, to Thring, and said, you know, I've heard about this, and I was jolly, I would be jolly glad to get out of the Army into something that wanted doing as a model-maker on something. And he wrote back and said, 'I can't think why any of you lot ever want to get into this shower,' he said, 'but if you really want to, I'll put your name and address in,' or something. So he obviously didn't think much of it as a place to be. But anyhow, he obviously had given my address to somewhere and when they were recruiting for people my name came up you see, and through, from the War Office, as it was very hush-hush, it was supposed to be absolutely tight security in the RAF Intelligence you see, where they used to look at all the sortees of the bombs and all the sort of, well RAF Intelligence really, very sort of, supposed to be hush-hush.

So what were you making models of?

Well to put it briefly, in the main all the coastline from the tip of Cherbourg round to the origins of the Rhine, and all the way round, all the landing models for D-Day.

And did you enjoy that?

What?

Did you enjoy it?

Well it was better than being in the Army, yes. I mean, I was with a lot of ex-art students, a lot of people I had known before; I mean it was...I mean we were based in Henley away from, Henley and Marlow; it was a very pleasant way of spending the war really, as far as that went.

How long were you there for?

Well the rest of the war. That was from, about 1942/3 till '46.

Three years or so.

Yes, quite a long time. Made a lot of models. Made a lot of models. Well I mean it was just like being at college really, I mean, the same old modelling, plaster and that, painting. Very nice. Well, up to a point.

And did you ever see your wife?

Oh I used to get a 48-hour leave every so often, not very often but on certain days once every six months or something. A certain amount of leave, yes.

So, your war was OK but not, nothing special for you really?

Well nothing that I could really complain of; I mean I didn't suffer any great hardship.

But nor was it a, in a sense a momentous time in your life for making friends or anything?

No, very much the opposite I think really, because the only way I could survive the war was to sort of, just to pretend not to exist. In other words I'm not going to get involved in this, I'll live it without being involved, because it's not going to, I'm not going to have anything to do with this you see. Because I was a conscientious objector, I didn't agree with it you see. But on the other hand I couldn't find any course of action which was more agreeable than just doing that. So, which wasn't...actually it wasn't a very good thing to do, because I think if you do that for five or six years you do more harm to yourself than you ought to, you know. You sort of pretend you don't exist for that length of time, you put yourself outside the pail[??] of a certain kind of sensibility. It took me two or three years to get back the...

You got depressed?

Well, yes I think probably, my wife would say I did, but that wasn't what I thought. No, it's just, well you know, put it this way, before the war I could write interesting letters to people, everybody used to tell me so, I didn't know I was doing that but I could, but after the war I found it very difficult to write any letters at all. You know, something, you know, you sort of harden yourself, or you blind yourself to experience for long enough for it to become almost permanent if you're not careful.

And had you also lost a bit of the sense of your own identity?

Not really. I mean there is...six years, I mean, even without the bloodshed and all the rest of it, it's a long time, and coming at a very bad time really I think. If I had been a year younger I

would have not got my, or at least I would have been able to apply for a sort of refresher course at the College but I had actually, when war broke out I had finished everything, I had no claim on anything. So I mean when I got back everything, all that continuity was broken you see, and it was like starting, more than starting from scratch because I mean it was a situation one was starting from and never been in before, if you see what I mean. It wasn't... I mean I can't complain because I wasn't maimed, and I wasn't blinded, and I, you know, I didn't suffer, but on the other hand you can't, you know, war is war and it affects many people in very many different ways. I think it took me...I don't know, it's very difficult, it's very difficult to know. I know that...if it hadn't been for the fact that always this sort of, the interest in what I would call the sculptural side of things, the interest, if that hadn't been at the back of you, you see, I don't think I would have survived that. But I mean all the way through the war I was just able, I had been more or less a civilian some of the time, though living in a camp, I could still go out, I could still walk in the country and I could still draw what flowers pleased me or what bits of the wood pleased me, and for no other reason than doing it, that... And so I mean I didn't lose...I didn't really lose touch in that way, but it was a sense of not belonging, you know; if you are in the middle of a country war and you don't agree with the war, you don't belong to it. It's the same as when I used to get out in the streets the first day when I was in filthy old denims, you know, I would never go in the street looking like that, but, so I mean you feel you're not...you're not really there, you know, and you go round on manoeuvres round the country and no signposts, you've no idea where you are. And you don't...you know, you don't really exist in any real sense any more. I think it had a... I don't know, can't tell really. It's easy to say you had this or that because you don't know what would have happened if you hadn't had it. You can only know what you've had, can't you?

Mm. So when the war was over, you had to kind of set up your first family home?

Yes, not half, yes.

All that had been delayed too.

Well, the end of the war, being demobbed, I had a job because unbeknown to myself, there was still the same head but she was a headmistress then, although it started off with a headmaster, it was my part-time teaching, which, I had said goodbye to that because I mean it was just like that, they could get rid of you by just coming into the room and saying, 'Well we don't want you after 11 o'clock'. I mean it was...it was just like that. I didn't think that was there any more. But I discovered that they had kept it open for me.

The Bromley job?

Yes, the Bromley job, they had actually...well they...poor old Willi Soukop was doing it then, they got rid of him to get me back, because there was a very high regard for me apparently. (laughs) Anyway, that, so I had that, but nothing else, I had no studio, no money, and no, nothing, except this teaching job you see.

So what happened? The war was over. How did it...?

It so happened that while I was in, being in the, in the RAF with these artist types, there was a chap there called - well it doesn't matter what his name was, but he was there, one of the other shifts, and I heard him talking to an architect friend of mine who I worked for later, in the barrack hut, about the fact that he was turning a house he had bought in Surrey into two flats, and you know, he had got to find somebody to live in the other flat. He was asking the architect about the level of the floor or something. But anyhow, I overheard it and I said more as a joke than anything else, because I would have thought that he would have had plenty of friends waiting for accommodation, I said, 'Well if you ever get stuck for anybody to live in your flat, I'm willing,' you see. And he laughed, and I never took any notice of it at all. But later on I got a letter from him saying, you know, would I like to come to see it? And I was taken...it didn't sound very plausible to go and stick myself in the centre of Surrey right in the country, but, it seemed a good idea as long as I could get to Bromley to earn some money. And, I couldn't take a lease on it, I told him I couldn't take a lease because I didn't know what was going to happen, nobody did really, because, although then there was a euphoria after the war, you know, everything was going to be marvellous now with the Labour Government and all the rest of it, you know, after, 1947, they had the first power cut and the whole lot came down...well you wouldn't know that of course because you weren't here, but the whole lot, the whole euphoria of post-war came down because the era of shortages had begun. We were gripped to the era of shortages you see, and no building work, not even domestic houses, let alone architectural work, nothing. No, you know, rationing all round and all the rest of it.

So you had a little house in Surrey, and a part-time job in Bromley?

I had a half a...I had the smaller half of an old farmhouse in a field in Surrey, not far from Horley, and with no studio, but I mean there was a possible studio space in the end of a barn; a job, and a wife and child, and that's where I went you see.

And you were looking out, you were...you had...you would have thought you would have been looking out for commissions, but you were now thinking there weren't going to be any commissions for a while?

Well that's what I thought; I thought, well, you know, you've got to plan it by...it looked to me as if, you know, it was settled that I was going to teach for the rest of my life, which wasn't all that bad as a possibility but it wasn't what I intended to do. But I mean nobody knew, nobody knew what the future was in those days.

It's funny in a way, this question of sculpture and architecture, because I've been doing some work recently on the post-war era in which everyone talks about reconstruction, you know, the Festival of Britain in 1951, and suddenly new possibilities for architects and for sculptors and sculptures were put in front of buildings, and now architects were asking sculptors to make sculptures for schools and colleges and new housing estates.

Really?

But this seems to be completely opposite of what you're saying.

Well when was the Festival of Britain? 1952 wasn't it?

'51.

'51? What was '52 then? Something happened in '52.

So, I mean did you...you must remember the Festival of Britain.

Yes, when was that?

'51.

'51.

How did that seem to you? Did that not seem like a new era of opportunity?

Well it didn't seem to dangle lots of architectural jobs in front of me, certainly not. I mean there were one or two sculptors, working sculptors who actually had work there, because there were some who had got sufficiently far in the Thirties to go through the war as, well,

fairly made sculptors. I mean they had names, they were known; it's just that the war for them meant a hold-up for the time being. But for me I wasn't even known, and I had no contacts, because I mean, you couldn't go back five years to find contacts because they weren't there you see. I mean, we had nothing. I mean if there had been lots of jobs offered at the Festival of Britain, I don't expect I would have got one.

Well, but is it that you were actually looking for a line of work that was more traditional, that had dried up, whereas what the Festival of Britain was offering was a kind of more avant-garde sculpture?

You mean I didn't get work because I was old-fashioned in my outlook, is that what you mean?

No.

That's what you could have meant. I mean, it wouldn't have applied anyway because I hadn't got any outlook except one, and that is, I am making myself available for anybody who wants whatever they want as long as they tell me what they want, and as best as I can do it, I'll do it for them. I've trained my hand to do certain things, and I'll do it for people if they want it you see.

Yes. No, I think what I imagine might be the answer is that sculptors that worked with architects after the war seemed to work not actually on the building but in front of the building.

No, well they won't do. You see we touched on this when you were last here.

Whereas you had been trained to actually integrate your sculpture...

Yes, I was trained in an old-fashioned tradition if you like where sculptors were self-contained bodies of people satisfying people with specific demands, either for churches or for public buildings or what have you, you see. Not as artists as such, not because they were artists, but because they had something they wanted which they knew it took an artist to do, that's the difference. I mean that's the Renaissance pattern really, that work was being done all over Italy which it took an artist to do because somebody wanted the thing, not the art; they were very glad to have the art, and they knew they had got it when they got it too, because, well one of them, I think it was one of the city states in Italy, fined Jacobo della Cuercha[ph] who was quite a good sculptor, fined him 2,000 ducats when he had the

impropriety to accept a commission from another city state while they thought that he was working for them. I mean they knew when they got something good, but they knew also what they wanted, but they knew...the first thing is what they wanted; they had the job and they needed an artist to do it. They didn't say, 'We'd like a bit of art, where's an artist? Oh, we'll give him the job.' I mean they had specific requirements to be met, which meant that that is in my view strictly being a professional sculptor, that you can meet somebody's requirements. If you can't, then you're not in that sense a professional.

But you were ready to take up any brief, but there were no briefs forthcoming?

Well that wasn't strictly true, because during the first year at, I think it was during the first year, it was very early on, having moved into Surrey, I got a job from a local architect who wanted a big stone plaque thing done for a building he was putting up in the locality, so I did that. And then for some reason or other somebody heard about me, it may have been through Bromley, through teaching, who wanted the Hextable and Swanley memorial for the Fallen, you know, which is a big, a very big wooden thing, which I did. So I mean I would take anything that...anything that came to keep my hand in. I mean as far as I was able to, I made...it was art; I mean I wasn't just...it wasn't, you know, rush it off any old how, quickly. I mean there were some lilies on the thing and a couple of other things which are in many ways, you know, quite good wood carving. They're worth...I mean, a job is always worth what it gets and I mean there's no reason why the Hextable and Swanley war memorial shouldn't be a perfectly, you know, really first-class work of art, there's no reason why it shouldn't be any more than there's any need for it to be. It would satisfy the clients at a lower level than I would want to make it, you see.

So, in fact commissions came and they went on coming?

Well it so happened that the man, the architect that my future landlord was talking to became a friend of mine, he was about the same age, married about the same time, and he and his brother were working out the practice, a London practice of architects which had fallen into decay during the war, his father, and they were doing other things like photography and a bit of journalism and the rest, as well as working out... And they, through being a friend, they knew what I was doing, liked my work, what you might say of the 'little pretty' kind you see, and they wanted a big mural thing you see, so I got that. And gradually they found more.....

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F4687 Side A

What I must stress is, is this business which started off with the blacksmith's nail. I mean you're getting a lot of facts about where I was and what I was doing, but what is...I think the one essential is to remember that the blacksmith's nail was the start or the beginning or the first evidence, or the complete evidence of what was going to be the whole of my art development through life, you know, always at the back of everything else; it didn't matter what it was, whether I was working for somebody, or teaching, or anything else, I'd always got this bug if you like about the shape of things that interested me, whatever they might be. It happened to be that flowers were some of the richest shapes that you can have, but I mean that, that is really a background, unspoken background of the whole of whatever you are taking on the tape. That's been, looking back on hindsight now I know that that's been always the major drive. And not just the drive, not for any reason other than itself. And[??] you want to make money out of it or fame or anything out of it, it was just that these things got me, you know, they had something about them to say which let to my, you know, more or less study of shape afterwards, other forms of shape, mathematical shapes and the other shapes as a matter of equal interest, but always it was my particular personal reaction to the shape of something, whatever it might be. It might be an dirty old tin in a puddle, if it happened to be the right dirty old tin in the puddle that was what interested me you see. And without that, a lot of it is quite meaningless I think.

But, I suppose this is the background to your own on-going interest in shape and how to describe shape.

Yes.

And, you've talked about when you were collecting flowers when you were a young boy.

Yes.

And I know that you still draw flowers.

Yes.

And presumably all the way through from then to now you've been drawing flowers, is that right? Has it gone on?

Well yes, yes.

Continuously?

Yes. Predominantly, not only flowers but predominantly flowers.

But flowers have been the way that you've explored how shapes turn and...?

No, where I've found most readily this mysterious quality which exists in the shape of the thing, and it is a mysterious quality. I can't tell you what it is, but I know it's there for me, and then it just comes willy-nilly if you like, but fairly constantly, right the way through. Something which is personally mine. I had no great desire to teach anybody else about it, no...I didn't want to introduce anybody else to it, I didn't need to, except of course that it must have been a background, that kind of interest in shape must have been the background to a lot of the teaching that I did. And the only...I mean there's a certain amount of circumstantial evidence that I was a good teacher, and I can say that without being a brag, because I had no desire to be a teacher as such at all, I mean I didn't...that wasn't what I thought was going to be my life, it's just that in that situation I was doing certain things which made me a good teacher for those particular students you see. And it's still vested in this...because partly I think because the students were like the flowers you see, they come from nowhere and nothing to do with them, I mean they are not directed there by me, but they are producing something which is their own, just like the flowers, which is their own shape and which is of interest you see. And sometimes they produce very fine shapes too, they didn't know how good they were lots of them. But that was, my interest in the teaching was very largely the same as my interest in the flowers.

Did you feel freer when you were teaching than when you were doing commission work?

Well, I think...I think the teaching...well I would say now looking back in hindsight it was a great deal more serious really, because it was a deeper kind of level of existence than that. I mean I like using my hands, I always had that, I like making things, and I like carving bricks because I like carving bricks, and I like carving wood because I really like carving the wood you see. But I wouldn't...I wouldn't think that the work I did for architecture was all that particularly interesting or good, you know, in fact one or two of them I would have rather not have made. I mean, I can give you an instance if you like, although perhaps one should keep these things quiet, but the ones I did at Liverpool, which have also been[????] better than they were, but it was a matter of circumstances over which one hasn't got control. I had to have these things a certain size for the architect, and what I should have known, or should have realised sooner than I did, that because I could carve a satisfactory bull purbrite[ph] on the

wall, I could do a satisfactory horse and bull on the wall of the veterinary building you see. But I couldn't, because I was limited to the half a width depth, and what I, although I began to realise, I thought, well it will be all right once it gets dirty because I'll roughen all the background so it collects all the dirt, but as far as I know, I've never seen them since, I think they went...the bulls need cleaning and things, they let them get dirty, and they're not...you know, they're not as good as they ought to be because of that...well I suppose the lack of experience in not realising soon enough that I could get the size of the animal right for its position but I hadn't got enough freedom of depth; I should have, probably should have realised. And then I doubt whether I would have got it done, because I mean the architects were using me because they'd got to have a wall there anyway and providing the material for them is cheaper. If I had said, 'Look, I want this number of bricks extended,' that would have been a bricklayer's problem, and I doubt whether I would have got it, you know.

So in the end you would draw a line between your public and your private work, and you think your private work is more important?

I think I would, I would yes, because, well, one was my interest in being a craftsman and making a good job, because I mean you can carve bricks very badly or well. I mean I usually made what I call a good carpenter's job, that is I can make a good table, and you could see whether he made it well or not, but it's not a matter of art, it's a matter of integrity and conscientiousness really. But I wouldn't...no, except that I would make some exceptions there. For one thing the horse's head, the horse's head in the Liverpool one is good, I mean that is, I wouldn't change that, and the whole horse is better than the bull. But the bull doesn't work because I hadn't got enough depth, and I couldn't...I couldn't get it to work. You see the thing is if you're working on site for architects you haven't got unlimited freedom. I couldn't go to the architect and say, 'Look, I've got to do that again,' because I mean he would have had a [INAUDIBLE] fit, wouldn't they, I mean you couldn't...and I mean the scaffolding would all have been going. You just, I mean if I were a big enough artist like Epstein I might have been able to get away with it, but not me, I would have had to let it go, which I did let it go you see. It's passable but it's not...

So do you feel in retrospect that the public commissions were deceptive, or that you would have been better to have looked more to your private work?

No, I can answer that no because you see, at least there was satisfaction, and an acceptance of... I mean one of the crucifixes I did for Patricroft in Eccles in Manchester, that was the first crucifix which was a five foot one in wood, no, that, especially the legs, I wasn't badly satisfied with that, but I also happened to breeze into the lounge one evening and there on the

television screen was my crucifix, you know, not one shot of it but one or two shots of it, which was quite staggering, you know, to suddenly be faced with that. And I realise of course that they had chosen that particular church for their televised service you see, so this was being beamed... And so this was the work you see which was being thoroughly and properly used, somebody's making use of it. It wasn't just a bit of art, I mean it was functional you see, and that is very satisfying. It's always nicer when somebody wants something, and when it's functioning as well you get a satisfaction of it. As long as you know it's not a bad job, it doesn't matter so much that it's not the best job you could make, all things being free you see. I mean that is the difference.

