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ARTISTS' LIVES

Michael Kidner

Interviewed by Penelope Curtis & Cathy Courtney

C466/40

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F5079 Side A

[.....in Hampstead Hill Gardens. It is Saturday, 16th of March 1996, and this is an interview with Michael Kidner.]

Let's go back to the very beginning.

OK.

What do you remember of your grandparents?

My grandparents. Well I remember my father's mother who lived in Northampton, and we used to go to visit her on Sundays with my father, my father used to take the family. Very often he would leave us to wander around town while he and my mother went in to talk to her, she was a very old lady at this time, a rather elegant old lady. My mother's grandfather I remember quite well, he used to come and stay with us when he was in his eighties, and he had a white beard and... Well he had been a farmer, he was a farmer from Somerset, and he had moved his farm leaving his eldest son to mind it, to Norfolk, outside of Norwich, and it's still there. A cousin, or is it, I think it's a cousin, I'm not sure of these relationships, is still running it. Anyway, yes he was a rather interesting character in a way. What I remember about him, he enjoyed playing chess very much, but he had great ideas about how the moves were made. I remember he used to hold a stick above the board with a pendulum on it, and it would swing across the board and it would decide his next move. And then a family friend came and stuck this stick in the handle of a, well, so that he wasn't holding it, so then it wouldn't move, and it rather destroyed his notion of the hereafter I suppose, of some...he had some belief, which my mother also had, in life after death, for Oliver Lodge[ph] and that kind of thing, and he was in a way exploring these notions that he had.

So, when you were born, how many grandparents did you have living?

Only those two. His wife died, I never remember, I don't remember her.

You had your mother's father and your father's mother.

That's right.

And were they still living in their own homes?

Yes.

So, did you...?

Well, no, my mother's father did come and live with us, or he lived with different members of his family when he was old.

So do you remember what his home was like?

What his home?

Yes.

Well I remember, it was Stoke, the farm in Norfolk, I do remember going there when I was a child, in fact I think it was the first time I stayed away from home, and being horrified because the bath water was yellow, and I had never seen yellow water and it seemed very... I don't know, it's a funny memory.

So he was living alone there?

Oh no, he was living with...who was running the farm? One of his sons. Yes, they had a farmhouse in the middle of the farm.

So what do you remember of what that house looked like, or how it seemed to you?

Well it was quite a big farmhouse. I was, I mean, as a child, I don't know how old I was, 7, something like that when I went to visit, I remember he had a big lawn in the front and a pony trap which was rather exciting. But I was very homesick and all I remember is counting the days till my parents would come and get me.

And, did you only go there once before he moved?

We didn't go there very often. My sisters went there quite, more than I did, or my elder brother and sisters. I don't know why, I don't have a strong recollection of the farm at that time.

But it was a comfortable old farmhouse?

Oh yes.

With...?

I do remember them making milk in a churn, oh yes, and marvellous ham that they presumably produced, and, yes, they went into market in Norwich every Saturday or something, or Friday, and there was always a bit of to-do about collecting all the stuff that was going to market.

But you don't really remember how the house was decorated or what kind of things were in it?

It always seemed to me very brown, it was a sort of brown house, and I didn't...it was unfamiliar, that's all I can say, as a child. And I don't remember the house later than that.

So your mother was a farmer's daughter?

She was a farmer's daughter, quite right.

So how had she met your father, and what had she done before?

Well they were cousins, which was a bit unusual. My mother was, as you say, a farmer's daughter, but she was...she had an affair with an architect. She went to Taunton Art School and I think it was there she met an architect, and she had quite a romantic affair with him, but she had known my father presumably for quite a long time, he had kind of decided she was his favourite cousin I suppose, and she, I guess, married him on the rebound of this affair with the architect. He offered a much safer future I suppose than the architect, so I think...I don't know what...I mean he had been as it were courting her for quite a long time through all this affair, and they got married.

So she was brought up in Norfolk but went all the way down to Taunton to go to art school?

No, no the farm was just outside of Taunton.