So there's a kind of cross between...you want art that has a reason for being, a brief almost or a function, but then you also want your best art.

Well, you see the thing is, you said...you were saying that between, distinguishing between that and what you might call the gallery art. Well, in the 1950s, which was, actually that was before I did the brick carving, but I mean while I was doing architectural commissions at that time, I had this one-man show, I was a gallery...I was prepared to be a gallery artist, because someone asked me to be. I mean it's [INAUDIBLE] 'Come and put a show up in my gallery, I'm opening a gallery,' you see. And I thought, well, I might as well, you know, I've got the work, see how it goes. And it was quite successful, I mean successful certainly financially, I made 50 per cent more than it cost me you see, which wasn't very much in those days, but... And also it got me an introduction to the Medici Prints, because one or two of the flower things they wanted to buy to make prints of you see. And, I thought it wasn't...you know, I saw a red light there because I thought, no, I don't want to be a flower...I'm not a flower artist, I don't want to make flower...I don't do them for that reason. So I just said no, thank you very much. But I mean I could have...I could have built on that a bit further, I could have made quite a lot of, well a reasonable amount of money I should think with backing of the right sort, because they were quite popular things [INAUDIBLE] but they weren't necessarily the things I like best, you know. In the process of making these things, you don't...it's a mistaken idea that everything an artist of present-day does is worth something, because he has his days when he's got worth anything and days when he's worth a tremendous lot. He doesn't...he's not thoroughly in control exactly of what's going to happen. You can't commission anybody to make you a work of art, nobody can come and say...or you can't go to him and say, 'Look, I'll pay you so-and-so on contract if you make a work of art,' you can't. You shouldn't do that, because you can't...you can make a good carpenter's work, you can make a good sort of thing that you...but to say that you will end up with a work of art is impossible, because you can't be sure. I mean to the layman it might look the same, but you know in your heart of hearts that you hadn't fulfilled the contract. You might have sufficient small conscience not to

worry yourself about it, you know, cry all the way to the bank, but I mean that is a point which is at issue, and it involved a lot of self criticism of this sort, and that's a thing which is in very very short supply nowadays, there's not enough, you know, there's not the self criticism and too much sort of, well it sells all right, so why bother, you know.

You say now that you were part of a pre-war tradition as regards sculpture and architecture, which had dried up after the war, but were you...did you think in those terms at that time?

You mean after the war? It would be better to put that after, the early Sixties when things really changed.

No I mean immediately after the war, in the late Forties, early Fifties, did you...were you already aware that that tradition had dried up?

I think I was fairly open then. I was ready for what offered, you know, that I think that if it hadn't been a certain type of drawing that the Medici Prints wanted I would have said yes, but I mean I can see that what they wanted was not what I wanted to do.

So what about this link with, the marriage between sculpture and architecture? Did you think that had dried up then?

No, because I could quite truthfully say that I would...I mean if I weren't so old and, you know, losing my strength, I mean if an architect came to me with a real desire for something that he wanted I would say yes, I'll do it. And the better, the more sympathetic he was to me, the more readily I would do it. I mean, clients come in all types, I mean from the sheer bigoted ignoramuses to those that are really quite sensitive to what you are trying to do.

Yes. I suppose I was just trying to work out to what extent you thought in 1945 that what you had been training for before the war was no longer going to happen.

Well no that didn't happen until later, because in the teaching I had to teach pre-war. I mean I was teaching sculptural method, I was teaching professional sculptors insofar as they were going to be in methods history and practice. I mean that was instituted actually in the 1946 Education Act. Suddenly sculpture was given a proper place in the sun against painting as a fine art in exams, and it allowed a lot more students to choose to be sculptors than was before.

But did that also mean that there were fewer who were going to be professional sculptors?

No, I think it would be that there would be more who, if they were going to be professional sculptors, would know how to be a professional sculptor.

But, I suppose what I meant was, is that the end of the sculptor who works for the architect?

No, it would be enabling them to work for architects. I mean in those days as a subsidiary study they were taught to do letter-cutting, which was a very good [INAUDIBLE], and quite a number of them would be able to earn, you know, quite a reasonable reimbursement for doing some letter-cutting, because they knew how to do it; they wouldn't have done that without being taught.

So the syllabus in 1946 was quite traditional?

Yes.

It was full of what you had learned yourself?

Yes.

But it was now an integrated syllabus within the art colleges.

It was now given respectable place in the training of an art student. The dominance of painting as being the important thing was gone, and a lot of painters didn't like it, I mean because they were cock-of-the-ball before that in the schools. I mean they were the serious ones who did the serious art, the painting. Fine art was, if anything, fine art sculpture was a craft as much as it was anything else, it wasn't to be ranked with... I mean the attitude to sculpture, well, the chap who wrote 'The Horse's Mouth', I've forgotten his name...

Carey.

I mean there it gives you an idea of the general attitude. I mean he really flogs it there, the attitude of contempt which that poor sculptor was...it's not very much of an exaggeration either. So that, I mean, up until the end of the Fifties or the Sixties when the changes were coming, when the NDD was changed into the DAD, and they changed the whole structure of examinations, they cut out the examination papers, they cut out the technical, and they just said, right, the college will decide these students' values in their lists, first class, second class, honours, by a final show that they would put up at the end, and plus an essay or so that they might write for the history of art and general studies you see. And that was when I realised

that what I...in fact I didn't have to realise it, because I was told it, I was told to my face by two members of the painting staff that it was a waste of time what I had been taught. And the other one said, not only was I wasted in a college teaching, I was an absolute menace in the place, because I had had this...because I had had this particular training you see. I mean the ignorance at that time was so enormous it still makes my blood boil when I think about it now.

So from 1946 through the Fifties, things were with you as it were? Your training was appropriate?

They were...yes, but there you see, you've got to remember this bug, this shape, this personal thing. I mean, that's what I would call sculpture but other people might not, but I mean that...and it was entirely to do with the shape, and the possibility of shape being made such that it had a mysterious quality which you can't get anyhow else you see. I mean, if you ask me, what's the quality, I can't describe it, nobody can describe it; you can know if it's there or it's not there, but, and that is all simply a matter of shape, not...only the shape you can see either, the Brighton Rock, or the...it's the whole... I mean the secret of Michelangelo's carvings, people look and say, 'What a lovely style,' because you know, the marble... But really his work was good because of the things you can't see. All the axes of the directions that he's made, of the limbs he's used, are right and not wrong, and they're not...they were so right that they add up to this extraordinary mysterious quality of shape which is... Well you never really come to the end of it, I mean it's a kind of perpetual universal.

When you were teaching were you using the studio in the art school to carve the wood simply[??]?

No I never...I did very little, very little of my own work, in fact very little, I don't think the students knew, many of them knew actually what I did. I mean I don't think it bothered them, they never asked me, never asked to see it. But I mean what I had to decide was, when I had been told that all my training is useless, every bit of it, you know, absolutely...you're a menace with that, you've got to get rid of that, you know, you musn't have anything to do with it. I thought, well either I give up the job, which could have happened, because it happened in one or two places, it happened at Leeds for instance, the chap, Harry Phillips, who was teaching there, became a kind of sinecure, he was still there but he wasn't doing any teaching. And so I thought, well either I, you know, I give up teaching, and I didn't want to do that particularly - well I couldn't afford to do it really, because I was...I had got high enough up the teaching scale to have a reasonable salary, and of course it gave me plenty of time to do what else I wanted to do, I had got time to choose whether I worked for an

architect or not. If I didn't really want to be saddled with that piece of carpentry if you like, I wouldn't say yes. But at the same time...see, I've lost the train of thought now, what are we talking about?

Well I was thinking, you weren't told that you were a menace until what, the Sixties?

Well round about the time when the...it was a bit overlapping here, because the NDD overlapped the first three years of the DAD, because one was a three-year course and the other was...well a three-year course, but who had started, the students who had started the NDD overlapped the students starting in the DAD, which was a three-year course, so that it would be about the Sixties, I think '63 was the beginning of the first, when the first Diploma of Art and Design sculpture students started, although there had been...well there was this overlap. There were students fulfilling both, one at the end and one at the beginning.

But until that transition, then your teaching was much more in harmony with official policy?

Well it was more what you would call proper, sound method sculpture really. And I mean having come to the fact that that wasn't wanted, I thought, well either I get out or I do what I think I'll do. So always being interested in students I thought, well they won't let me teach sculpture, or don't want me to teach sculpture, I'll teach students instead, I'll...here's a student come along, obviously got some interest in shape or they wouldn't be coming to the Sculpture School, let's see what they can get out of it, what have they got in them, what drive, you know, what shape can they do, never mind teaching them how to cut a piece of stone in half, or... I mean you would teach that if it was necessary when it came to it, or do it for them when they didn't know, but, I mean I just started teaching students.

So you changed what you taught them?

Not much. I don't think I changed very much, except that I didn't have to be too worried about the answers they were going to give in an examination paper about how to cut a piece of stone in half. I mean fortunately I would say that, because that is a bit of a bind, I mean...

So you could stop teaching techniques?

Yes. Oh yes, you musn't...you musn't even mention the word. That was a dirty word, I've seen that in public, pasted up, technique is a dirty word.

So, you left behind technique and you left behind art history?

Yes.

And you could begin to look at...well I imagine at this point you might have been able to bring your own drawings and the way you saw shapes more into play?

Yes, I think I did

Is that right?

Yes. But I wouldn't do that consciously, it was unbeknown to myself and the students, because, I can tell you, what might illustrate that, that for a certain time up until the Fifties, between...in the Forties and the Fifties, I had a class of recreational adults who came and did wood carving one day a week, and whereas they were mostly treated as sort of, you know, they'd got to do it by the teachers as part of their job, I decided that I wouldn't do it that way, I would make them do the best they could, whatever it was, you see, and one or two of them, well one or two I remember were really very good. I mean, given the proper...I found out afterwards they had been art students when they were teenagers so it wasn't surprising. But, when they used to...carving wood or stone was very much the same; wood was a bit easier because it wasn't heavy, and it wasn't so messy, it didn't cover you all over with stone dust, so they seemed to favour wood. And I never told them what to carve. And then they always did the same kind of, all tended to do the same kind of work as if I had been carving it, you know, I didn't...it didn't worry me. I mean they never saw what I did, they didn't know what sort of sculpture I did, but what I was suggesting I suppose they did was really what I would do in the circumstances and they did it, but it didn't please me very much that, but... That would possibly answer your question, but...

But, I wonder in which period were you happiest teaching?

Oh, happiest. I don't think I ever asked myself that question. I like students, I like people, and I like...and there was always this challenge with the students. Well they got something which, if they're left to their devices they would bring out at about 50 per cent, and if you try and sit on them they'd bring[??] it out at 40 per cent, but if you go the right way they might even get out 90 per cent of their capability you see, depending how you treat them. So I used to find, you know, find out the way to treat each and every student as themselves. It was a real one-to-one; although there was a group it was really one-to-one you see, I mean insofar as I thought they were capable of doing it. And one or two of them were very good indeed you know, they were very high, some students achieved a very high standard.

So you didn't...obviously you enjoy teaching.

Well I mean I...it's not strictly true because during the course of the time I was teaching from Ravensbourne, which was from the 1940s to the 1980s, you know, there were time when I got...said, well you know, I'll go mad if I go on year after year at this level all the time until kingdom come; I'll have to get a fresh job for a fresh... So the council decided to change it for me and they gave me a new building to work in you see, which was sufficiently an advance and a difference to carry it over, and I thought at the time, well it's a very nice thing having a new building but thank God it can only happen once in a lifetime. But it happened again you see, it happened, and each time it happened just at the time when I was really...well it's not the teaching but the fact that always the similarity of year to year with students starting at the same level and getting to the same level each time, it got a bit sort of tedious. And you might have a good year of students followed by a bad year of students, you know, you might have to work a bit harder.

Do you remember particular names, particular people as being good students?

Yes I do.

Do you want to say who they are?

Well if you like, yes. I mean, I can't remember them all, because my memory is going, but, well you know one of them, Alison Wilding was one. But, there were those that went from Bromley to either one of the three or four MA courses after their diploma, the MA or the post diploma course, and, I think it's true to say that all the while I was teaching, I'm not sure about the last year, all the while I was teaching there was always at least one ex-Ravensbourne student at one or other of the MA courses in London, there was always somebody who I could go and see at that level having come from me, and sometimes more than that. And, I mean that...I suppose that must have meant that in some way or other I was a good teacher, but I mean I don't...I mean I don't like to say that because, I mean it doesn't really mean much I don't think. I mean it wouldn't be anything that anybody else couldn't do [INAUDIBLE].

But which names do you remember now?

Well, the names that I remember? What starting right from scratch? I wish I could remember them all. I don't think you will have heard of them. There was Elizabeth Kinnear, who was at the Slade at the same time as, I forget, who was it, Elizabeth Frink. Tony Hatwell who has

just retired from head of school at Edinburgh. There was a chap called Taylor, I've forgotten his Christian name, who had a good period at Goldsmiths. There was...Jane Truzzi-Franconi, who was on the way to becoming a very good bronze sculptor; she took a bronze course at the Royal College and was, you know, very...she was what I would call a slow starter, that she needed more than the three years to really find her feet but when she found them she... She used to sell to the Academy really worthwhile stuff, she made a...she did chickens, you know, the hens and things, which were not just ordinary hens, they were a very good shape. There was Lucy Rogers.....

End of F4687 Side A

F4687 Side B

[INAUDIBLE] She wasn't necessarily the best of the bunch either, there were one or two there who were very good.

Did you teach Richard Wentworth?

No I didn't.

He taught with you?

He came as an assistant teacher, I don't know, probably for a period, or maybe for a visit or two now and again, but that's how I came into contact with him.

Right. If we got back to the 1950s...

Yes.

I suppose, there's one thing I noticed in your CV which is that you entered the Unknown Political Prisoner competition.

Oh yes.

And thinking about a kind of new mood in sculpture after that...

Yes.

I wondered also what you thought of, or whether it made any effect on you, the 1952 Venice Biennale, the British sculptors, Ken Armitage, Paolozzi, Butler, those people showing then, whether [INAUDIBLE].

Well, yes, that was '52. I never reckoned much on Paolozzi, never have done, in fact the only thing I've seen of his that I would give anything for were three or four drawings that he showed on the, showed in the Tate Gallery not so long ago, as well as...I don't know in what connection that was, but anyway I've never seen any of his drawings before. But, no, I couldn't...I don't like his work at all. I couldn't respond to it in any way.

Because in that early Fifties period, this is when Herbert Read was coining that phrase 'the geometry of fear'.

Yes.

And Reg Butler won the prize for the Unknown Political Prisoner competition.

Yes.

What did you think about all that?

Well, I thought that Butler's winning the prize was probably the best of that bunch, because for one thing it was possible to make it at the size he had envisaged it in the structure that he made, and it really followed on the work of Gonzalez who had been doing it earlier in Europe, and was quite well drawn, and it was...I thought it was...when you think of some of the ghastly sculptures that had been put out to commemorate anything I thought it was quite good. The others I must confess I wasn't particularly interested in.

What was your submission?

I can show you, it's out there, if you like. But anyway it was another...another flower really, but I mean, well it wasn't a flower, it was meant to be a bronze, that was a maquette but it would have been a bigger bronze, of really two flowers and with a barbed, pattern of barbed wire round it, which, it was quite a nice shape really.

And did that competition excite you?

I was quite...I wasn't unsatisfied to be one of the final 45, because I mean, it was getting jolly competitive, you know, there was an awful lot of slugging going on, you know, careers being wrecked right left and centre by critical comments of the wrong sort, and it was...and even to have, you know, been allowed to show in an exhibition at the Tate Gallery with such people as Paolozzi and the rest of them was...they were all known people you see, that's what I knew, that they were the people that you could almost have said, they will win it because they are known. Because that was becoming...that was becoming the sort of media thing. I mean, artists were beginning to get known as they were, personality-wise, independent of their work. In fact a very disturbing sort of illustration of that were some of the catalogues of the one-man show which happened soon after the war before they got inflation of 15 guineas worth[??], you would open it and the first thing you would come to was a whole list of

acquisitions, possessed by all the galleries, everything they could rake in, and then a list of the works, and then one or two, perhaps two very mediocre photographs of work at the end of it. I mean the important thing was the standing you see, that's what they were showing, never mind the work. Yes?

I was wondering how you felt about the actual competition itself, whether you thought that was a good idea, this idea of the monument.

Well, I'm not sure about competitions because they never quite produce the right result. But I didn't think that it was a wasted exercise on their part. There was another one at the same time of, the Football Association decided to have a footballer at the fine arts exhibition, which I had a goalkeeper in, three of us did goalkeepers [INAUDIBLE] which went travelling around Britain. I don't know what happened to it, I suppose they still possess it somewhere if it hasn't fallen to pieces.

Because some people look at that competition as a new marriage of sculpture and architecture, you know, a new role for public sculpture.

Which one, the...?

The Unknown Political Prisoner.

Oh, no, I couldn't go...no, no that would be...I'm afraid that would be rather a shallow observation. I mean, you might say that, with equal truth that...I've forgotten architect's name, the one that did the Lloyd's Building.

Richard Rogers.

Richard Rogers. I mean you might say that his work was that really, but I mean that's as much sculpture as it is architecture, and in some cases more sculpture than architecture. It's a piece where, instead of somebody making architectural sculpture for Richard Rogers, he's made it for himself, and one could say that of one or two of the works he's done, because the freedom of expression in what is allowable as shape has enabled quite a number of architects to do much better work than they would otherwise, but it hasn't necessarily...you can't say the same for sculptures unfortunately.

But quite a lot of those sculptors who were connected with the 'geometry of fear' were presumably about your generation, or was that the same time?

I suppose the 45...yes I suppose they...yes they would all be roughly my generation. Some of them would appear to be older because they seemed to have been round about longer. Some of them seemed to have survived the six years' service that I had to put up with before...

I was wondering whether the difference was that they had actually done their art school, or come to art after the war, whereas you had done your training before the war.