Oh I'm sorry, I've got completely...

In Devonshire.

Right.

The original farm, before they moved to Norfolk, and they hadn't moved to Norfolk when she left the house.

Right. So, was that before the First World War?

Oh yes, it was...well my eldest brother I think was born in 1909, so, yes, it was quite early. I remember, or she remembers, driving to Islip House from the railway station, she arrived on the railway, and then was met by horse and carriage and driven, and that was what, 1908 or 9, well 1908.

Was that quite unusual for someone to go to art school from that background?

I don't know. She didn't...she didn't make a lot of noise about that.

Was she one of a big family?

Yes, quite a big family, oh yes, she had, oh three brothers... No I think it was about eight in the family.

And other ones stayed on the farm?

Uncles and aunts. Well three of her brothers all set up farms in Norfolk; the eldest brother remained in Somerset. And they all did very well as farmers, one of them specialised in chickens, one of them in cattle, in bulls, breeding, and a third one in apples - no, in asparagus eventually.

So, your uncles were farmers as well?

They were indeed, yes, and good farmers on the whole.

And what had your mother done at art school, do you know what kind of work she did?

She used to make rather drawings; I never saw much of her painting but she would make drawings, rather sort of delicate pencil drawings from life, of us as children and of family pets, things like that. Rather, it reminds me a little bit of the illustrations, probably not as good, in the sort of, the children's books, Beatrix Potter. Yes, but, no, they weren't as, probably as imaginative as Beatrix, I mean she didn't humanise the animals or anything like that, she just took them straight from life.

And did her parents know about her having an affair with an architect?

Sorry, did they...?

Did they know that she had an affair with the architect, do you think, her parents?

I don't think, I think her mother was not a terribly sympathetic woman, as I recall of accounts of it, and I'm not even sure that she didn't die before this, so it was just the father, I mean her father, who was probably too busy with the farm to be terribly concerned. I don't know, I don't know about that.

And, what happened, did she finish her art school training and then marry your father?

I don't know if she ever...I don't even know what that training involved or whether it was just a kind of finishing school for girls.

Yes.

I don't think there was ever any thought that it could become a career. No. No I think she reckoned that she would be married and raise a family probably, so her art was kind of, a kind of education really, a way of getting out of the home. But I don't...I mean she never said she wanted to get out of the home, I think she had a relatively happy childhood, she never mentioned her home as being unhappy. She was a very unworldly woman really, but in a sense she didn't have to be, my father was a quite capable man. Technically he was known as an ironmaster, and he became the managing director of a small iron mining business in Northamptonshire. There's quite a lot of ironstone around the town where I grew up, which was Kettering, and it was an extremely, for us children, he would take us to what he called 'the works' on a Sunday when he wasn't busy, and these were big iron smelting furnaces, there were eight of them, and all the sort of little railways and cranes and pumps, because to get the ironstone up to the top of the furnace meant taking these hand-pull trucks of iron and, I don't know, limestone and stuff that they put in with it, up to the top of these furnaces and then dropping it in to the furnace. And as children we would go around and go up this lift, which was run by water, it was...you filled up the tank when you wanted to come down, and emptied it when you wanted to...or the other way round.

Anyway, so it was extremely dramatic, you know, we could get in the engines and take all this molten stuff and drop it on the slag heap, and...

So how...was your father from Northamptonshire?

Well my father, his side of the family were...I don't know really very much about his family, or even, I don't...I don't...no I don't know very much, beyond the fact that they were related and, how that relationship occurred, other members of the family might know better than I do.

But he was not from a farming background then?

No. No, definitely from a...well, he used to go off to Birmingham for business meetings every now and again; he didn't have any truck with London, it was sort of Midlands area.

So, when do you think they met?

I think, you know, as cousins might well meet, some sort of family occasions, must have done. I don't know.

But you had this impression that it was a kind of, a steady courtship and then they got married.

Yes, definitely, definitely.

And do you know where they got married, and where they first...?

No. I think it was probably in Kettering. Well, no that wouldn't be so usual would it? I don't know where they got married.