That would have made a great deal of difference.

Did you see their rise at the time? Did you notice that as a kind of new group?

Well, I don't know how to answer that one really, because I don't...you see I wasn't averse to the departure of sculpture from the traditional. I could understand in fact the use, the free use of multi-material. If I had been a younger student it would have played right into my hands, that was my, that was my interest in material. But I did deplore the fact that it had to be introduced with such an absolute wipe-out of previous traditions which I thought was not only unnecessary but from a sculptor's point of view, who were just coming into the, you know, they were just coming into the sun[??] as serious working artists, suddenly there it was all swept away, so I'm told there's no difference between sculpture and painting, which meant there was only one thing which was painting. That told me, you know, any idea of saying that a first-year, common first year for sculptors and painters wasn't a bad thing. I mean you couldn't even begin to support it if you generally understand what sculptors have to know and what they have to do, they're a different field. But I mean that was the kind of attitude, that I would deplore. I mean the freedom of, well I mean the sort of shapes that I was interested in and my flowers and bits of things, I didn't find those in Renaissance and European sculpture, I mean they were...I mean they couldn't necessarily have been interpreted in that style, you had to have a certain amount of freedom. And that, to me that was good. But really, there was one of that generation of people, I don't know which one it was, and it wasn't Paolozzi, a name I've forgotten now, who said in public at that time, as far as England was concerned there had never been any English sculpture of any quality at all until the 1960s. And I mean he meant that, but I mean that is...it's such a...it's the wrong thing to say, because it isn't true for a start. I mean he probably was quite ignorant of that period of English sculpture which we call Saxon, which was better than anything that had been done... I mean it was real sculpture, it still exists, and I mean if you judge it properly it would [INAUDIBLE]. I mean that kind of thing, it was so unnecessary for it to happen really. Well the only things that, I mean the thing that was the saving grace there, that if you take students, some of the painters of the College would say to students, `You do it this way, because that's the way it's done; this

is Hard Edge because Hard Edge is the way it's done,' you see, and the poor student had to do Hard Edge whereas they really wanted to go and paint a [INAUDIBLE] type, you know, still life. But I mean I never said that to a sculpture student at all, 'You will do it like this,' or 'This is the way it is done.' All I would say to them, 'How are you going to do it if you make it [INAUDIBLE]?' you see. And as far as they were concerned this sort of contradiction between painting and sculpture was quite irrelevant, it never worried them, you know, I mean, they were quite happy using their materials, and some of them using them very well.

When did you start teaching in Ravensbourne?

When?

When?

Well it depends what...you see I started... All my teaching was done virtually under the same education authority, and it started off at Bromley, but in 1963 Bromley School of Art, which had become then the Bromley College of Art after the war, it started a school of art, it became Bromley College of Art after the war, became, merged with Beckenham School of Art then became Ravensbourne College of Art in 1963 or thereabouts. And so that I mean I was teaching from Bromley all my life.

And it stayed in the same site but in different buildings?

No, it was the same...well not quite, I mean, to start with it was the old library in the middle of Bromley, then it moved about two miles further out of Bromley on the way towards, I don't know where, but on the outskirts, and then it moved over to Chislehurst, so it didn't even remain in Bromley but it was all the same, Bromley was the sort of, the borough, the London Borough of Bromley.

So you were with the same institution from just before the war until you retired in...

In 1979.

'79.

Yes, I was with the same authority.

So you have a first-hand account of changes in art education...

Yes.

Through the Forties, Fifties, Sixties and Seventies.

Yes, I have first-hand experience of it too, and not...not...and also because Ravensbourne was quite a good school, produced some good painters, but it had some terrible, terrible politics in it, you know, had a terrible ignorance of what sculpture was all about.

So, do you feel that sculpture has always lost out to painting, even when it became supposedly equal?

It would tend to, yes, because of the lack of understanding. The idea that it's like painting only it's maybe something messy rather than oil paint or... Really a complete misunderstanding of... And it's not necessary for it to be misunderstood because they're quite capable of seeing what the difference is provided they have the generosity to accept the fact that there's something being done seriously which is not painting. And it's much, genuine sculpture is much more akin to music, music students, and I would, instead of joining the two together in any kind of college I would have stuck sculpture students and music students in the same place, not painters. Not because I...I mean I was a painter, I was a very happy painter, I mean I was, as far as I could see I could probably have remained a happy painter all my life, it was just by accident. So I know, you know, if only a little more generosity of understanding and, you know, and the wish to sort of remove some ignorance instead of making it worse, compounding...

When.....[BREAK IN RECORDING]we got to Ravensbourne over four decades.

That's right.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

.....just too hard to try and characterise.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] Maybe, because you can talk about what happened in 1946, and you talked about what happened in the early Sixties, but presumably there are more precise changes all the time in art history, in art education?

Well those, from the point of view of sculpture, which is what I am only fit to talk about, sculpture and teaching of it, I couldn't be much of an authority on anything else, although I

mean general, the general education of drawing and things I could be there, but I mean, they're the two main events, and they were very...very important you know. There was one.....[BREAK IN RECORDING]the introduction of the sculpture into the NDD syllabus as a serious study for students, which meant that a lot of those coming from NDD - from the intermediate, which was their first examination after two years, they could come into sculpture instead of [INAUDIBLE - TAPE FAULT] into painting, and only those that proved unsuitable for painting coming in to sculpture, which was [INAUDIBLE].

And do you think.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] Did that result in a new burgeoning in British sculpture?

Yes, well it...it certainly.....[BREAK IN RECORDING] Run out of tape. [BREAK IN RECORDING]

Now it seems to be working.

Good.

Burgeoning in British sculpture, that's where we were. You were going to talk about how bringing sculpture into the main syllabus...

We're on, are we?

It's recording, yes. Bringing sculpture into the main syllabus encouraged British sculpture.

Oh yes, of course, it meant that there were more students studying sculpture seriously, and they genuinely wanted to...they didn't have to be rejected from the painting side. And especially many students, you know, toss up were good at both really. So that I mean they had a...yes, it opened up, it opened up the field for sculpture in art training very considerably, very considerably.

And if you look back over your career, then, do you see the fate of British sculpture as being much more favourable after the war?

I think the potential I think was vastly increased, and certainly I think that the sculpture, which had been made in the Thirties and even before, just before the war, which was stopped abruptly at the war of course, was a development of the school of Paris which was very promising. I mean it might have...it was breaking away from the musty sign[??] of

Renaissance traditions and developing into an area where it still had the integrity of sculpture. I mean sculpture would still be sculpture, and recognisable as such, but with a new interest of new materials and new ways of looking at things and new freedom from slavish copying of accepted images. Definitely.

Mm. And, I don't know how easy or difficult it is to characterise what you saw students wanting to do or being interested to make in the various years of your teaching at Ravensbourne.

What me?

Yes.

Well, I found that one very difficult, because I've often thought that as far as I was concerned I've always been...I've really been making the same work all my life, and in various forms of it. I'm getting much more purer[??], much more, well, much better in the sense of the essence. The framework, as a framework of space holding material it works, the works that I made there work from every direction, any and every direction, every time, instead of working in previously, some so-called views best and others not so good. It's a question of a third dimension giving its...as near as you can its infinity of possible views for it to look at you rather than the other way round, and the aspects which it presents are... I mean it's very difficult to do, it's very difficult to do that, you know, in proper integrated terms[??].

Now a lot of the sculpture you make comes from your study of plants, it comes from drawings.

Yes.

And then you might make a very small model, and then you carve it.

Yes.

How long have you been doing that for?

All my life.

All your life?

Yes, I think... Well nowadays I don't necessarily have to make the small model if it's fairly straightforward but I always would... You have to, you know, if you've got a...if it's a carving the matrix is already there, and if the matrix is already there it's all wrong, I mean insofar as its shape generation is concerned, it's either so dead simple like a cube and it's not really of great interest, or it's so random that it's chaotic, and somewhere in between that, somewhere you've got to find that particular framework of directions and really three-dimensional disposition of matter which is making a supreme order out of what is otherwise chaos. And that's not so alien to us now because I mean computers are doing that; out of apparent chaos, disorder, crowds of things, they can find ways of extracting a mathematical order from it, which by, you know, a formula of some kind to allow them to stick in the computer. But I mean, a sculptor who's doing it is doing that all the time, he's always judging the framework that he's making and saying, that is not right, and then putting it right as far as he can, making judgements, thousands of judgements. I mean as many...God knows how many judgements you make, because you don't leave any trace of an alteration, you don't make a statement every time you make a judgment. And if you...when you get experienced enough you can follow that all in its full infinite three-dimensional way, not just one or other views of it. I mean it's...and if you do that you get a...it's simply only doing with material, the same material, what a musician does with the chaos of sound, he just takes an abstract quality of something and he re-forms it into an order which makes a Beethoven quartet, you know. It's an extraction of an infinite number of possibilities that he might have put a note in or a note there, and somehow he gets the skill and the understanding and the integrity to get it as right as he can, if not absolutely perfect. Well, sculpture is doing the same thing only you're doing it with shape instead of sound. It's nothing to do with whether he copies a flower, copies a person's head or he copies anything, or doesn't copy anything, I mean is what they call abstract. If it works it's making this order from every possible. Because obviously three-dimensional therefore every possible aspect is working as a...and it can be, well it can be, you know done pretty well, if you get [INAUDIBLE] otherwise you wouldn't have any great art sculpture would you. I mean, it's not a new thing, it's as old as man.

Most of the works around us in your house are made of wood.

Yes.

They're either carved or they're constructed.

Yes.

But you haven't always been...were you working so much in wood earlier on?

No, they're... No, I mean I was a stone carver predominantly, and I've worked quite a lot in clay. I mean I've done four or five portrait heads, one of them in bronze, which are in clay and they're only about half of what I had done as well, I mean they're drawing, if you like drawing in clay. The wood is, it has very many advantages. It's lightweight and it's tensile as well as block, you see. If you want it...if you are taking your matrix and you want to carve thin bits like the handles of that alabaster thing I spoke about[??] in wood, that's perfectly all right, provided you go along the grain with it, and even if you don't go along the grain, but mostly, you've got tensile and you got the weight. With stone you are a bit restricted comparatively, although not much, because I mean it wouldn't feel restrictive because you would feel the idea in stone and it would be all right. But it's...it's just that, especially if you've got a studio next door to your house, you've got plaster or stone dust in there, you've got a different problem than if you've got the floor covered with wood chips, it's just...and also the weight, you could lift the thing up and put it where you want it without having to get someone to give you a lift and all that kind of thing you see.

So the question is, do you work in wood for convenience or for preference?

I like carving wood, but it isn't in any way necessary for me to work in wood, I can work...I can work in any medium that gave me the same power over shape. Wood is just convenient I suppose really.

In your experiments, or your explorations of three-dimensional form, and how it turns round and changes, have you ever had to unlearn anything that you had previously learned so that you could see afresh?

Unlearn.

Did you feel you had to...?

Well, in the sense that you sometimes learn by experience what not to do. For instance some people, I've done it myself on occasions, try to get rid of the wood and the extra bit of wood, you know, you know you're not going to want, or think you don't want it, with a saw, straight through like a wound, and it's a very dangerous thing to do because you can make very many more mistakes of judgement because it's not as feasible a way as feeling the shape big and gradually getting smaller, so it draws... You see it's a very...carving direct, or at least from a small maquette, is unmeasured[??] carving, is a very, oh, it's a very kind of complex movement from the big to the small. A good test of carving, if you wanted to give a test of

whether a student was knowing what they were doing really with the tools, if they wanted just a factual test of that, never mind the art, you take a piece of wood or a piece of stone and you put three marks on there which respond to the three points on a model, and you say, 'Now, carve that stone so you end up with that shape, with those marks untouched'. In other words if you can get that shape out of that piece of block at maximum possible size, because it couldn't be any bigger than that, then you've got some justification for thinking you know how to carve from a matrix. It's easier if you work out from nothing because you can change, I mean you can alter it, I mean, if you're doing a model and you want to push the arm up you just push it up, if it's in clay, but that has other dangers of course.

But that's the kind of test I suppose that young sculptors never get nowadays.

Oh, well, a test of that rigour, they never have had; I don't think I've ever... I may have talked to a student about it, because I've tested myself that way.

But presumably you had to when you were a young sculptor, you had to use pointing machines, transfer things from...

No, no.

You didn't?

No, that went out...I doubt whether... Well I think Reid Dick...I don't think he used a pointing machine, although he used the big calliper for measuring three-dimension, but a pointing machine had a drill on it and it drilled a hole as well, and then the mason just cut the surface off which was really very dangerous. It was no wonder that some of the work done was a bit ordinary, you know, a bit [INAUDIBLE]. It wouldn't have the sort of fluency of thought.

But you didn't see that kind of thing happening really when you were a student?

No, I never...I used calliper measurement quite a lot, but not...I've never used a pointing machine or a pointing measure. That was...I suppose it's all right, it just meant that there was one small model here with a big arm, and a pointer on there and a pointer on there, and when you put that pointer by the laws of geometry that pointer enlarged that distance in space, as long as it didn't sag. And I think for certain, for armature making you see, if you're going to do a big job in clay where you haven't got a matrix you can't just start with clay and build up the clay because there's a whole weight, especially if your studio is near the traffic, it all sinks. And that's another thing you have to learn, that you can have all your work sink so it

really doesn't measure up properly after the end of a week, you have to... There are all sorts of expertise in fulfilling a contract for producing your work which if you don't know them, you can waste so much time and material that you might as well go and beg on the streets because you'll be out of pocket in the end, you can't... For that kind of professionalism you've got to know how to fulfil the contract. Now, we were saying just now about the difference of the kind of sculptures that you might get asked to do as a result of the Festival of Britain, well that was because art was being built up as a commodity independent of tradition or anything; as long as it was art it didn't matter whether it was painting or sculpture, who cares as long as it's art, you see. And it meant that, especially a media [INAUDIBLE] one, one of the media, they say, well this is jolly good fun isn't it, you know, that would be the sort of thing of a firm of architects[??] or a firm of, you know, industrial firm would want to have one of those because then some of the notoriety rubs off on them, some of the modernity rubs off on them, and they want a modern work, never mind what, so long as it's recognisably a modern work you see. And I mean, that's still all right, if you can find a sculptor who, if you can trust him, can still make you a piece of sculpture worth preserving in the Tate Gallery, but unfortunately under those circumstances the weak ones come along who give them what they ask for, something in the right style which is...it doesn't matter whether it's a work of art or not. And that makes a very slack sort of attitude, and very slack. I remember.....

End of F4687 Side B

F4688 Side A

It's going.

Well I was saying, many years ago when they were considering what was going to happen in the precincts of St. Paul's, they had a big square there for a long time and there were shops round the [INAUDIBLE] and some steps up, and somebody had the bright idea of having some open-air sculptures show in there, and they asked a lot of artists who should have known better, you know, look, here's a chance to show your work out of doors here. And really, the result is just what you would expect. There were some who were put up the side of the steps, one behind the other, just showing themselves in the open air but completely useless for the siting point of view; I mean, looking just like some, well house-breaker's back yard who had just demolished a sculpture museum. I mean that kind of ignorance is not good you know, I mean you can't just put a bit of sculpture outdoors and say, well that will be... I mean, or, you can't just have a bit of art and say, well put it there because that will call attention. Well you can, but it's better not.

So, did you think that the 1948 Battersea Park exhibition worked well just because they were so nervous about it?

Yes. I think that had a great deal of, made a great deal of difference, not because they were nervous about it, but because the nervousness made them take a great deal of trouble over the arrangement and the siting. And it doesn't really mean that they ought to have a lot of Battersea Park shows of that quality. What it should mean is that there should be more sculpture sited out of doors, more permanently out of doors, belonging to the community that has it, for which the siting has been considered as part of the sculpture, has been made for the site, then you can say, well that is really, somebody has asked for a piece of sculpture and got it you see, otherwise they're going to get a misplaced piece of pseudo-sculpture, which they, well it may be stylistically, you know, enough to...but it isn't...it is not going to...I can't see that it's going to warrant any, a lot of it warrant any place in a future gallery of art. I mean it might be all right, it might answer for modern, a museum of modern art, which is a contradiction anyway, a museum of modern art, because modern is made today, at least in that sense it's all right, but the art side is going to get a bit thin [INAUDIBLE] sometimes, not going to justify a museum spot, not really.

But you were telling me that for that exhibition in Battersea Park they made models.

Yes.

And did you actually see those models?

I didn't see them, I just heard about them, because, I think Barry Hart was working, was one of those working on the site, he made a lot of the pedestals or organised a lot of the pedestals.

And had he been involved like you during the war in making wartime...?

I don't know whether he had, but I have a...and I can't be absolutely certain but I believe that some of the expertise in making it was the result of some people who had worked in the Royal... But they're not...you see a lot of architects began to use architectural models with the proper trees put in and that sort of thing, it was...it wasn't only done in the RAF. I mean there were, well certain firms of architectural model-makers who would do that, and whether they went to the bother of making all the trees to scale or whether they just made sure that where there was a big tree they couldn't get rid of they had that in order to see that the thing was sited. But I do know that, although I wasn't there in person, I was told, probably by Barry Hart, that that is a fact, that they were so worried about the fact that it was going to be a fiasco. Because it was costing money you see, and it was a real sort of brave endeavour. Because I mean sculpture is not a very popular art, people don't understand it anyway, I mean, not pretty colours like painting, so I can understand them wanting to make quite sure. And by Jove they did, you know.

And did you see the exhibition?

Did I see it? Yes, it was terrific, yes, especially the Bourdelles, they were really good. And that was Moore's, was it that one he had, 'The Three Maidens' or was it in the next one?

Yes, that was that one. So, would you say then that, if it's done really well, sculpture, not part of sculpture, just on a site, can look good, but it has to be done really well?

Sorry, the end, the sculpture...?

I mean, in some ways you seem to be critical of the post-war sculpture which is just put somewhere unrelated to its site...

Yes.

But yet you're also saying that the 1948 Battersea Park show was fantastic.