And do you know where they set up home first of all?

Yes I do, in Kettering, Bowling Green Road. And, my father was obviously much more, a kind of... Neither of them were church-going; my father was obviously much more of a Methodist I suppose than, my mother was a free thinker, and rather unorthodox, in fact she embarrassed my father I think when he would have bridge evenings at home, and she would substitute cold tea for the whisky, and she allowed my eldest brother to wander down the street totally naked in this rather Edwardian background which must have shocked people. Those are the sort of family stories I hear about her. But obviously his business, he had a very good business sense I think.

So do you think that their parents were quite happy about them getting married?

I think they were, I mean I suppose from their point of view it was quite a good marriage really.

So your mother left Taunton and went up to live in Kettering?

That's right.

And was that kind of, the end of many of her links with the south-west?

The end of...?

Her links with the south-west.

Well no, she always...I mean she kept quite good relations with her brothers and sisters, I mean they used to come. Uncle Roger was quite a character in our family, he was the cattle-rearing... He had great presence, great...a wonderful laugh, and he was very sort of, a rather charismatic character really.

So, she came from a family of comfortable farmers?

I would say.

Quite well off, presumably.

Yes. Although with a big family it's quite a hard job. She often talks about the move to Norfolk, which she wasn't part of but which is obviously quite a family story. They drove the family over land, which, you know, the railway was quite capable, I don't know why they chose to do it, but it's quite a long trip from Somerset to Norfolk.

Was that in search of better land? Did they go to Norfolk because they thought the farms were better there?

Yes, definitely, definitely. And because he had three, four sons or something, and you know, he had to provide for all of them.

Yes. Did they own their farm or were they renting it?

No they must have owned it. In fact I think my family lent money, or I'm sure they did, lent money to develop the farm. Yes. And the eldest brother who remained in, Marcus, who remained in Somerset, had a very large family and was no businessman, and that farm went to wrack and ruin, and he did need financial help which my...well I remember posting letters to Marcus which my mother wrote fairly regularly which contained money. So, you know, we were kind of...yes, I mean, my father was quite a successful businessman.

And, he came from a family of businessmen did he, do you think?

Well his father, I think, founded the ironworks which he then inherited, I mean he was one of the founders of this little ironworks.

So did that have a name, like Kidner Ironworks?

No. No, it would have been called Islip Ironworks. Islip was a village close by, and Thrapston. It was...yes, it was called the Islip Ironworks. It was bought up by Corby, he sold it to Corby in about, I think before the Depression. It was a very timely sale,

because it's no longer there, it's been pulled down completely, and so has Corby, but at that time Corby was a big ironworks, and it's now disappeared and has become British Steel.

So, you said that you also remember visiting your father's mother.

Yes.

So what kind of woman was she, and what kind of house did she have?

She was a very elegant, rather...she had obviously been a beauty in her day, and she was a very elegant elderly woman, surrounded with all, vast cases with beautiful things in them. It was the kind of house which a child wouldn't go into, it was too full of delicate things, so we were not, as children we were not particularly, she didn't appreciate us, so I don't have very much of a memory of her except as this rather remote, very old lady, who had a companion living with her, just the two of them in this large house.

Where was that?

In the middle of Northampton. It was a town house, not too unlike this one really.

But she lived in style?

In style?

In style?

Yes I would say so.

And did you like her taste in things?

It was...she was too remote from the family, it was just one of those things we did occasionally, and I mean we would much rather on a Sunday go to visit the works or, we called them the works, or, anything but Northampton.

So you don't have a very strong impression of her as a person?

No, not...no, as a personality, no. Just this, you know, almost like a kind of film character in a way.

Was that because she died before you grew up?

Oh yes, oh yes she must have been, gosh, yes she must have died when I was 7 or 8.

I see, right.

Quite young.

So, when did your parents marry?

I don't know the date of their marriage, but I think my eldest brother was born in 1909, so I suppose they married about 1908 or 1907, something like that.

So, he was already settled in a job, so they began quite comfortably did they?