Yes.

That's just because they took so much care.

Yes.

Do you think that could have happened again and again if they had taken equal care, or was it...?

Yes, I don't see why not. If a sculptor takes one job as seriously as he should, and he's big enough and he's not, you know, adequate recompense for his time, he should be prepared to give it that amount of time and make less work but make one work which is going to last. I mean that is what a sculptor is, I mean, he's not a gallery-filler like a painter, never was a gallery-filler; he can't make work fast enough to compete with that. I mean, you know, or you must know, that you get painters who, they've got to put up a show in three weeks and they'll do that, all the painting for it in three weeks. Well you can't...you couldn't do that, you couldn't make a gallery full of respectable sculptures in three weeks, not in any quantity. You might even be lucky to make one that's any good.

So is the problem with sculpture in the more recent period, that it's been too ambitious, it's being churned out too quickly without...?

Well, yes, I think it's fallen into the trap that it was invited into by opening up painters' galleries to accept sculpture, which had to be put on the floor, you know, that's a bit old hat now, so they have to hang it from the ceiling, you know, just...[??] But it was assumed that because painting was good for, galleries were good for painting and for selling them or showing them, that it was equally good for sculpture, and it was the wrong assumption. I mean, a concert hall, that is where people sit in comfort and look at that for as long as it takes to listen to a Beethoven quartet, just the one piece. I mean, in quality that is what...you don't need half a dozen all round, all impinging on the space. But that, it then has to be properly sited; it's got to be...you can't just make any old thing and say, that's a bit of sculpture if it doesn't fit anywhere in its space. And it's not impossible, I mean, the Renaissance and the French and some of the cathedrals they've done it, I mean they do it, they've got it right, you know, it's rightly placed.

So is the proper place for sculpture on architecture, is that what you think?

Well I would...yes, if the architect wants it and if he's considered him in his design. I think that generally speaking nowadays more than ever, that architects' work is more or less large-scale sculpture, especially as, you know, the way they're...I mean it's got the freedom of...it's got the freedom of multi-material sculpture writ large, I mean, it doesn't need, it doesn't sculpture on it because it's there already, and there's no reason why an architect shouldn't use a sculptor's expertise as a sculptor, he could have been a sculptor for all I know, as long as he gets the shape right. But I don't know whether, there again I think, I must say that this particular reward for concerning oneself with shape like I've tried to say over my background here, and I don't know whether that, whether you should expect to see that in architecture either, whether you should ask an architect to go that far. I mean I think that is something which is, you can't ask for in a way, you can't engineer it.

It seems to me that sculpture you make in the privacy of your own home is not sculpture for architecture, and it is sculpture for a gallery.

Well it isn't made for...no, the thing you see around here will be, they will be for architecture. Although they might be...no, I don't think they can even relate to that.

They stand by themselves, don't they?

Well, you see what I would like...what I would like you to do, if you ever got round to it, you were talking about, once when you were talking about showing some work of mine in the Institute, how to show it, you see, well I would like to try and experiment where you have one of them, which I believe is [INAUDIBLE] universal in its shape, either [INAUDIBLE] or the other one, and without telling anybody about it with no advertisement, no trumpets, nothing at all, but preferably in a changing light, near a window or somewhere where the light changes, have a turn-table which is not too big, and then encourage people, ask them, tell them that if they want to they can pick the thing up. And not to feel it, or they can feel it if they want to, but to pick it up and have a look at it and then put it down again. So that they begin to divorce themselves from the idea that what it's there for is to just look at it, because it isn't there just to look at it, although obviously they're going to look at it. And if they like it, and I think, you know, I am...I have a fair confidence that there's enough people really to appreciate good sculpture, as there are people really to make good sculpture; there may be a lot fewer than is realised and none the worse for that. I mean, [INAUDIBLE] every man is not his own sculptor, like Eric Gill saying every man is his own artist, I mean, it isn't...that isn't necessarily true. But, it's a question of knowing how to experience the stuff, how to...and if you have a work done[??] that's got some quality of that sort and you find it not necessarily in any one side or any way up, but suddenly as you go about your daily business you suddenly

find the thing looking at you. You are looking at it, and it impinges on your experience, you know, suddenly it looks at you. And I mean I think that's jolly good, I mean that's fine, because generally speaking people, there is a kind of uplift which some people get from music, quite a lot of people get from music, they can't...I mean sort of, raising one's temperature, raising one's sort of feeling, you know, a sort of up, an uplift, and I think you can get that from all the arts if you ask for it. If you cloud the issue by asking for a lot of other things at the same time then you may never get it you see. And it might not, you might never get it in any great quantity, but at least if you get it once or twice you've got somewhere. And I think that there are people who get it much more than that, provided they get the opportunity. Nowadays, I mean the genuine appreciators of sculpture haven't...they're not really given much chance, I mean they have to go to a big show, and they have to pay to go in and they have to look at where it's shown, and the light it's shown in, with no possible variation, they don't get a chance to come to terms with it from an experience point of view, which they need to in order to think, well I've seen that now. You know, I think that they haven't seen anything probably really. It's not just...you see there again you can get...you feel [INAUDIBLE] well you must know [INAUDIBLE] shows of sculpture, they're very different [INAUDIBLE] visually against another [INAUDIBLE].

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F4689 Side A

[Interview in Eric Peskett's home, Whyteleafe South, Surrey, on the 1st of May 1995.]

Right, well I think last time we got to the Second World War and you were talking about the changes in art school education after the Second World War.

Yes.

But we kind of missed out how you established yourself with your wife and family life, and how...

During and after the war?

Yes.

Well we had the flat in, quite a nice studio flat in Walton Street, a very small studio but it was quite cheap, and it was quite a cinch really. But of course, because of the war, we were there all of the phoney war, the first year of the war, and I was not...didn't know whether I was going to be called up or not, or whether my teaching was sufficient to make it a reserved occupation. But it wasn't, and I had call-up papers for September. Well just before I left for that, we had the bombs dropping and the Blitz had started, and there was no point in my wife staying in Walton Street, so she went down to her parents in Brighton.

Yes, I remember you told me that she was staying with her parents. And then after the war you got a house through a friend.

Yes, well, yes a flat, yes.

A flat.

Got as far as that, did we?

Yes. So how long were you in that place?

Well that was...he was a fellow sergeant in the RAF and he had this big farm, he had bought a fairly large farmhouse that was split into two, in the country in Surrey, down near Outwood, and he offered it to me. And although it wasn't really all that suitable it was at least

somewhere to go, because when I was out of the of the services, I couldn't go and live in my parents-in-law's house because it wasn't right. I mean I had to get somewhere quickly, and that's how we moved in there. In the end, I went there on a monthly basis, thinking well I'll have time to look round and see what goes on in London where I thought I ought to be, and I was there eleven years in the end.

So, you were there for eleven years and then did you come to this house?

Then we came to here.

So when did you come here, when was that?

'57, 1957.

Right. And is this a similar kind of place as to where you were before?

This? Well, not really, no, because there wasn't a proper studio there, I used to use the end of a barn and one small room in the flat, and it was very, you know, we had to get a car of course and that helped a bit, but it was rather far out. In any case my father-in-law died and my mother-in-law had to live with us, and there wasn't room in that flat so we had to get somewhere else quickly. And various things had to be suited, like Lawrence[ph] not wanting to leave grammar school where he was, and me wanting to be able to get to Bromley easily enough, and to London, and this was the best that came along really. It hadn't got a studio, I had to have that put on, then we were sitting in what was the roof of the garage which is underneath you see. But, this proved very adequate, I'd done a lot of work here.

And you bought this house?

Well, I didn't buy it, my wife bought it, or at least she bought it as a result of the sale of the Brighton house which...yes, we bought it, but we never had a mortgage for it.

So you from the very beginning you've owned this house?

So it's her house, it's my wife's house really, it's always in her name.

And you've owned it from the beginning?

Oh yes, yes, yes.

One question I was wondering was, whether you can describe a bit about how much it's changed since you've come here, what it was like when you arrived?

What, the locality or the house?

The locality I suppose really.

Well, it's got rather less rural. It's almost exactly the same except that we've had that lot of flats which were built about ten years after we came, which replaced what was a large country private house, which we were rather worried about because we thought, well that's the finish of this rather nice secluded house you see, but it hasn't worried us at all. In fact by having taken down several trees it is rather more pleasant. But what has changed is that the noise of the traffic since they've built the M25, and this has become a feeder road to London, to Croydon, the noise has just ruined the quality of the terrace, you know, especially at weekends and things like that, and so it's not really as pleasant living here as it was when we started, although from the point of view of my work it hasn't made the slightest bit of difference of course.

And, is where you live important for your work?

Well, yes, I would say so. I mean there's always the problem, is it better to have a studio that's away from the house or better to have one that's in the house. I mean there are virtues and vices in both really. I've often felt I'd like to have a studio in London, exactly, I would like to have had a studio where Alison Wilding is now, that was just my dream, my dream studio. But...no, it...the studio problem settled itself very well, I mean I've got an area which is split into four which is no loss of being split into four, in fact it has its advantages.

I was wondering whether you would like to have a studio in London, because it was so urban.

Well, you see you want...there's a way, not so much now because I think the whole art world's gone crazy quite honestly, I mean it was the place to be, you had to sort of, you know, I was near enough to London here to keep contact. There was a way in which London was a vital centre for art, and it was the sort of place to be really, especially if you were working, well as I was, with London based architects largely, and also for deliveries and things like that. But really, I don't think I missed much by not having one there.

In terms of your sources of inspiration surely you would need...

Well, I mean this garden, which was a gift, I mean we didn't buy the house because of the garden because it wasn't like that then, but obviously that has been a tremendous, the biggest influence of all on me since.

So how did the garden come along then?

Well, they were sort of suburban gardeners, the couple that had it before us, and they had really ignored the hill and tried to make a sort of, you know, the common or garden suburban flat area with banks of flowers and things, and roses and all kinds of things, which gradually over the years I made into what is virtually a piece of sculpture. I mean in fact I very quickly found that if I had to cut a piece of grass I liked the shape off I quite enjoyed it, but if I didn't like the place where it was I found it an awful bore and I wouldn't do it you see, so, and where the paths were, and where what trees were left and what trees were not, I mean it became a kind of... And of course it was a repository for North Downs wild flowers, which as you know has been the basic, really the basis of my life, has been wild flowers.

So, do you go out into the garden to pick a flower to draw each day, or how does it work?

It all depends. I mean, I have to do what I can see. If I go into the garden and I see it there I have to do it there of course, because there it is, I mean it wouldn't be the same if brought indoors. But if I were interested in a certain type of flower, like a blue alconet[ph], I would bring some of those in there and stick them in a pot and just leave them there until I saw them in the same way as I might have seen it in the garden; I saw it where it was so I could use it there. And I never sort of think, oh this is a nice flower, I'll draw this, and put it in a pot and draw it; it had to be amongst something where it had a specific quality which made it different from the rest you see.

So, is it to do with the space around it, or the angle that you see it at?

Well, both those rather boldly. It's the reaction between it and me. I mean there's a, without going too deeply into it, there's a sort of tripartite action goes on; there's myself and my mind, the plant and itself, and the drawing, the three things there. Now when you start it's all up here; I'd say, well I'll start off with... But after a certain time then it all takes over, and what's done next, either comes as an information from the plant or it might be an information from the drawing, or from me, and it begins to work in that way you see, so that in a sense I'm not really drawing the plant as much as the plant is drawing me, and that is the whole significance of it, is the different between myself and what might be called a flower painter, who will just

say, 'Oh that's a lovely flower, I'll paint that,' you see. Because, that's why before long I began, when I found what they call dead flowers were much more interesting than live ones, I was drawing dead flowers, which people thought, well that's a bit funny isn't it, drawing a dead flower, but I mean, it's because, it's nothing...it's not really in a sense drawing the flower at all; it's getting something from it, and from the drawing as it progresses. I mean I remember, there's a film, one of the film clips of Picasso and he actually said that when he was drawing he often felt that he wasn't doing anything, something was doing it through his hand you see, and I know exactly what he meant.

But what is it that flowers have that other things don't have for you?

Well, they obviously, it was the shape of them, and there's the fact that they grow the shape without any... I mean I don't tell them what shape to be, there they are, they go about their business and they come this shape or that shape according to various forces which can be understood. I mean there is a reason why, up to a point why they're this shape rather than that shape.

But, I mean presumably one could say the same thing about shells, or...

Oh yes, yes, yes.

But you like flowers particularly?

I can't...I've never bothered to question that. I know it started quite early. I mean it's my earliest memories, finding them. The first time I found any bluebells I didn't know what they were, but I was out with my aunt and I picked two or three and I said, 'Look what I've found,' you see, as if I had found something, not particularly interesting, but she said, 'Oh, yes, bluebells, where are they?' you see. Terrific sort of answer to it. And, I mean then, I can remember that as a...and also walking to Sunday school, walking down the lane which was by the village tanniar[ph] and every spring there were these celandines, the celandines came on the bank, you know. And then, you know, I began to, when I was older I began to collect them, not because I was necessarily interested in making a collection but because you had these things which were there, whether I was there or not, nothing to do with me in a sense, they weren't there for me, but I could find them if I looked for them, and they grew to a certain shape because of where they were and what they were and what they had to do with regard to seed-bearing and the rest. So it's not...the interest in the flowers was not the love of pretty flowers if you see what I mean; it was because of they had organisms.

And is it that, you're interested in the structure of different flowers and how in one species you have the same structure which nevertheless is different in each flower?

Yes.

Is that...?

Well yes, I mean the variety, their variety and their independence of myself. I mean that, I had to go and find them, they didn't come to me, I mean I had to... And then I had to find out, you know, I had to find out why they were the shape they were and why they weren't. And they're very varied of course, and when... Very interesting subject if you...you know, why one is a tube with a flower on the top and why one's a bundle of things, and they've got...there is a kind of biological reason which, possibly by chance they found, but anyway they found it and I just see it. It was only later, when I began to realise the significance with regard to their shape in space and the relation of shape, of the phenomenon of shape in objects with space that I began to see, you know, there was a bit more reason in this, because I mean they grow, they grow differently from me because I'm compelled to stand upright by gravity and everything I do I've got to keep my balance, but they ignore gravity as far as they possibly can and they draw[ph] because they've got attracted to the sun. They therefore have a different kind of, a much more three-dimensional attitude to shape because they're not bound to this...though they're stuck in the ground and can't move, in themselves shapewise they are much freer than we are, as figuries[ph], you know.

So you don't really find that in anything else, that quality?

Well, to a certain extent, yes, I mean it's there in fishes, and...but I mean I...and I mean I've found this similar kind of shape interesting in other things, but the plants are so readily available. I mean you can't...you can't, in a way you can't get away from them you see, I mean they're always there, and they're always there in great abundance really and a great variety you see. So that you're not...so, they're there, more available for a basic study rather than from being themselves. I mean if it was a fish, well a fish has got to be a fish and it's got to be, it's contained in itself, but plants grow together and they fuse together, or don't fuse together, and you've got tremendous choice of the right kind of odd shape that you're interested in you see.

So when do you think, or when did they start feeding into your sculpture?

Well, you see I don't think I was much concerned with sculpture by name or as such before my last year at art school, because I mean I was a very happy painter at art school, I wanted to be a landscape painter more than anything else. I mean I didn't want to be a sculptor then, it was only at the last year then that I began. And, I think I had done one or two, I had drawn one or two plants I can remember, but not specially so, I mean it was more the landscape that I would be going for in those days. So that I suppose you could say it was about 1936, 1936 or so I began to really I suppose, going to London, living in digs and rather nostalgic for some kind of country you see, I decided the nearest place was Kew, and I used to cycle there, and there I found, you know, a whole variety of wild flowers as far as I was concerned, because I didn't grow them, I didn't put them...I mean I didn't cultivate them, there they were, [INAUDIBLE] and I could go and look at them. And it was rather interesting that I, although it wasn't in any way related to the work as a sculptor, because I mean you just didn't do that sort of thing as a sculptor, I mean they weren't on the list of subjects for sculptors to do you see, but I felt impelled to do something with these things, and I did some, I started doing some very quick pencil drawings, rather like Gaudier-Brzeska of things in the rests[??], and not in any way connected with art either really, just because I decided to sort of make some answer to this particular shape. And I kept them, it's rather interesting, that, oh, not so many years ago, probably about ten years ago or so I came across these, and oh, I could do something with these, you know, I could get somewhere with these. I'll just clean them up a bit and straighten them up. And I felt I couldn't touch them, I couldn't do anything to them which didn't ruin them, you know, I mean they...as drawings or whatever I was drawing, they were there and that was it, you know. Which I...so that I suppose you could say that it was Kew Gardens that started me off, but only because Kew Gardens was like the country; there they were, someone else had put them there. I had to find them you see, it's always this quest.

But that was drawing. When did plants actually emerge into the sculpture?

Well, well no that you see, in the 1930s, that's before the war, the Sculpture School was the figure, and basically it was the study of the figure. Whatever you did you had to do a life figure and you had to do a good life figure; nothing else was really... Well everything else was regarded as rather play, playing around, you know. If you started drawing flowers that was because you were admitting to yourself you couldn't draw the figure, you know, it wasn't even drawing, you know. It's rather...it must sound rather extraordinary to a present-day student I think, but I mean that's how it was. And fortunately that's what it was, because there is no doubt in my mind now that if anybody wants to be a sculpture in the sense of using three-dimensional shape, a study of life modelling like we used to do at the College is absolutely essential, I mean it's the one way in which you can get a full grasp of what's going on. So that I mean, I didn't...I either kept my...I wouldn't have dared show my drawings as

drawings to anybody, and I only, towards the end I did put some into a, I think it was either the next to my Dip. show or my Dip. show, I put one or two of these drawings in, and was most roundly abused by everybody for doing these things. And it was rather interesting that when I had my one-man show in Kensington in 1950, Bernard Denver[ph] who has died just recently, you know, the critic, he was there, and he said, 'Just...it absolutely proves to me,' he said, 'what I've always thought, that sculptors can't draw,' you know. Because I mean to him, I think, they weren't drawings you see, I mean they weren't in the classic mould of drawings.

So what was in your one-man show?

Well, a lot of those, I sold a lot of them actually, because without...you know, without meaning to I could still be attracted by an attractive flower and I could draw, I could draw it in a way that made it attractive, and in that sense they were...they were really...I suppose they were in that sense, in the beginning they were just flower drawings, in the way that girls did at art school you see, and that men never did, you know. You would never...men didn't draw flowers especially, not sculptors drawing flowers, which is rather odd, because I mean there's a lot of floral decoration which comes into the field of sculpture. In fact there was a...the nephew, I think it was the nephew, or the great-nephew, of Rabindranath Tagore, he was a student at the time I was there briefly, and he had a masterly sense of decoration. He could take a spandrel and he could spread these leaves over there in a way which I never could have done, you know, it was quite amazing how...I mean that was sculpture in a way because they were in relief, and I mean that in a sense is a flat thing, it's not necessarily very sculptural, but he had this wonderful sort of way of dealing with the decorative side of things. But anyhow as far as the English sculpture schools were concerned, flowers weren't sculptural elements.

And, did that exhibition include any sculptures of flowers?

Oh yes, it did...it did, and that, they would have been plants, because when I was at Walton Street before the war in that studio I began to do sculpture from plants, very similar actually to what I do now, in fact half of them think I'm doing the same work as I was doing then, and certainly using the same tools, but just taking the shape of a plant or something and exploiting it as far as possible in wood. But it wouldn't...it wasn't in those days, I mean I remember doing candlesticks and old saucepans and old bent kettles and things of that nature, it wasn't specifically plants. Because in some ways they're not very suitable. I mean as themselves, taken literally as being representational, they're almost impossible in sculpture because they're not the right sort of, they're not the right sort of shape for either modelling or carving really.

You've almost always carved wood, for the plants?

Not from a predilection for it, although I like it as a material, it's just that it's such a very convenient material for making shape in, because it doesn't make as much mess as stone carving, which I was, you know, very much keen on. And it has a tensile strength which means you can cut thin members without, you know, transgressing the sort of, the basic dogma of carving stone, you don't carve thin members. It's a very, it's as, I suppose...maybe because it's a plant in itself, but it has a tremendous use for getting the shape from plants. It's probably the best medium really.

So you were making plant sculptures in wood before the war?

The first one I did, I can tell you this, the first one I did in wood was a leaf, which I noticed that when it was on the wall it flapped and as it blew down in the wind so it was actually drawing this sort of solid shape. So, it was a quite small thing in wood, and I took it along to college to show a student who was there who had come from Brighton and had done exactly what I had done, and he was two years in advance of myself and he was quite a good sculptor, and I thought, well I'll see what he thinks about it. And he said, 'Oh, is this what you do?' He said, 'Well,' he said, 'if I were you,' he said, 'I would go and show it to the Professor and then go home and put it on the fire,' you see. My first effort at doing something with plants was very very badly received, and that rather put me back, you know, because he hadn't...he was very...a very sort of powerful kind of personality, I thought, oh well perhaps he's right, you know.

So did you stop for a while?

No, I didn't, no. It would take more than that to stop me. I mean, I didn't do a lot of wood carving at college because I mean I...well I suppose I did...I never did any wood carving at college, although there was a wood carving department, and that was, amazingly enough that was always the girls who did that and the men did the stone carving. Sounds funny now, but... And when I moved, I started, to be quite honest I suppose I started when my landlady, who was a very lonely old soul, and, you know, liked to have company in the evenings, and when I was first in digs, it so arrived that she was quite pleased to have me staying there if I was carving, and I had a bit tray which I could cut small...I don't think I did any plants - oh I did one plant there, yes, that's right. But when I moved into the studio at Queen's Gate, a back kitchen there nearer the College on my own then I did...I suppose I did some plants there, but I was very interested in snails and things like that at that time, I did one or two snails, and... It wasn't specifically plants, because anyway at college I was trying to be an

architectural sculptor and I wanted to be a stone...I wanted to carve stone you see, I mean that's what my main work was.

So when did plants take over?

Well they never...they never took over, they more or less always insinuated themselves into what I did, [INAUDIBLE] more and more as... They must have been taking over before I had the one-man show in 1950 because that was almost, there were quite a lot of plant drawings there, in fact there were, as far as I remember, I've got some still up there, there wasn't anything but drawings of plants there.

And the sculpture was [INAUDIBLE]?

The sculpture would be partly figurative, quite figurative, because I mean I've always been interested in the figure, I mean I like...I mean as a shape-maker there's nothing... But on the other hand, it hasn't got a...there's a way in which it's different, dealing with space. I mean plants use space very three-dimensionally, because they've got...they can go where they like you see, I mean they're not...they go where the light is, and we have to stand where the gravity pull is and we're bound to or we fall over. And they have a thoroughly, they're so thoroughly three-dimensional that they're very... If you get really interested in the fundamental three-dimensional nature of space you get to plants anyway, but you don't necessarily disregard the figure. I mean I would...I wouldn't have said, oh look, the plants are for me and there's nothing else, I mean, and as far as I can recollect, I didn't really use any plants in my architectural, in my professional work there, that was either animals or figures or... Except for one, from the first one that I did after the war was a war memorial for Hextable and Swanley Village Hall, and that was in wood, and being in wood I put some lilies at the side, and some poppies and things at the top as part of it, and they, I enjoyed it, and they were...but they were decorative, I mean they were not in that sense exploiting space, nothing like that, they were just a sort of decorative use of these lily things, and they were rather successful I thought.

But they were design.

Well they would...yes, they would be...I was very much a designer, as I believe I told you. I applied to college, or at least I applied for the, having got the leaving scholarship from Brighton I applied to college to the Design School with everybody else's advice, because I was, you know, a good designer you see. But I changed my mind during that...I can't think now how I ever had the...I was stupid enough to think I could change my mind in the middle

of the summer vacation, and without telling the College to go and sit in the Sculpture School.
I can't think how I could ever have been so naive really.

But you did it.

I did it, yes, and it happened you see.

So how was your show.....

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In those days, I mean there weren't many galleries showing anything anyway, and this was a gallery which was opening and...

What was the gallery?

It was called the Paul Alexander Gallery, because he was Paul Alexander, and I don't think he had...he was trying to be an entrepreneur in art and I don't think it lasted more than two or three years afterwards but certainly I was...I think I opened it for him and...

How did you meet him, or he meet you?

Oh, through a friend of my wife's, the usual way, you know, a friend of a friend, and...just like that really.

Right. And, I was just wondering how...how did it go down in comparison with other sculpture shows at that time?

Well, as I say it was quite well reviewed. It had a full page in the 'Listener' and a photograph at a time when Barbara Hepworth was also having a one-man show which was of course, if you worried about these things, was quite a feather in your cap, you know, really. And the critic in the 'Scotsman' was quite impressed, and he wrote quite a good newspaper thing of it. It went well and I made money on it too. It cost me an outlay of a hundred and something pounds, which now sounds ridiculous of course; well I think I made that and £50 as well for selling drawings and some of the sculpture. I mean it was all right. And as I think I told you elsewhere, the Medici Prints were after me, they wanted to buy some for reproduction and I could see that, well, I thought that sounds rather good, until I thought, well I'm not going to do that because I know what they want, you see, they don't want my work, they want my pretty...they want my failure stuff, not my successes you see, so I turned it down. And I had no...you see I still hoped that I would be working for architects on big stuff, you know, really, I don't...I didn't think then and I've never thought since that sculpture is the right thing for galleries, I mean, or put the other way round, galleries aren't right for showing sculpture. They're only used that way because traditionally they're the painter's way of showing.

So is that why you didn't try to have another show of your private work?

Yes.

Because you don't approve...?

Well, that and other reasons. The one is, you see I began to be aware of the fact, I think 1966 I began to draw seriously plants, I began to realise, you know, that there wasn't any point in trying to make these things saleable, and especially not in an atmosphere which was very much against any suggestion you studied anything to make your art. I mean the American influence coming over in the 1960s that was quite out. I mean in any case I thought there's something here that I had got to find out and there was no point in showing green apples, and also the fact that I began to realise quite obviously that you didn't just show things; I mean, it's a business deal with somebody and you have to promote yourself, you have to give time to...it's not the showing, it's the time you're going to give the building up towards it which... I mean as I was teaching and doing that for students in a sense, and also trying to satisfy architects who wanted things I wanted to do, I mean there just wasn't the time to do any promotion. I mean if I dropped everything else and said, well I'll promote myself as a special artist dealing with flowers, which I thought wouldn't necessarily work anyway because I mean what people think about flowers are pretty flowers, they're Dutch flower paintings and all that, I mean it's all absolutely, well done to death almost, and rather slighting[??] they are. I mean Elizabeth Blackadder who has done one or two, but I mean generally she does exactly what I would never want to do, just, using the flower for the sake of itself, whereas I was trying to develop something from it, through it.

But presumably in the Sixties and later things became much freer, so it was more acceptable to do different kinds of things, like drawing flowers.

Not really, no. It still... I think, obviously there was still an undercurrent of some people who were doing what you might call figurative or representational painting and things, but there again I wasn't really trying to do representational work of flowers you see, I mean I wasn't as you might say, take the flower instead of the figure. I mean I was trying to make, well, extract the abstract values of the plant form and use those you see. Well now abstract is common enough, I mean everybody did abstract you might say round about, but not in the sense of starting with nothing and working out with a bit of material something which looks quite fun. I mean, it had to have a reason for its being where it was, either mathematical or whatever it is that makes plant shape what it is, it was important. And in any case I was really quite...I suppose I was quite indifferent to it really, I mean I didn't want to...I didn't want to be a gallery artist in that sense. If I wanted to be anything I wanted in the early days after the war to work for architects and to do big stuff you see.

So, I wonder what you thought of the Festival of Britain.

Well that was...that was all right. I mean there were...except that I began to realise then that the war and the ten years, virtually the ten years that it took out of my life was now beginning to show you see, because although there was work there done by sculptors who were still making sculpture up to a point, they got a name and I hadn't you see, because they hadn't had this sort of...you know, they had grown up through the school since the war. If I had been younger and I hadn't completed my college training when war broke out I would have gone back and had another two years of refresher course and it would have made a great deal of difference to my life. But I had finished you see, so I had no connections, nothing, nothing at all, no connection with the College or anything, which is what was necessary to build up. And of course there was a, well there was this sort of extraordinary revolutionary, terribly arrogant, what seemed like upstarts, you know, who decided that all sculpture, in fact it was absolutely said in public by one of them, that before the war there hadn't been any sculpture of any quality in England at all, ever.

So what kind of people do you mean when you say...?

Do I mean what?

When you say that people were saying that, this new arrogance.

What?

What kind of people are you talking about?

You want some names, do you?

Yes.

Well I don't...I don't normally give names.

So we'll have a picture of who you're talking about.

Well, I can't...when you come to think about it, I can't...I can't remember the names off-hand. There was Paolozzi. Do you know, any one of that time. My memory for names is very bad. Butler, although I had more respect for him, but, I think it was Caro wasn't it, isn't it a bit

early for him? There was a chap called Adams and another one who...no, do you know, I should know these, I should know these names but I can't recall them.

But you mean that kind of grouping made you feel like an outsider?

Well they were producing non-figurative work very largely, because the figure was one of the things that, you know, was...you didn't do. I mean that was the basis of sculpture which had to be discarded. It was necessary to a certain extent, you know, one's always got to change, but it needn't have been as revolutionary as that; in fact it was rather a pity the war came because the change was taking pace in my opinion in sculpture against the figurative in what they call the School of Paris, or did then, which was moving in a very very, very good direction for sculpture, it was just that the war stopped it, you know. And then very soon after the war the American influence, which was very anti European of course, deliberately, especially in painting, began to take over from the more traditional.

When did you first become aware of the American influence?

Well, it wasn't so much...it wasn't so much a matter of the American influence initially; it was an academic movement in this country, it was in the Schools that I first became aware of it, in a form, the early form of Pop art, where students would be sent to collect their objects for use from Woolworths, because they were vulgar and common, and not from the museums because they were good sculpture. That was when I first had been aware of it. It was in, in fact it was in the teaching world more than in the outside world I think. Its effect on me, it affected me most in the academic world of teaching than it did in there, because I've always been very independent in attitude, and it might not have affected me at all otherwise.

Yes. So, how often did you go to the Festival of Britain?

Well I went several times, I mean it was a very interesting place, and not specifically for art, because I mean the sculpture that was there wasn't all that sort of remarkable, not really. I mean the Skylon was quite a sort of inspiration thing because it was sort of, suddenly departing from the necessity of gravity. I mean it was a sort of stuck in space, it was really... In fact in many ways the architecture was more authentic than the sculpture really I think.

So there wasn't any sculpture that made a strong impression on you there?

No, none that I can remember other than the Skylon, no. Well there were...no, nothing that inspired me, and they were...they weren't bad. What I used to call carpentering[??], you

know, sort of, the job was done well and fulfilled but not really much sparkle, not for me anyway.

But these people like Paolozzi and Butler and Adams and so on, when did you first see their work, or where did you see their work?

Well I can't...I suppose I came into direct contact with their names over the Political Prisoner competition which you may know of, I forget, was it '52? It was round about the same time actually, for which I put in a...I did a small plaster thing, and it was one of the 45 selected, pre-selection for Great Britain, of which 12 were selected for the final competition, and Paolozzi was one of them, Paolozzi and Hepworth I think, and Butler, I'm not sure of the others, but, my memory for names, there's been so many thousands of artists' names in recent years, you can't really keep track of them. And also in the Schools [INAUDIBLE], because you see we used to...the situation of visiting the Coldstream Committee which decided that it would be very good for all art colleges to have frequent visitors from successful working Bond Street artists you see, and Paolozzi and Flatworthy[??] and Caro I suppose, although I don't remember Caro visiting, he never came to my college as a visitor. That's where I would have been aware of them.

You didn't go round the galleries to see their shows?

Well I did, yes, of course, I mean I was always...I was always...well, until recent years of my [INAUDIBLE] that I used to go regularly to see them, and certainly would know what was going on in that respect, and read the magazines too and the rest of it, and also had to deal with students who had also seen Krista[ph] and people of that kin[??], you know. I mean, you couldn't really be a teacher without being aware of what's going on in that way. But I mean if you were trying to be...if you tried to be aware of it to the extent that you felt on top of it you would go bust, you know, I mean, you just...you just had to take as much of it as you could really.

So which galleries were the ones that counted, the ones you went to to see things?

Well, I suppose it would be the Marlborough Gallery, the Lefevre Gallery, Agnews, and, what's the other one, end of Cork Street? Names, terrible now. Well anyway, they're still going and they're still at the end of Cork Street, which one or two of them aren't, you know.

Do you mean Waddingtons?

Yes, Waddington, that's the name I want, yes.

And did you go to the public galleries, like...?

Oh yes, I went to...

I wondered which ones at that time had exhibition programmes.

Well there's no doubt whatever to me that the museum I value most is the Museum of...behind the RA, the...

Mankind.

Mankind. Because there, from the point of view of shape, I mean there's some tremendous inspiration there really. But I think, you know, Europe is not especially endowed with masters of three-dimensional shape as sculptors, they're not..you know, they've had their geniuses obviously, but I mean the rest of the world has had some very very fine stuff to offer. Well, I mean compared with the stuff which is being pedalled today, I mean, there's no comparison really. Certain parts of Africa where their command of shape is so extraordinary, or seem to be, I mean whether, you know, if you picked out a number of European works and showed them in Africa, the Africans might think the same thing the other way round of course, it may...but I don't think so. There is a...there is a kind of indescribable quality which is necessary for a man to have; you can't say why is he a better sculptor than somebody else. You can go so far that way but then in the end you have to admit you can't say why he's better than the other, it just obviously is you know. And insofar as the post-war attitude from the academic point of view was trying to get rid of a certain stuffiness and a déjà vu of the old figurative Renaissance tradition, I think it was excellent, but I mean they could have done it differently rather; instead of, you know, saying, you know, tradition is all punk and get rid of it, they could say, well perhaps there are other traditions that aren't you see, and what do they do? It would have been much better to go into Woolworths to buy a plastic toy just to get inspiration from it, you know.

So was there new work coming out in the Fifties and Sixties that was exciting you?

Well no, you've asked me that before, and...I can't... The thing is that I...with regard to work which was being done, gallery work that I might go, and this is what's being done now, if I would go there I had...if I thought I could do it as well or better I wasn't interested, but if I thought I couldn't do it yet, I was. But I mean I can't...it wasn't that I necessarily thought, well

I would like to have done that, or I want to be famous like that; he's got something which I haven't yet, you know, I can't do yet, and I'll have a look and see what it is. And so that I can't...I can't really truthfully say that I was terribly influenced by what anybody else was doing at all, other than in that sense. I mean I didn't want to...I didn't want to do anything in any particular style. So, I mean I can't really answer that question, not truthfully.

Maybe there wasn't anybody. And, were there people that you would be discussing the shows you saw, or the sculpture...?

Well I had to talk about them to students. But even then you see, as far as I was teaching students I wasn't saying, 'Look, go and have a look at that because that's the way to do it, you go and do it like that.' As I think I also told you somewhere else, the fact that having had my technical training thrown in the dustbin, publicly thrown in the dustbin, you know, you don't need...you're not going to teach that sort of rubbish now, you see; I thought, well I've got to teach something or else give up the job, so, I think then, well I look back now I think I decided that I, as I did with wild flowers, I thought, well here's a bunch of students, they wouldn't be here if somewhere in them there wasn't some capacity for making some kind of shape, let's find out what it is you see. Well, so that I spent my time teaching students rather than art, and trying to find out what they would do, what they had got the capacity to do on their own terms and to do it at 90 per cent instead of about 40 per cent which most students were satisfied with, you know, 40 per cent of their capacity was good enough for them. But I mean, it's not...it's not really good enough you see, you've got to... And I think that...so that I wouldn't...I would be much more inclined to have advised them to go and look at something in the Museum of Man than I would have to have gone to somebody's... They didn't need to be told that anyway because they would do that, I mean...