Well, yes, I mean they certainly moved to bigger and bigger houses in Kettering. I mean I remember the house where I was born, which was in Queensbury[ph] Road, and we moved from that house just a little further along the street to a bigger house called the Crossways, and that's the house I remember most clearly, I was 7 at the time that we moved, so that's a sort of date.

So your eldest brother is 1909, and, how many others are there, and what are the...?

Two girls.

What are the gaps between them?

Well I'm not very sure any more.

Roughly, I mean...

But I mean roughly, roughly two-yearly intervals.

Where do you come?

I'm the fourth.

You were the fourth one, right.

And I am...she had the eldest, my eldest brother, Jack, the two girls, Betty and Audrey, and then myself, and then I have a younger brother, three years younger than I am.

So there's five children.

Yes, and there was a sixth but he died of diphtheria, he would have been the youngest.

Right. And you're all quite close in age.

Yes, fairly.

So presumably you all played together?

No. I...well, first of all we all went away to school, my two sisters went off to school at the age of about 8 to a boarding school, and they...yes, I mean we...yes, but I played most of my time, most of the time with my brother, younger brother, we seemed to

make a kind of team together and the girls had their life, and my eldest brother was...he seemed a lot older; you know when you are 7, if he's 12 or 13 or something he seems like an old man practically.

Yes. Why did your parents send you all off to school?

Interesting question. But they did. We all went to boarding schools, well, Bedales was the school of their choice and Dunhurst[ph], which was the junior school for Bedales, and that's when they started.

But they, had they gone to boarding school themselves?

I don't know. No, my mother certainly hadn't.

So was this to do with prestige, or that they wanted time to themselves?

I don't think it was due...I wouldn't have thought it was due to prestige. I don't know, my father was certainly politically a Conservative, but I would say a moderate, you know, a sort of left-wing Conservative if anything. He was very concerned, he had quite a sort of public life in Kettering, he was a member of the Council, Kettering, you know, District Council, as a Conservative but he was elected, I remember, top of the poll or something in the evening paper, and he was always very...when we went to 'the works' he was always interested to see what kind of...he was planting trees to cover the slag heap, and where there is still now a little wood there, and interested really in a kind of limited way in the welfare of the work force.

So, did he own the company himself?

No, there were five directors, but he was the managing director, and I get the feeling that decisions were mainly made by him.

How big was the work force?

I've no idea.

Did it seem big or small?

The village of Islip more or less completely employed that work force. On Sundays sometimes when we would go to the works we would see the wives taking the joint to the baker to cook, I mean it was that sort of tradition, and bringing them back for lunch.

So your father was seen as a big employer in that area, is that right?

Yes, yes.

Yes. So you, did you feel as if you had a special position, that you were the son of the area's employer?

I'm sure we did, oh yes, oh there was definitely a kind of class thing. But you see, well my father was killed in a road accident. He used to....`the works' as I call them in Islip were about eight miles away from Kettering, and he used to go off in the morning at about 8 o'clock, 8.30 on a motorbike, he was proud of riding this motorbike, and he wouldn't come...he would come back in the evening at about 5 o'clock for a high tea after we had had our tea, and he was a very remote figure as far as I was concerned, and you know, he worked every day of the week and even on Sunday he would take us over to the works. So, my mother was definitely running the house.

Did she have maids, servants, to help her?

Yes she did indeed, three, a scullery maid, a housemaid and a cook. And, I was brought up, you see my mother was a fairly remote figure really in the early years because, they had a governess, a nanny, she was more than a nanny, she really became quite a member of the family, because she...they employed her to look after Jack and Betty, the two eldest, and then Audrey when she came along.

End of F5079 Side A

F5079 Side B

And Coursey really felt was hers. And the first ten years of my life were definitely Coursey's years, not Kaye's years; Kaye was my mother. It was only when I went away to school that Coursey rather dropped out of my life and Kaye became my mother. And Coursey was a brilliant nursery school teacher. My parents set her up in a nursery school, the bungalow school, and my younger brother Pat and myself and Coursey would go off after breakfast in the morning at about 8.30, and we would have a long...it was about a mile we had to walk to get to the bungalow school. Coursey's sister was resident, it was a little bungalow sort of the edge of Wicksteed Park, and she was running this school in a very Montessori fashion. We had little chairs and little tables and we did all these, and we had insets[??], you know, metal plates, and you would draw patterns. And we sewed things and we drew on the blackboard, and we learnt b-a-t, bat. It was a very happy school I think, and Coursey was undoubtedly brilliant with children. After, she finally left our house after must have...God! after twenty years, and set up on her own, set up a nursery school on her own, which did very well.

Was she a local girl?

Yes, local to...yes.

Who just had a natural gift for it?

Absolutely.

She hadn't been trained?

I don't think so. She didn't marry because she was, you know, one of the women who had suffered from the First World War, her boyfriend was killed in the First World War, and...yes, her mother lived, oh, a couple of blocks from where we lived.

And did she live with you in the house?

She lived in the house. We used to go round to visit her mother, and I remember hearing the first crystal radio at her mother's house. Her mother had a sort of little...I mean she had a front room which was never used, and then the back room, just like we have here, which was constantly used. But her front room was for visitors only, set out, you know, it was very typical of that period, and the back room was quite a messy, smoky sort of place, and the children, and Coursey would take us around to visit her mother, she had this little crystal wireless set which was very exciting.

Did you have a nursery in your house?

Play room.

A play room?

Yes.

So it was a big house?

It was indeed, quite a big house. Not only did we have a nursery, we had, my father built a squash court at the bottom of the garden. The garden had a grass tennis court and a big lawn outside the tennis court, and a chicken run where we had ornamental ducks, and my sister got very involved in the ducks and the chickens, polishing their beaks and their legs with furniture polish I think. But anyway, I mean it was a very ideal childhood, but totally fenced in by the family in the house. I mean I was hardly aware even of Kettering town. On Saturday mornings we would go to town and we would...Saturday was pocket money day. If we remembered at breakfast time to ask for our pocket money we would get it; if we didn't, we wouldn't get it. So we very rarely forgot, and our pocket money was like twopence a week, and we would go to the Kettering town, which seemed a long walk then, but it's incredible, you know, how these differences shrink. But anyway we went into town with Coursey and spent our twopence on buying lead soldiers.

All of you?

No no, Pat and I, Pat and Coursey and I; the rest of the family was something else. And what we would do, we had a sand tray, it was like, it was about the size of our table in the other room with sides on it, and we would fill this with sand and then we would make models of battlefields with trenches, First World War battlefields.

So was it Germans and British?

Yes, the baddies and the goodies.

Mm. How had...you were born during the First World War?

I was.

How had the war affected your family?

Well, my father was not involved in the Army, I don't know why. My...yes my mother lost a brother who was...changed, well he was a doctor, but only one brother. We really escaped pretty lightly I think from the war. I think, though I don't remember anything about this, but during the General Strike I think my father adopted a sort of strike-breaking attitude, or went, volunteered to run the train, or run a train or something, became an engine driver. He wasn't in favour of the strike. On the other hand he was...what he always used to say to us, the one time when we met him was at breakfast time or maybe Sunday lunch, but he would say, 'Moderation in all things'. We were, first of all, if we wanted...we were never allowed to have jam on our bread until we had had one piece of bread and butter, so if we still had an appetite after that we were allowed jam. And 24 bites to every mouthful. There were little kind of edicts like that which were moderate. He was remote, from my view he was rather remote, a little frightening. They had a big row, my parents, over my eldest brother. My father was all for strapping him for some offence and my mother said absolutely no, and my mother won, and I think at that point my father said, 'Well you look after

the children, I'll look after the business'. He didn't take a lot of, a big part in the family.

Did you actually eat with them, with your parents?

Not in the...we were sent to bed before they had their supper, but we had...yes, we had...well when... I remember Pat and I having a little table because there wasn't room around the big table with the rest, so we had a little table. But yes, we would all eat at the same time and, you know, 8 o'clock was breakfast time, and 1 o'clock was lunch time, and you had to be there, and tea time.