And could you bring in your study of plants into the way you taught? Was that important?

Not by...not specific example, no, I wouldn't...

But do you think the way it had influenced you to look meant that you could...?

I think the way that I looked at things must have got across to them, because I mean they...they did...which I...which, although I was getting it out of them and not telling them what to do, was work that I quite liked, you know. I mean there was a way in which particularly I...when I had a, for a short time in the middle years I had a class of recreative sculptors, mainly women I think they were, because in those days they had the time to spend during the day as amateurs, and all the rest was evening classes, the main evening classes

were men and the day classes were women, and they, as was fashionable at that time, from the war onwards, what used to be called sculpture in the home was small things that at College we used to call 'little pretties', you know, little animals, little weasels and stoats and cats and dogs and polar bears you see, and a little knobbly thing that could be grass. And although I've never showed any work of my own as far as the teaching, I would always keep it quite...because the last thing I wanted was to see a lot of people trying to do what they thought I was doing, and doing it literally, but the work that came out of this recreational class was very very much my work in a way, although they had never...I mean so it's something I must have told them to do. Although I never told them, 'Do it like this', some suggestion I made must have been coming through you see. You can't really in that sense avoid it I suppose.

But now they can...it seems like you can't grasp it, you don't quite know what you were saying?

Well, no, you see, I mean I think...I think I was quite popular with the students because I mean I...I didn't force them to do anything you see, and it didn't...I don't think...I think they thought one or two of them that I was terribly old-fashioned, did little figures like Rodin and the rest of it which they thought was old-fashioned stuff you see, until they came here, as I used to have a year, at one time I used to have four or five students a year and I used to have them here for tea during their diploma year. They were a bit surprised you see, because they thought I would... But it didn't matter that I was that because I mean...what I was doing wasn't...in that sense didn't come very much to the fore because I was trying to get out of them what was in them you see, and one or two of them were very good, you know, about two in ten students were really worth it, really first-class creative minds they had.

How long did you teach Alison Wilding for?

Well, I had her for the three years of... It's rather interesting that Alison Wilding, she was one of three students in the first year who were a little bit dicey and a little bit difficult, you know, a bit sort of, not quite obstreperous but not quite going the right way. But I remember having to, in those days I mean one could be fairly sort of authoritative and I made them all do something which I thought would be a jolly good corrective to what they were doing. Well actually they were quite good friends, these three. But Alison I remember very well making a work from, it had to be a photograph because you can't get hold of one otherwise, of those Chinese, there are one or two in existence of what they call libation vessels; of course they don't know what they were, but they're old bronze shapes about that big, the beauty of the V & A, which is fantastic, you know, really is a marvellous three-dimensional shape, it really is

worth...well you can't describe it really. And she was a bit reluctant but she did do it, and... Then of course she went into the current fashion which was what I call flag waving, where she would use...she used to do them very well, but not...they departed from what was really what I might call the grist[ph] of things, the fundamental three-dimensional grit[ph], because if you start putting too much coloured plastic together you get a kind of interest in it which allows you to be a bit loose in the sculpture. But she was a very good, she did become a very good student. She got to College of course, and as far as I can realise had a very miserable time there too, because the kind of atmosphere of what was being done at the College wasn't quite her cup of tea I don't think. But anyway it so happened that I lost touch with her a bit until some years, let's see, round about 1985 I suppose it was, she had a show at the Serpentine Gallery which was the first, I saw her Dip show but between then I hadn't seen any of her work at all. Had a very smart catalogue I remember. But I was...very seldom am I completely surprised by anything, or nonplused, but I really was, because there, although I thought she had gone in the way of contemporary sculpture at that time, you know, with the great mixture of use of furniture and conceptualism and installations and that kind of thing, here she had done some objects which had exactly the kind of shape as I was trying to talk about to her in her first year when I made her do this thing you see. And I was so amazed that...

Just because this is a tape and we can't see your hands, you have to describe what you mean by the shape that you were talking about in her first year.

Well I'll try to describe it, you can't do it [INAUDIBLE] can you. You can't...you see the trouble is, if it's really three-dimensional shape, especially a shape of space, there's no way in which you could do it except by doing it. The photographs are useless, I mean you can't...you've got to see the thing and there's no way in which you can get it second-hand.

But just...

No way in which you could describe sculpture except by doing it. Like you ask people to describe a spiral staircase and they'll do that you see.

But why were you pleased with her show? Because...?

Well because she had got... That she was reviving a use of material for purely shape purposes which I was trying to get her to do in this first year exercise you see. I mean, whereas she might have gone into this other...suddenly she was back where I would think, well that's just what to do if you call yourself a sculptor you see. I mean make this sort of object with a

really three-dimensional quality and nothing else, except for a certain patination and the rest of it.

So did you breathe a sigh of relief in the Eighties when sculptors began to make objects again?

Did I what?

Breathe a sigh of relief?

Not really, no. I mean I was very pleased to see that she had, but I mean I don't...I'm not uninterested in the rest, what they do; my only bone of contention might be, if you like, is the fact that it has to be given to the world under the name of sculpture, which it isn't, I mean, if it didn't have that confusion I wouldn't mind. A lot of it's very interesting, and in fact I very often thought, know that if I'd been ten years younger, if I had done my training when they started using these sort of materials other than the traditional clay and bronze I would have lapped that up, because I was made for that kind of use of materials. I would have been a happy...

But I mean I know that I would have missed something, because I know that it's only...the
only one.....

End of F4689 Side B

F4690 Side A

And then I decided I've got what she's got.

Now, I was just thinking that perhaps after high conceptualism when sculpture, there was no object and people were just going off to do projects, or going off to beaches or whatever to gather things, suddenly in the Eighties you must have seen sculptures made by Richard Deacon or Kapoor or Alison Wilding...

Yes, I know them, yes.

Which actually returned to an object in space.

Yes. Well, yes but not really. I mean, I remember Deacon, he was the one that uses lino and things, and I remember seeing one of his at the Tate which appalled me really because I mean, if you use sheet material and you do that then you are using God's gift of the necessity of plane spending[??] in one way and not the other; I mean you can't make a bent...you can't make a bent plane, because it goes straight for you, you know, you can't bend a sheet without it drawing itself very rigidly straight that way, so it goes round. But what he had to do in one of them was to make a big band of stressed metal which should have been one piece of sprung steel because that would draw the shape for you, you see. And he had to join two pieces and of course he hadn't done it very well, so this beautiful shape which was coming round there had a kink in it, you know. And there, it should never have been...if the sculpture is of quality it should never have been like that. It's like sort of, you know, somebody showing you a head and making one eye bigger than the other in a representational way. I mean it was a mistake, a flaw which could have been put right I suppose, but he hadn't bothered to put it right so that it all got rather slack, you know, the quality, the renown he was getting was because of his use of materials in a certain way, which was quite clever and quite articulate and all the rest of it, but without the necessary self-criticism of thinking, well it may be made of a bit of lino but it's still got to have the same quality of perfection that it would have if Michelangelo had carved a nose. I mean, you can't - well you shouldn't really, I mean, the material's got nothing to do with it. It doesn't matter what the material is but what matters is the integrity of what you do with it you see. And that I remember of Deacon. And also the fact that they became so unportable, that they became so gallery-bound, you know, like Kapoor's heaps of sand [INAUDIBLE], where work was obviously beginning to be, the shows were the work showing the individual and not the individual showing the work; in other words if it had been the work which was being shown, the individual could keep in the background, it doesn't affect it, but I mean, if it's the individual that's being shown then you can put anything

anywhere as temporarily as you like, and it can take any form you like if it's sort of advertising the maker as much as to say, 'Well look, see, look at this and see how clever I am,' you see. Well, it's all right, but it's not...it's a very sort of low form of sculptural effort I think, to do that.

But for how long were you teaching at the same time as making architectural work?

Well, until, I think I must have made the last one, which in some ways wasn't the best ones, in the 1970s. I know that it was during the Sixties when I, you know, when the teaching began to get more demanding, because they were raising the general standard of the teaching, and I began to be more interested in getting to grips with plants for my own sake you see. And also the pace of building was changing; I mean whereas a building took a fair amount of time to build at one time, modern building methods they go up in a night almost. Well, you know, you need time to deal with architectural sculpture as much as any other sculpture, and you can't do it quickly if you do it well, you know, you can sort of...the time, always you had to be prepared for the fact that you had to let go of something which you wouldn't let go if you had more time on it. You could say, well wait a bit, another six months and I'll get it better than that, because, you know, you've got to tie in with the building and the rest of it. And also I realised that I wasn't set up, and if I was going to do what I wanted to do, you know, be an architect, I should have started twenty years before and got a workshop and started making a factory of it when I was in the Army you see. I mean I would never have caught up there. I was only...in a sense I was only playing at being an architectural sculptor because I wasn't actually earning my living; although I was extending my thing with it, I wasn't... So that I thought, well gradually I suppose I gave it up; in fact I never did have to ask, I never had to go and tout for work with architects, the work came to me, but I used to...I got rather choosy and I would, you know, if it wasn't something I wanted to do I would refuse it. In other words I lost not my interest in architectural work but I lost my interest in doing it, because, in doing it in that way.

Because it was too fast and...?

Well because it made...you had to make too many compromises, and you had to be prepared to sacrifice; you had to be prepared to do a good professional piece of carpentry and not what you would have liked to do if you had had more time to do it, you know, or to do it again.

So you and architectural commissions kind of went separate ways, even though, from what you say, you had always believed that that was a proper place for sculpture.

Oh yes, I think, well and also because what working for architects meant, doing a bigger size gallery type thing to put somewhere in the environment of the building, not really integrating with the sculpture as such. So that a firm of architects who might be interested in it, or clients who might be interested in having a bit of modern sculpture there, would expect to have almost a large gallery piece, but in their environment you see, almost buy the work ready...not quite buy the work ready done, it wasn't quite like that, but I mean it could be very much... Well it began, it was rather like that when they were building these big housing estates and those slum clearances where it always seemed to be the thing to put what I used to call a block of culture in the middle of it, and I mean, the tenants as it were were not very terribly interested in it anyway, in fact they thoroughly disliked it most often, but there was, the artist would have a name and it would be a, you know, it would be his work and the architect would say, yes we've got this here. But that wasn't...that wasn't really what I was after either.

So what you were after, or were after, do you see that as a tradition that's died out, or that's just in abeyance at the moment?

I think probably it's in abeyance, because I think most, as far as I can see, that when you get architecture, present-day architecture which is what they call forward-looking, you know, future-looking, it becomes like sculpture itself, it becomes a piece of structural sculpture. There's a very thin dividing line between the two, I mean really, they're very closely related. But in a way I suppose ideally if you have a building which is in itself a good shape and it sits well in space and it's well designed, then working with the architect certain nodes[??] of it, certain parts of it can be drawn up together in a sculptural... A very good, a very good example of that was Alison showing that construction of hers in the ITV's new building in, I don't know if you saw it did you?

I did, yes.

Because I mean that was so right there, so much part, so much in feeling with that very open air sort of non-walled thing that it was quite terrific. I mean that was a big, that was really properly sited. If it were going to stay like that of course, as soon as it was filled up as an office with all the clerks and all the rest of it, it would have just become a sort of, rather an interesting novelty in the place, but seen as it was then, I mean that was a piece of sculpture and architecture working absolutely remarkably well together.

So you're not entirely pessimistic about the future at all?

Well no, I think, I mean I could be, you know, I could be very pessimistic about it if I thought, well what sculpture is now as builders' sculpture, you know, [INAUDIBLE] sculpture, is of any great permanence, you know, I feel like sort of going away and jumping in the river or something, you know. I mean it's obviously not...can't stay like that in a sense; I mean certain things have to change, and it may be, I mean who knows, I mean there may be a way in which an architect and a sculptor, never mind what they are called as long...I mean the architect himself could be the sculptor and he's called an architect, he could have actually designed his whole building, but I think it's probably more like films are made, a group practice, a group of ideas are put together, might achieve more in that. You certainly, it's not really the right field for a highly individualistic originality of a modern gallery sculptor, I mean that is not the appropriate sort of kind of thing to consider putting on a nice piece of architectural sculpture.

In which of your commissions do you feel you did achieve a marriage between architecture and sculpture?

Ah, well, I think the brick wall that I carved first.

Was that the one in Liverpool?

The one at Pirbright, a work, I carved this bull, and I thought that did...it was right in the place, it was the right size in the place, and it was right for bricks and it was designed for the bricks, and it was the right size for the bricks. And I think that was...you know, I think it would be, the building was much improved by having that bull on it than it would have been if it hadn't had the bull there you see. And to a certain extent, although there again, you know, one can't order these things to one's advantage, the bricks that I did for Eastbourne on the theatre there, which gave, you know, quite...I mean they are quite something. If you're going to have a bare brick wall because you can't have any windows in because the kinds of use of the building precludes the windows, it was really very good fun, and it was integrated, it was made by the bricks, it was [INAUDIBLE], whereas it was made by the bricks were[??] really extended or not extended by so much, and I think that... But the only thing there was that it would look vastly better if only it wasn't orientated on the north wall, but it had to be the north wall, and so it very rarely gets any sunlight on it you see. I mean there are certain aspects of it, it would at certain times of the day [INAUDIBLE] better. I think there's one time of the year that the photographer found, early in the morning, that he could get the sun on it, but I mean if it was such that the sun had been able to cast these long shadows down there it would have been...it would have been quite terrific in some senses I think, because it worked out very well as a pattern. I'm quite pleased with that.

So it's the exterior brick walls?

Well that was...you asked me which specific jobs you see. I mean, the one I did last of all for Norman [INAUDIBLE] was a big fountain pool for outside the refectory on the first floor of the tower block of...

What refectory was that?

Borough Polytechnic, which is now no longer the Borough Polytechnic, it's the University of something-or-other, but anyway they rebuilt the tower block, and the architect wanted to conceal the entrance where all the butcher's meat went in with something, and he had this, and I designed this big fountain. And that was quite, I thought that was quite good actually, but I don't think, I doubt whether they use it now. I think when they first started using it the students used to chuck their empty cans in the lake. And I went to the Borough Polytechnic, oh, about five years ago to see what it was like now and they'd never even heard of it, but of course I did go to the wrong place, I should have gone to the tower block instead of...but they didn't know what I was talking about, so, I mean it may not still be there now. I mean that's the other thing that, the other thing that you're up against in fact of course, they're not very permanent very often. I mean generally speaking, as I was being asked to do these things, when I was working for Westwoods who were, you know, knew me as a sculptor, and asked me to do it because they knew what sculpture I did, in fact they had bought carvings and things like that, that I wasn't really, you know, I was able to be much freer; not completely free because they're jolly...very...they're very sort of concerned with design. In fact the one that was mostly my friend was quite an excellent architect for detail, you know what I mean by that; if he does a row of windows he gets the proportions of the windows right instead of just not right, he was a very good detailer.

What was he called?

Westwood, Norman Westwood. His brother was one of the other partners and he's dead now. You know, I felt freer than most of these people do when they're working, because some clients are terribly bigoted, they know what it should be, but others are really quite sympathetic and you never know quite what you're going to get hold of.

So most of your work was for Westwoods?

No, well I suppose you could say that, yes, because there wasn't all that really very much of it, but it wasn't...there were other firms concerned because the work I did at Corby was for another one, Corby New Town, and the architects for the [INAUDIBLE] college they were different. No, I suppose the majority of work, would it be, well quite a...I mean I was conscious of the fact that I did certainly quite a lot of work for them, yes.

And you were working with them for twenty years or something, more.

Well, ten to fifteen years I expect, yes.

Wasn't that from the Fifties through to the Seventies?

I forget when I first...where I would be. [LEAFING THROUGH PAPERS] I can't find where the...oh Australia House, that's right, I did two big wood carvings for, when they were redesigning the entrance hall of Australia House, I don't think they're there now. And there I was really, well I was quite free really, I just, they decided it would be a good idea to have gum trees, because they were very Australian and they wanted this sort of knob of decorative material, so, just get on with it you see, and they liked it. I don't recollect ever feeling hidebound in any way, any more than I did with the Austin Reed screens which are now no longer there now, which were abstract reliefs of a rather interesting kind. They, I just...well they...in fact three, there were eight panels altogether plus, eight big panels of 5 by 3, and three of them I thought were really all right as works of art, you know; the others were a bit sort of carpentered in the right style, fulfilling the decorative object without being anything else. And, so I think that by...you see I wasn't actually dependent, never dependent on the work for my living. Now there again that would have added a lot of things, because I couldn't have done it...I would have had to have had assistants, and I would have had to have paid the assistants, and I would have to have had either a good business head or an accountant to work for me to work out how I was going to cost all this you see, in order to, it began to be apparent that you can't just say, 'I want to be an architectural sculptor' and that's it; you've got to be a firm almost, well like Eric Gill was, I mean he was [INAUDIBLE], but his workshops were small private factories really, and he took, I suppose he took work, generally speaking you would have to take what came, I mean you couldn't be too choosy, although I don't know how choosy he was.

And did you ever have assistants?

Well I used to, when I was carving the brick wall I had an assistant, yes, he would carve with me. He was a teacher at the College who had been a student of mine in the early days, a student at Bromley, and we used to work well together.

So you would go to the site to carve?

Oh yes, some of them, yes.

And so how did...you had to do that in your holidays?

That's right, yes, used to fit that in to vac.

So the one for instance in Pirbright, or there's also the one in Liverpool, you would have gone there...?

Yes, well Pirbright I went from here - no, from the other flat, or a bit of both, it may have overlapped, I'm not sure, but, yes, I did that from here, but the other two, Liverpool and Patricroft, I had to stay, and I had about a fortnight each. But I knew...oh, a lovely time, I remember sitting up there on top of the step scaffolding, because the work[??] is quite high, it's quite big the one up at Patricroft, and sort of four stages of scaffolding up there, chipping away, and in the end they had this really, you know, life was really worth something in those days.