And do you think in the evening when you had gone to bed, did your parents entertain, were there people?

Well this is another thing that I have very little recollection. They certainly entertained people, but mainly, my father would entertain his friends, and they were...he was keen on chess as well, and he would have chess evenings and he would have bridge evenings. They would entertain. The only time we saw my mother really, she had a kind of routine of coming to say goodnight around I suppose 7 or 8, 7 o'clock, just before their dinner, and she would come up and, Pat and I had a room, you know, a bedroom, and we would go to bed, we would lock up 'The Sphere'. They had bound volumes of a magazine called 'The Sphere' that ran back through the whole of the war and we would look at these war pictures. Although really Pat was more, he had got the 'Book of the World', well we both had, we had the 'Book of the World', with pictures of this sort of, you know, encyclopaedia full of pictures, which we enjoyed. But most of the time we spent with Coursey, and... Yes, it was quite a sort of...that evening ceremony with Kaye was rather important to us, it made us...otherwise we would never have seen her at all really.

So did she feel like a loving mother?

She felt like a caring mother. But they were both a bit distant.

How did she spend her days?

I have no idea. Writing letters, you know, looking after the house. Goodness knows what people did. She didn't have many friends outside her family I think.

How was the house laid out, can you remember how it...what rooms there were?

Well, the Crossways I remember. Well I remember the first house in Queensbury[ph] Road but of the Crossways, we had a sitting-room, we had two garages, two cars, then we had, you came in the front door, we had a sitting-room with a piano, next to that a dining-room, and then there was a sort of hall-way which was as big as a room, and then across the hall-way the playroom. That was the ground floor. Then the kitchen and the scullery. And outside there were some out-sheds where we had...my brother had set up quite a, he set himself up with really a nice workshop which we used when he grew out of it. And a potting shed next to that, and then a sort of bicycle shed next to that, and then the garage and another garage. And then upstairs there was our, Pat and my bedroom first, and then my parents' bedroom, a dressing-room, a bathroom and a spare room. And then on top of that Coursey's room, my sisters' room, and the maid's rooms, so there were four rooms on the top. It was like that, it was a big house.

Did your parents have a loving relationship?

We always assumed they did. You see I was 13 when my father was killed, and I don't... I remember them having a big argument when I was very young, and I was carried out of the room by Coursey, about oranges, something about, get a box of oranges and be done with it. I don't know, they were discussing provisions I think. But it was the first row that I saw between them, and it rather impressed me; that's the only time I remember them fighting in front of us. But that business of whether to strap us or not was I think, which was before my time but I think was important in the relationship. I don't know whether it would have been. My father was obviously... I don't know, I couldn't answer that.

No. It must be...I mean one never knows anyway but I suppose some children see their parents not getting on, which you didn't.

No, I certainly didn't. No no, we were supposed to be a happy family.

Yes. And as far as you knew...

I mean really as far as this is...yes, we couldn't have had a happier, more as it were... You see looking back, one wonders how useful in life later a very happy childhood is. I felt, when I was reading one of Herbert Read's books and he, you know attributes his early childhood to his freedom to sort of wander around and not be pressured; we certainly had all of that. But, I don't think it's a very good preparation for later life.

How about being stimulated, did you feel that...?

That's what I mean. Well, we had so many games and so many, Pat and I between us, well I suppose all of us we had so much opportunity, I don't think we needed outside stimulation really at this early time.

At what point, I mean I suppose that it's talking about a little later, but did your parents, were they concerned that you should read, listen to music, see art and things like that?

There was a sort of brief period when we were...there was a piano teacher brought in. We didn't listen. My father used to read, on Sunday evening we had a routine, my father would read aloud and we would - this was the maid's night off, so my father would...we would make our own supper, and then we would come into the sitting-room, not the dining-room, and my father would read aloud, sort of Greek fairy tales, and, he read very...well it was rather...it was good, it was very nice evenings.

So you all enjoyed that, did you?

Very much, yes.

But I suppose, you weren't often all together because by then your older siblings would have gone to school.

Well yes. But I recall evenings when at least the girls were there; I don't remember my eldest brother being there but I do remember the girls and Pat and myself being there, and making quite a sort of crowd around the fire for these readings.

And were there books in the house?

Oh yes, there were books, Medici prints on the wall, no live art on the wall.

But if you wanted to read a book, then there was plenty to chose from?

Yes, there was. But we didn't read much, we were too busy. We had the workshop and the playroom and we had the building bricks, we had...there was so much to do that we didn't, we weren't particularly encouraged to read. I mean, later on, as we grew up, then the girls began, probably the people who really began to sort of read more, but I remember Aldous Huxley, 'Eyeless in Gaza', and... Of course there was a lot of...but then this is, you know, the Thirties, the hunger strike. Yes, my elder sister had a boyfriend who was very involved in the hunger strike, or in, not one of the marchers, he came from Birmingham, but, he was a journalist, he ended up in the BBC actually, but he was reporting the hunger strike and they went out. They came through, marching from the North they came through almost, I don't know if they came right through Kettering or not. This would have been '36, or '35, I don't know. So we got sort of rather unreal impressions of what was going on, I feel, at this time, but so...

Did your parents read newspapers? Did they read newspapers?

Yes.

And did you read them?

No, not at all. They had two newspapers, a kind of, you know, like the `Sun', I don't know, maybe it was the `Mirror', and then a serious one, I don't even know what it was. We had no intellectual... You know, it was a really very provincial upbringing in my view.

Did you go on holidays together?

Yes. We had a house in Sheringham.

Where's that?

In Norfolk, on the Norfolk, sort of Hunstanton, Sheringham, Cromer, Runton. Yes we had wonderful summer holidays. We had a house called Barna Bush[ph], which was about a mile inland from the sea, but it faced onto pine woods and things. Oh, yes, I used to get up and go out with the fishermen for crabs, and Jimmy of Paris with one gold earring. I would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and go down to the beach where they would go out to get these crab pots and we would come back about 10 o'clock, and so that was quite... And then there was wonderful sand for modelling; my sister made fantastic models and dyed the sand with chalk which was in the rocks, you know, seaweed, green seaweed and brown seaweed. And swimming. Yes, and we used to catch shrimps and cook them on the beach, you know.

Sounds like L.P. Hartley.

It is, I mean...yes. Yes, Barna Bush[ph], we used to drive a hundred miles, it took all day. In those days it was quite a big thing, with the cat, who got lost on one occasion, we would drive through Wisbech and we would stop and picnic and the cat, we let the cat out, disappeared, and we all got in the car. This was a very precious white cat. And just as we had given her up for lost, she jumped up on something in the middle of a cornfield and, you know, in view, and my sister rushed off through the corn and picked her up. And that was rather a strange coincidence, but, yes...

So that was all together, the whole family was together then?

In the summer, these were summer holidays, yes. I don't know how long they went on. We would often go there for much longer, you know, people would come and go, but Pat and I and Coursey would stay for the whole summer, or...

But your father wasn't there for so long?

He would only come for maybe a week, or, you know, not much more.

Yes. When were you packed off to boarding school, how old were you?

Well then I was 10, and I went to this school which was near Sheringham, Gresham's, a boarding school, to the junior school obviously, and I was only there for two terms. I wrote letters that were so homesick, and in my first term I did so badly that my parents decided this was not the right place. In fact when the headmaster of the junior called me to say that I was leaving, I had no idea that I was, this was at the end of the second term, I burst out crying, because in fact I was enjoying the school very much. And in the second term I did completely, I mean I was actually top of the class that I had been bottom of in my first term, so, it's odd that. I mean it was my own fault, you know, Mother showed me the letters I wrote home, and you would have wept. So I was, I mean I was homesick but at the same time I was having a good time. So they took me away from there and they sent me to Bedales, like the rest of the family, but I had only been there for a few weeks and I got very ill, I got a streptococcal infection, and at that time there was no proper treatment for this thing, and I remember, is it Sir Thomas Horder[ph] or Sir Thomas Hoare[ph], anyway, a surgeon of the day or, not a surgeon, a doctor, came and gave me an injection of some sort and it was rather, you know, they weren't properly tested I think. So there were about 24 hours when, and I actually do remember not being at all, just lying in bed very peaceful, realising that there were a lot of people rushing around, but not being terribly...being really very content. Anyway, so I was ill, and that meant, so then I came home, and after that they sent me to a prep school in Sheringham where our country house was, and both Pat and I went to this school for, what, a couple of years.