And did you have to find digs when you went off to these places?

Yes, yes I found digs.

Did the architects arrange that for you?

No no, I did it all. And all they arranged for me was to give me the scaffolding, they put that up.

How did you transfer your design onto the wall?

Well you see, the point is, if you're going to do things like this and you're going to work them in, you've got to know what you're going to do. In any case if you're going to carve somebody else's brick wall which is keeping the blessed church up and then also keeping the weather out, you've got to respect the fact that it's somebody else's brick wall. So I used to do

it in model form, I used to make a scale model, and solve all the problems of bricks and where the brick courses came, and it would be about an inch and a half to a foot, it would be about that big I think, and carve from it. Transferring it to the wall is easy enough because that's the only carving I know where the grid is already there, the bricks are there, so you just, you've got the grid lines for mapping it out right the way through, careful you don't carve them off either.

Would you draw it in chalk or something?

Well, I suppose so, yes. Yes, I suppose it would have been a bit of white chalk, but you see you just do it brick by brick in that sense.

And did you get all these commissions either through friends or through word of mouth?

No I got that one through a picture in the 'Brick Bulletin', I saw the Pirbright wall, the picture [INAUDIBLE], and of course it appealed to these architects because, you know, sculpture on a wall you don't have to pay for them because they've already paid for the wall you see; it's quite a, it's really quite something. It's like the Eastbourne bricks, I mean they had a whole theatre north wall sort of decorated, in fact it could have been more so except that the architect took one out because he thought two was enough. But I mean that was there, it cost nothing, because the bricklayers who they thought would demand double pay for doing it, because they couldn't just run along the line, they had to sort of follow a pattern you see, they not only didn't want double pay, they almost did it for nothing because they were so pleased at having a variety to relieve the boredom of laying bricks, so I mean the sculptor was there just for, I mean for the cost of my design really.

But that sculpture emerged as they laid the bricks?

That's right, yes. They did it, they did it, but...

And did you go on site for that?

I didn't need to. I mean I had worked this all out in model form, but I knew what problems might arise, and they just had this sort of drawing with marks, this one's out here, only two protrusions, one twice the size of the other.

And what were your models made of?

I expect I would have made those out of cardboard, they would have been bricks. I would have actually built the wall, well, in cardboard bricks.

And did you have to give them the model then?

Oh yes, I had to...they didn't...I never had a free hand where they said, 'Well get on with it, we'll come and look at it when it's done,' no no, you had to...at the design stage. Which is quite right, because I mean that's the time when you can...I mean it doesn't necessarily spoil anything, in fact it's sometimes very good to be given other ideas as to how it can be better. Oh no.

And, so it was only for the brick walls that you had to actually go there and do it, otherwise you would be making models at home?

That's right.

In your studio at home.

Yes. So although, to say the Crucifix at Patricroft, which is 36 feet, that actually took me just under a fortnight to carve, but the whole job lasted two years; I mean from inception of the job to the final check was two years.

And where did you carve that?

That was in...Patricroft is in Manchester, Eccles.

But did you carve that on site or did you carve it...?

Yes, I carved it on site, yes.

Gosh.

But, no as I say the actual carving on site was under a fortnight for two of us really, but the whole job, working out the designs and the rest of it, covered two years.

And for something like the Australia House, or the Austin Reed doors, did you make small models here that you then sent away?

Yes, I would have made...I would have made Plasticine models for that, probably...well the things themselves were about four or five feet, but the model would have been about that big I think perhaps. Well in fact I've always worked from that, I never have worked from drawings for any purpose. No, never from drawings.

Who made the finished versions of the doors?

Of which doors?

The Austin Reed.

Oh, they were...I did...let me see, I did...I have to be careful here because the same firm did others. It's quite possible I made the whole lot here. I certainly made the eight things I'm speaking about, which were full [INAUDIBLE] panels, but there other panels had little smaller ones sort of put in into a plane, and I think it was the firm that may have done that... Certainly they did it all when I did a similar thing for Martin's Bank in Watford where they had...where I actually produced rubber moulds that they cast the concrete in.

So you had to make the rubber moulds yourself?

Yes, I did those.

And you had facilities for that here?

Oh yes. Makes rather a smell actually, yes. Yes all those things have be done. In fact, it's always a moot point, do you have a large studio, large enough to get the whole work in and out, to get the lorry to drive into the studio to pick it up, like Reid Dick, or do you have a small one which you can afford to keep warm enough to work in, you see. And I thought, well, it looks a bit small to me but I've been surprised, I did two big, very big bronze coats of arms for Corby which nearly filled that small room, but I can still work in there, I mean it's just...it's all right.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

I thought what we could do is for you to actually describe this work that you have, and also how it fits into your work more generally.

Well only that the one thing that...the one thing it's produced on the tripartite collaboration I spoke of where you have the object, the thing and me, and each has something, a contribution to make and says, 'What do you do next?' or 'What do you do now?' The inspiration or the directive can come from either one of those three things you see. And so that although it's a leaf, or it was based on a leaf, the leaf offers its contribution but isn't the final say as to what is happening you see. And also what is happening is partly what I think sculpture ought to do and how it ought to draw itself in space, but is paying some attention to not just anywhere but it uses a leaf as a kind of, something to hang it on, so that there's that as well. And also, that it has to be, and this is one of those where it's very important that it should be given enough time.....

End of F4690 Side A

F4690 Side B

....into the possible views of it, if he's talking about views of it, that the light is changing, the position can change, and the mood of the person who's looking at it can change; all three things have to work so that you can't catch it out. In other words you can't...there's no good having a piece, 'Oh that looks nice from this view but it's a bit rough from the end,' or something, because that to me would be an indication of a failure. If it is going to be in a position where it can be seen from that area, even if it's going to go against a wall permanently, stuck on a building if you like, nobody's going to see it from the other side, you don't have to be quite so careful. On the other hand, what happens as it...if it's three-dimensional, what is happening from one aspect isn't just from one aspect, because changing it you're changing it from every other aspect you see. You can't alter a fully three-dimensional thing from one view without altering every other view that it concerns you see. So that this would be, as far as I could make it, you know, as far as one's skill and experience allows, impossible to view with a bad view. In other words it should work out as a matter of drawing in space. Now the drawing in space is quite a simple thing really, although it's not very often understood, and it uses the principle that everybody knows about, that if you draw three-quarters of a circle or even less and you say, 'What's that?' people will say, 'A circle,' because the mind draws, having been led to go round there it completes it, and it does that in painting, in other[??] paintings there are movements or directions which are established which are being picked up so the eye reads it. It actually draws an invisible line across the thing you see. Well, with three-dimensional sculpture then the eye is doing that with directions, but it's also doing it with planer[??] suggestions; in other words, what the space is doing round about the sculpture is being interpreted and extended in the way that the eye extends the rest of the circle. So if you do that well, and it needs a fair amount of experience in trying to cope with it in three dimensions, then the work itself is drawing things in space, it's drawing that much of the circle that you can see which is extended by the eye beyond what you can't see. And then you get a piece, a work of that sort becomes bigger in scale than it is because it's actually extending, it's drawing its shape in space beyond its actual material you see. And if you could do that, I mean it's the same in two dimensions but of course it's much easier because you've got...when you've got three you've got quite a lot of things, and it means, or it means to me at the moment, that in order to achieve it I've got to be able to pick it up. I've got to be able to examine it in the way that I am expecting it to be examined, because if I don't then someone's going to look at it somewhere else and I'll be caught out, I'll make a bad shape which really if you say what is a bad shape, well it's near to chaos, which is always there. I mean everything you look at, every shape you have, does this, but I mean, if it's got no sculpture then it's a chaotic, it's a chaotic object from that point of view. And you can make a three-dimensional sculpture which is taking two views, has this sort of continuity, this structural design of space

which the eye is using, and I mean it's not anybody's eye, unless they're, you know, if they've got moderate powers of discrimination can soon get to feel what I'm talking about, I mean there's nothing extraordinary there, as long as they have the opportunity.

Do you make some sculptures for picking up and others for...?

Well at the moment I make them all for picking up, at the moment of course.

But there are earlier ones that you made for hanging on the wall.

Well, yes, those that hang on the wall would be easier because I mean I've only got to consider less...well it's still quite an infinity in a way because it varies with different light, different height on the wall and different mood, I mean that's important, you can't...the mood of people looking at art is very important. That's why again I feel that the only way that art can be patronised is by personal possession, you must have the work yourself. Somehow or other you've got to get an original yourself because there's no other way of...it's no good saying, 'Well I've got this because the country owns it, it's in the National Gallery'; that's not bad, because if you know it's there you can reasonably... But I mean the thing is, especially with a work like this, and that's not so strong as it is in the other one there that's done with the crumpled paper, which in certain lights can look very sort of, well ordinary, it doesn't look particularly exciting in this very broad light. But I've had that around the place, and accidentally by being able to move it about and having it moved about and not looking at it in particular, as you pass it by suddenly it looks new; you know, suddenly you get an aspect, a view if you like, to use that horrible word, a view of it which you've never seen before because it's never had that actual combination you see.

That one you made from small pieces of crumpled paper.

That's right, yes.

Whereas that one down there was made originally from a leaf...

It was from a leaf.

But then, did you make a Plasticine model of the leaf?

No no, no I didn't, no. Or not...perhaps I'm telling you a fib. No I'm not. I think...I think for that one I would use the leaf itself, I would have used...well when I say use it, I mean it's in

the way in which it's giving me information if I want it, but you can't just tell, well there's a shape, why don't I show that? Because I've got to respect...there's a way in which the material has got to be used in the same way as what you can and can't do, it's got to be an interpretation of it in the wood you see.

So you often have a small source that you are actually using [INAUDIBLE].

Well, I find...not necessarily so, because that one I showed you, the slug-eaten fruit, it didn't have anything, and there's another one in there with three cabbages which are just three cabbages, and that I just did almost as if it was of Plasticine. I mean I was working it as I went, although, I may have had a drawing or...I may have had some kind of, some kind of... Because you can't...you see all the while you're working at a work, it's always wrong until it's right. You can't...you're always looking at a wrong thing, and trying to use a, well you must make thousands of judgements in the process if you're doing it in three dimensions, thousands, just like a computer really only of course you don't...they don't register as such; they're probably quicker than a computer, even at that sometimes I think. I mean more [INAUDIBLE]. But it's a matter of...you've got to...and you can be caught out you see. And then you end up with something which in a sense is so three-dimensional it almost doesn't exist, because having no gravity, no gravitational necessity in it, it has no, what shall we say, no way out, which is not necessarily a virtue; I mean, things probably should have...well I mean there might be ways in which it suited a particularly close surrounding up rather than longways, but I mean it could be adjusted to fit wherever, so that the main thing is that if it's any size, and they could be, I mean they could be bigger than they are, it's just that, you know, it takes longer to do a big one than a small one, but they...they could be...well no, I've forgotten what I was going to say now about it, but...

Well i was thinking [INAUDIBLE], the majority of your works now are carved wood. Are you still making constructed wood pieces, like [INAUDIBLE] pieces?

Well, as a matter of fact I was...I think I was about to do that, it's just that I've found a, had an idea for using some tube things that would be a construction, yes. I don't know what determines...I mean there's nothing, there's no valuation comes into it. I mean it isn't better to do it carved than it is to do in construction; it doesn't really matter how you do it, provided that you get the drawing right, and you get the drawing right in every possible aspect. If you get the drawing as right as you can, every possible aspect that it might be seen in, in every possible light, then you've begun to achieve something in the way of sculpture. Now what...yes?

When you say drawing, you don't literally mean pencil and paper, you mean lines?

Well no I don't. I have to...you have to...in those written notes I gave you I used to draw[?]?...I tended to fact that, there isn't a word for drawing which is sufficiently free from that conventional idea that drawing means marks on paper, but I mean, marks on paper are only one form of drawing, not the other way round, and drawing in space is very, well, identical with drawing in two dimensions except that of course it's got rather more demands being made on it you see. I mean these things, those things there, now they're two-dimensional, but they're...

Pottage[ph].

But you see the way in which I do them, they cut out this dreadful necessity of having to concern yourself with every possible view you see, so I can make what I call flat sculptures and do them much quicker and it gets an idea out much quicker than this, I mean...

You said earlier this morning that you thought maybe the work you are doing now was just the same as the work you were doing forty years ago.

Yes.

Is that so?

Well when you say the same, I mean I think it's the same in the sense that the instigation of it, the inspiration of it has come from some interest in the shape of it, and so, I mean, interest in the shape of a carving if I do a pot plant in 1940, the result is not all that dissimilar from the interest in the shape of the piece of crumpled paper I'm doing in 1990 you see. I mean you can't...it just so happens that by the act that[?]? one's got the thing, you know, it's still...that one gets that sort of, that sense of continuity there. I can see how I wouldn't have done it, or at least I might have done it better, although that isn't even necessarily so because, you find that with students, and it's not a gently flowing stream from incompleteness to [INAUDIBLE]; I mean it's the development. A student can do a first-rate sketch when they're not worried about it, which they then proceed to ruin by making it into something worthwhile. I mean the quality, it's not an even flow of... So that there are some drawings which are different at the time from what was being done at the time, but when you keep them you can see that they're not all that different because they're just presupposing certain aspects, certain kinds of drawing which are going to come. It's the same with the development, only sometimes I will, what I would think of, descend almost to just making it into a nice drawing

of a flower, which is nothing to do with what I'm really doing, but you do it because that's what happens at that time you see, you find that out when you keep it really.

Do you think your sources of interest, or your source materials have changed?

I don't think...I don't think much has changed. I don't think much has changed at all in...I mean I'm still as independent as I was, I still do what I think I should do at any moment with...and I am the one that decides, but not because I think I'm God but because I, you know, I am working with this three-partite thing and I know I can make mistakes. But I mean if I wrote a biography I would probably title it 'The Blacksmith's Nail', you know, the one that I pinched from the blacksmith's quite early on, because there was no reason for me wanting that but that it had a particular kind of shape which I had never seen before, and a certain kind of size you see. So, it's all...there are ways in which, I wouldn't be alone in this either, that a freely working, spontaneously proficient artist is doing one work for the whole of their lives really; I mean it's one oeuvre, and that's it really. It's not often I think that you have the benefit of, by accident really, of having a sort of collection which covers a whole year, so you can actually see things like that, but you can realise it even without that I think.

Do you have a typical daily routine in terms of your drawing, or your sculpture?

Well, no, I can't...you mean do I start work on Monday morning thinking another week's begun? The drawings, you can't do a drawing unless you feel like it, you can't...you know, you know, you've got to do it when...it's no good leaving it for tomorrow: well at least it can be, you might be lucky. You see something there in my bunch of, odd plants stuck in there I'll see something; if I don't do it now I can't say, well I'll do it tomorrow, because I might not see it tomorrow. In fact it's sometimes almost impossible to see tomorrow what I saw yesterday because my mood has changed I suppose. But, no, I think that answers your question there.

On a different tack, I wanted to ask you a bit about your son and how you brought him up, especially in terms of looking at things.

Well, I had very little...I don't know, you would have to ask him that. I know that our interest in materials, and shape actually, is the same, although he has never...he has never wanted to make any sculpture, but then you don't have to really. I mean there are people about whose discrimination of art is much superior to the artist who has made the work they are looking at, only they don't realise it, and the artist doesn't realise it either, if he did he would use a bit more self-criticism sometimes before he presented it to the public. But the idea that art is the

possession of the artist, is given the largesse to...is quite erroneous I think. I mean there are people out there who are more versed in discrimination than the artist, so they can make...I mean they don't think they can pick holes in, but I mean they don't...you see there's not enough realisation of that fact, and there's certainly not enough self-criticism of students, or sculptors, about.

Did you have particular concerns in terms of bringing up your son, wanting him to see things, or take him to art galleries, or [INAUDIBLE]?

No I didn't need to, because he was very alive to the same kind of things. I don't know that he's terribly interested in flowers, but he's always been interested in shapes and making shapes. I mean he's influenced...he made some very nice folded paper things, I've got some photographs, of cut and folded paper, and he's interested in the mathematical side of, you know, the mathematics of shape and space, but not...I don't suppose I...well, I don't suppose I ever influenced him in any direction too much because I don't believe in it. I mean as far as I was concerned it wasn't for me to tell him what to do or how to look at things, but for him to find out, or he could tell me really.

So, what did you do together, what kind of things?

Oh, well, you know as a child he was terribly interested in plumbing and insulations, and all kinds of things which...so am I, but he was much more intensely invaded[??] about it than I was. He used to tell me about it, he would tell me how the water works. I mean I remember taking him to, holding him by the hand when he was about three or four I suppose, to Brighton Aquarium, and you know, they had a row of tanks of fish in there, and there was one there that had about half a dozen pipes, some of which were letting water in at some speed and some which weren't, I don't know what they were doing, cleaning it out. I couldn't get him away from that, he stood there staring at it. Everybody came past to see what we were looking at. It must have looked quite barmy, you know, standing enthralled with these pipes. But I mean that was what he liked at that time, he was very...

At what point in your lives did you have him?

What?

Where were you living then?

Oh, he would have grown up, his formative very young years would have been at The Rookery[??], at the first studio I had, because he was born during the war when my wife was at home you see. So his first two or three years, two, three years would have been, he would have been in Brighton and then we moved to the other. And he became very much a self-generating person, you didn't need to tell him what to do to interest himself, he just...he had a great interest in clearing the ditches of the place because he liked the flow of water you see, it was very...and that kind of thing that, he didn't need any help to keep himself amused.

And he is your only child, is that right?

That's right, yes.

I wasn't quite sure. And, in terms of bringing him up, I wonder whether you could describe how...did you leave your wife to do more, or was it very much equal?

Oh I don't know. I should think equal. I don't think there's any, either of us had any great necessity to lean on him very hard in any direction really. I mean he was allowed to do very much what he liked, because we liked doing...was accommodating and was sensible[?]. I mean he was sort of playing about with electricity, and making, he made a very good machine that drew what we call a [INAUDIBLE], a [INAUDIBLE] of figures where two pendulums were drawing things, and he made that. I mean he was doing that all the time. And he was telling me as much as I could tell him in many cases.

And now he is an architect.

Well half an architect, yes, he never managed to get himself trained. We never quite know why he had this sort of mental block, which I suppose was a kind of mental breakdown at the end of his... Well I've got...I think I know why, but no one ever asked me for my opinion as to why, so, I don't know whether anybody else knows why, but... He was taking a kind of training which was intensely practical, and works by[ph] practical things, and he was being trained to be, as all architects are supposed to be, creative artists, and I don't think he is a creative thinker in that sense, he doesn't...he's a very knowledgeable discriminator of what is there mechanically, but not...he doesn't...he couldn't...you know, he could tell you why, he could do all the plumbing for a pavilion, a sports pavilion and get it absolutely perfect, and looking perfect too, looking well; whatever he showed it would be very well done, but it wouldn't be... I mean to make it look nice like an architect sort of designing a pavilion who ignores the plumbing as far as he can, he couldn't do that you see. There's a way, I can see that there was a, I can see that there was a reason for a mental block there which might have

been dealt with along certain other lines. So he never got, he never got fully qualified, and though he is quite a good architect now, I mean he's very good at reconstructions, you know, and developments, and he knows what to do, and very good on the visual side of it.

So you can enjoy seeing his work?

Well, yes, he draws very well, though he doesn't think so, but I mean, the kind of drawing he does is very good. I've been lately encouraging him to do a bit more, but I don't think he will do it because when he's doing it he's not doing it to make a good drawing, it's got a purpose behind it you see. He doesn't want it looked at as a...although he quite likes it, and though he's done a good drawing, he doesn't do it for that purpose you see; if he's not got that drive behind it he couldn't do it. And that was, again the purpose is being a sort of perfectionist with regard to the purpose of what he was designing, was asking himself to do too much as a student for designing a sports pavilion or something like that; I mean he would try to get, you know, solve every possible problem that could happen with a sport pavilion including the drainage and the subsoil and all the rest, and the look, whereas most students would do a nice pretty, you know, shaped thing and say, well that's very nice, and leave all the plumbing and the rest to some other, somebody else you see.

Whereas still have the drive to want to make a good drawing.

Do I?

You do, obviously.

I don't know, I don't know whether it...I don't know whether the drive is as simple [INAUDIBLE] any more than I would like to be a, you know, I suppose...I don't...I would like to be recognised as a famous artist without being famous, but I don't know that that's...that's not the drive. I don't know, I can't say what the drive is. In fact I've often asked myself, what am I doing this for, as an intelligent adult, you know, when the rent's got to be paid? There's no answer to it really.

But the drive is still there now as much as it ever was.

Oh yes. Yes, I don't...yes, very much so. Yes, you never really get to the end of it. Though it's this question of judgement, it's...you need experience and practice. And also, a strange thing, you never do a job and say, well that's it now; it's always the next one which is going to

go...where this was going the next one will go. You're doing this one in order to go there, and the next one... It sounds silly, but I mean that's what it amounts to.

How long have you been retired for now?

Since 1979, so it's about...I've had no...for...

Fifteen years odd.

Getting on for, taking the war years out of it I'm getting on to nearly half as long retired as I was actually teaching. Seems rather strange but there it is, the years go.

Does having complete days to yourself help your work?

Well, I suppose it must do really, because you can't...you see so much is dependent on mood that you need a bit more time than appears in actually adding up of the number of hours that things take, you know. It's not quite as straightforward as that. No, I suppose, there's no...there isn't any known storable purpose for doing it, that you can lay your...any more than you can make a statement saying that that is a good shape and that is not such a good shape; there's no way in which you can point that difference to someone who can't see it, and there's no way in which you can say, well aren't you wasting your time doing all that? You might have been doing something else. There's no answer really. There are some questions in life which have no answer really, you can't...there aren't any.

And you haven't worked out why you're doing it, or...?

No, any more than I could have given a reason for why I was looking for wild flowers when I was about 12, 13, I mean, a most unsociable act to do on my own, and most un-boylike activity was supposed to be botany, which only girls did in those days. But there you are. I mean I find reasons for it, but whether one ever gets to the bottom of it... It's probably that, you see the thing is I think that if you take art as a whole, all the things that are classed as art, that it's a...it could very easily be some kind of inroad into an advanced state of consciousness that we can't recognise because we're not there, if you see what I mean. It's like a short peephole in a way to a possible higher range of consciousness and understanding, so I mean we can't...you can't describe that sort of, the state four in terms of state three, because state three doesn't...it's not in the same world you see. I mean it may be just that, I don't know, if one gets down to the real nitty-gritty of what is being done[??], because I mean there couldn't possibly be as much art in existence as there is supposed to be by the number of artists that

are making it, I mean it isn't... Some of it, you know, some of the museums have got some which have managed to survive time and they're as pleasant as they were when they were done, I mean they're ageless really, but there are not many of them.

And are you happy with the work you've made?

I think so. Well I think happy in the sense that I can think, well I'm safe from that awful business of saying, well if I had only got more time I would have done this, or if I hadn't done that... I mean I've done what I've done as far as I could, wherever it's going, without...and that's why I haven't really got any regrets that I hadn't done this, hadn't done something, you know, as I say, like people say, well, you know, I would have...I'll get down to writing a book one of these days, or something like that, you know, sort of, or looking back and thinking, oh I would have done this if I hadn't wasted my time. No, I don't think that I would...no, I've no regrets of that sort, no.

What I get, you see some people, I've got one particular.....

End of F4690 Side B

F4691 Side A

A wood carving of some girl being burnt at the stake with flames at the back of her, which, how it came about that he had it, he...now how did he...? Somebody, I think from Norwich, I had, on two occasions I had a couple of dealers come who were on the look-out for cheap work, you know, what you might call studio rejects, anything that they could...with smaller provincial galleries or shops that they obviously... And, he came...there was one came just at the time when I was getting a bit appalled by the sheer quantity of work that was around, keep getting in the way, collecting the dust, and I never liked this, although I had always kept it because being a Royal Academy piece I thought, well I'd better hang on to it, the figure was wrong and I know, you know, every time I looked at it I wished I had done something else you see. And so, I let some, one of the...I think he was the one in Norwich, took three pieces; I've a feeling I got for them all, and the reason I let that one go, because together they had got enough for me to pay for the bronze of one of these carvings in bronze you see, so I thought, well I might as well do that. Well what happened was that Mr Blake, who obviously saw it in this gallery and liked it and bought it you see; well when he got it home he found my name and [INAUDIBLE] on the bottom of it, but only that you see. So he went, for some reason or other he went to the Academy and asked, and he got my address through going to the Academy, not because they were...Bryan Kneale was there and knows me by name, and they sent him down to...he came here you see. And he told me had bought this thing, and he was trying to...he wanted to buy some...he would have bought...it was the sort of way that he had, a desire to collect art but he had no money to collect art with; he was always on the scrounge to build up this collection, you know. And I ought not to be talking about this on the rape really, because...

Anyway, you were going to say about the two people who kind of collect your work.

Oh, yes, if they...when they like it, when I know they want it because they like it, if they understand, then I get some satisfaction, I give it to them if necessary; they not always won't accept it on that term, they insist on buying it. But I mean that to me is the right place for that work to go you see, because someone who owns it, it's a personal possession, and also they've got it for the right reasons. Whereas if I put them in a gallery and I sold the lot I wouldn't know where they were or what they were bought for; I wouldn't feel that somehow I had fulfilled myself by taking the money to the bank because I wouldn't know where it had gone you see. But, so that in that sense I suppose there is a certain satisfaction.

In some ways I get the impression that you've been able to do what you wanted to do, you know, had the freedom to do your own work; but there's also a sense that you feel the times were a bit out of joint for you.

The times?

Yes.

Well yes of course there would be, because for one thing I don't like the intense gallery dominance, I don't like the galleries as a system for selling art. I don't mind artists using them, I'm not against selling in that way, but I'm against the fact of its dominance as the only way in which it is purveyed you see.

But you do think sculpture is better off now than it was fifty years ago, don't you?

No.

No?

No. Well it depends. No, not than fifty years ago, because you see when Gonzalez and Bourdelle and Despiau were working there was a way in which the sculpture was moving out of the dominance of the Renaissance and the dominance of Rodin too, and it was achieving a kind of abstract quality which, some of it...what's his name, oh dear, the names, terrible. There were one or two English artists who...

Epstein?

No. Oh dear, he did a swan in alabaster which is in the Tate gallery.

Garbe?

No no, not Garbe. More, we would have said much more modern than Garbe. No, it's terrible.

It's not Gaudier?

What?

Gaudier-Brzeska?

No, no. Parallel with him. It'll come back presently but it's gone at the moment. No good searching for it, it'll come back. No, I can't... Well, up to a point Epstein too, although he was a bit more dangerous in his influence. But certainly, I don't think that...I can't think that sculpture has really progressed all that much. I don't see in what way it can be considered better, because you see at one time, say before the war, then a show of anything was a mark of the fact of somebody had to a certain extent arrived, you know, it was sorting themselves out, he's better than the others, and he could be sorted out because there was a general consensus of opinion that everybody was doing more or less the same thing, but some a bit more out than others. But more or less there was a consensus that a critic could get hold of and say, he is better or more advanced, or does this better than the other one. But as soon as you get this business that happened after the war where originality, where you didn't dare do anything like the sculpture next door because, well you didn't do that you see, I mean nobody could found a school like that. I mean Moore himself couldn't found a school, he didn't found a school. People didn't all start doing Henry Moores in the way that they all did Rodins at one time, because the thing was that the emphasis was on the individuality of the artist. He made the work to express his individuality you see. Well, you can't therefore say this is better than that, because you know, there's no sort of common ground. You can say, I like it better than that, or...you can't even say that to a certain extent. I mean it's a way in which you can't...it can't be better, it can only be different, and also the concentration on the style of the thing, which is quite irrelevant, I mean style is something which wraps up art at any time. I mean it's never the art itself, I mean there's not a...

Do you have any ideas as to why after the war there was this new emphasis on originality?

Oh I think it came from the Americans really, very largely, because they... You see after the war they, I don't know whether it was immediately after the war, but that's when it came to us, they had freed themselves from this necessity of going to Europe to learn how to do it. They're provincial, they're sort of feeling that we are not, you know, we don't know it here, we've got to go to Europe to find out how to do it properly. And they're not alone in that, I mean it used to be even more so where they made the grand tour, the Prix de Rome and all the rest of it, one went to Italy for it. So they suddenly realised, quite properly I suppose, that if they've got any creative ability at all they might just as well do it in their own country, never mind what was being done in France. So they did that, and...but the only way in which they could do it on those terms is not having a consensus of opinion to work in, they can only do what they thought was right. And whatever was right you see, each individual, so obviously, here's a crop of people all doing what they think is the right thing to do.

So you feel we've lost a common ground?

Well yes, I think...yes, I would think so. Particularly as they began to break down the difference between painting and sculpture, which in my view is very much bigger than people realise. I mean I would rather teach a bunch of sculpture students in connection with a school of music than I would a school of painters; if they're going to join in I can...it's much more akin to music than it is to painting. In some aspects they're a radically different approach which you have to sort out in doing either, not to get confused with the other, you see. But it's better to be away from it if it's one of those, and I think it's much more akin to music. So, I mean, you see the sort of development of the necessity being original, it must wear out, because you can't...you can't really be original by intention; you can only hope to God that if you do what you think is right it is original. I mean if you're lacking[??] in a sense you can't be original, you're only trying to be. There's a marvellous verse, poem of Robert Graves's on that line which I could show you if you're interested, it's residing under that blanket at the moment.

Well, [INAUDIBLE] not right now, I think because [INAUDIBLE]. But, I suppose I'm wondering whether, the situation that you went to art school in in the mid-Thirties, would you have wished that to continue then?

Well, when I went to art school? Well of course when I went to art school I was as green as everybody else is.

Well say, you know, when you came out of art school, just before the war, do you wish that that context had gone on longer?

Well, yes, the way in which the School of Paris was moving, the way in which shape was beginning to be... You see there was a time when they talked about truth to material and that kind of thing, which wasn't what concerned the Renaissance in that sense, I mean, although the material had something to offer in respect of the shape that's made in it, which is a very valid thing really. So it does. But also...well it seemed to be having the vigour of a tradition without having to be a slave to it really. I mean the idea that although the realism was important, it wasn't everything, and that it's only a part of what is... And also a realisation of the fact that whatever the style of sculpture, whether it's realistic or not, the sculptural element, the drawing of it in space, is an abstract quality. It's an abstract, you're making abstract judgements, you're not making judgements...if you're making judgements, 'Oh well that doesn't look very good because it doesn't look like an eye,' that is not a sculptural

judgement; but if you say, 'That eye would be much better, or that would look better if that eye were here or there because it draws in that position better,' then that's a sculptural judgement you see. And if you are a slave to representational realism then of course you don't dare make things like that, you've got to be a Picasso to come along and put the eye half-way down the face, because it looks better to him half-way down the face you see.

But from what you were saying you didn't think much of the Reid Dick approach.

Well, I didn't want to be...I didn't want to be too derogatory about him. I mean he was...I mean he could model Renaissance type putties, you know, miniature, very well indeed, I mean he was very skilful, a very skilful modeller. His ideas of architectural design were rather suspect because they were in a sense more figurative than they were architectural, that's what I would think. But, I didn't...no, his work was averagely good.

Could he draw in space?

Could he what?

Draw in space?

I think actually if I talked to him along the line I've been talking to you] he would have told me to shut up, because...

So that's what I mean, don't you think we have actually gained quite a lot in the years since...?

Oh well, do you mean...oh well, do you...yes, I am better for having lived...yes, I'm sure of that. I mean yes, I mean there is a way in which the freedom from a slavish style of any sort is good, because if it's a slavish style then people are doing it like that because that's the way it's done, and not because it's best like that you see. I mean, when the Gothic style changed to Renaissance it was better, but I mean it wasn't...it didn't necessarily continue to be better just because it was Renaissance, because in its own time it becomes worn out really, I mean it loses its, I suppose loses its zest really.

And how much do you regret that the monumental commissions of the pre-war period dried up after the war?

What do you mean do I regret from a social point of view or from a personal point of view?

From your own point of view as a sculptor.

You mean my commissions or everybody's commissions?

Well, that general commissions dried up so that you too didn't have the work you might have had.

Well, I don't...I don't mind that necessarily. I'm just a bit hurt when I find a piece of public sculpture which is a rotten shape, because I think, well what a waste. I mean, here's an opportunity for someone to put a good shape, and what we've got there is a poor one. And some shapes are very poor, and why are they poor? Because the person who made them hasn't bothered too much about what shape it is. Made the style right and made a sort of original style, but never...they thought that was good enough, you know, without thinking, well if that is it, that can be a different shape within small measurements, whereas it's a really good shape without really being to the layman very different at all, but to a sculptor it ought to be a lot different. It's the same with my architect and his windows. If he put this line of windows, he gets it right you see, by very small dimensions very often, but all the dimensions that matter. The shape can be as simple as you like you see. It's the same as minimal sculptors when they came along, those Americans that made the sort of metal tanks and things, I mean, there was nothing wrong with that except the fact that they were such rotten shapes. If you're going to make a tank in a shape, there are ways and proportions. The Greeks knew all about it when they built the [INAUDIBLE], that you could make a shape which is very yearly like that but vastly superior, because you've only got three proportions to get, but I mean they can be right. In very small dimensions, like, quite as small as an engineer making an engine that's got to be made to within three thous of an inch or something like that, and if it doesn't work, I mean it can be very very slight. But that's really what one would regret, if bad work goes out in the guise of something which is worth having you see.

And that's partly because they've been taught badly?

Well I think...well to put it bluntly, I mean I don't think that for the last twenty years some of the students have been taught anything at all myself, not in the way of acquiring judgement, and certainly not even acquired much skill as far as I can see; well that's the minimum that you can expect to give the student, is some skill, because you can talk about that, you can...I mean there's a right and wrong in skill, but the other is not so easy, but... I mean they haven't...well not taught self-criticism, never come up against this fact that if they're not careful they're going to show their work to a number of people who know much more than they do and better artists than they are really; you've got to be careful, you know, what you

do. Strangely enough, when I...when I was in the final year at the Royal College, 1938, I was advised quite strongly by the teacher of carving there who I greatly respect, he said 'Don't take any of this work with you,' he said. 'Break it all up.' And he said, 'Don't do a public commission for five years, because you'll regret that, if you've got that stuck there. You make all your mistakes in it, it's still there, you can't go and break it up.'

So how did he think that you were going to make a living?

I don't know, but I mean he was quite right, because it's quite true. I mean I would have made a living serving in a pub or something, like poets do, or writers do, or other people do. I mean how do you make a living writing poetry? You don't, do you. But that doesn't mean to say that you can qualify the poetry you write by the fact that you've got to make a living, can you? You can't...it's just not like that, you can't... You know, it's like saying, well that would have been better as a work of art if I hadn't had a headache. But you can't say that, you're not allowed to have a headache. It is or it isn't, you know. If it's not a good shape it's because you haven't made it so. And if you say, well what is a good shape? Well I would say, those people outside there who know what a good shape is by intuition will recognise that it's a good shape and they'll like it, but they couldn't tell you why, but they are there, I mean I'm sure that there's discrimination.

Well can anyone say why a good shape is a good shape?

No, not in the final resort, no. You can only... No, you can't, because... You can give, well you can talk about it, you know, you can give sort of suggestions as to what might be... There are certain rules of composition, like Japanese, and they have a sort of, the Golden [INAUDIBLE] and all that, there are certain ways in which they were that...you know, bad proportion, you can sort of... But even then you can't...it's like, in the end it's like using a finer and finer sieve and still something goes through, you know, you can't...there's no sieve which holds the final thing, it's not small enough. [INAUDIBLE], yes. It must be well beyond your train time.

End of F4691 Side A

End of Interview