So by then you were reunited with Pat?

I was really...?

You were reunited with Pat.

Yes. Well, I'd never been separated from Pat through all this time really.

So he sounds like...

Oh, just at Gresham's I suppose I was, yes, you're quite right, yes, that's true.

Was he your great ally then in these years?

He was a great ally.

Yes.

I mean, yes, I don't know what he thinks about this, but from my point of view he was. Yes, so then we went to this, first as day boys, and that was quite a long trek from Barna Bush[ph] to this school, but then later on we became boarders in the prep school. Yes, and then, and from there, largely through my own...Kaye decided to send me to Pangbourne, which was a nautical college, you know, the kids wore uniform, sort of...

So you didn't go to Bedales?

I didn't go back to Bedales after I...

Whereas the rest of your family had?

Yes.

So why was that?

Well, I had spent just this one half term there and got ill, and I don't know, I think... You see my mother didn't send Pat either, she sent Pat to Gordonstoun, which is another fairly tough school, and I think she thought we needed toughening up.

So she was obviously quite interested in trying out different kinds of education, your mother.

Oh yes, oh definitely. Oh she was... Yes she was. And she was always very interested in mysticism, I mean she went to seances in London after her father died hoping to make contact with him. But really...and she was very interested in Eastern philosophy. [BREAK IN RECORDING] I was going away to a real school.

I've just realised that by this point your mother was making these decisions by herself, because your father had died.

Yes, my father was dead by then. Yes, it was quite a...it was quite a handful for her to take on. You see my father was killed in '31 when I was 14, and she was left with five children. My eldest brother was in Africa, we had cousins in Rhodesia and he was learning the tobacco business. He came back from there and went to the Imperial College and studied mining engineering, and qualified, and then dropped it and went into farming and started a farm in Sussex.

There was enough money left for you all, was there, by your father?

You mean financially?

Yes.

Obviously she had enough to live on, he had divided his... I know he gave three-eighths of his estate to her and one eighth to the children.

And there was enough money to pay your school fees and everything?

Evidently.

Because life didn't change?

No, it didn't, and we went on living in the same house. No, life didn't change at all.

How old was she when he died, do you think?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] She died at 82, he died in '31. A little calculation...

I just wondered, was she middle...?

She was probably around 40, 45.

And then she had to live the rest of her life alone, did she?

End of F5079 Side B

F5080 Side A

To continue with your mother, she just really went on looking after you, seeing to your education?

She didn't really... You see the reason I went to Pangbourne, I read a book - I did read some books - I read a book about Scott going to the Antarctic, and with him was a man called Wilson, who was a botanist, and I kind of romanticised Wilson, he became my kind of hero figure. And, I don't know, I think that, I don't know, that and the uniform, I wanted to go to Pangbourne, or I wanted to go to some kind of sea training school, and Pangbourne seemed like the place. There was a training ship on the Thames at that time. But anyway we selected Pangbourne and I went there aged, what, 12, or, I suppose just 13, because my birthday was at the beginning of the year. So...it was the worst three years of my life I think.

The worst three years of your life?

Mm.

Even though you had chosen to go there?

Mm.

But this time there was no changing anyone's mind, you had to stay?

I had to go.

And you wore a uniform all the time?

It was the first time when I really seemed to be encountering the world instead of this walled-in home, and I certainly wasn't up to it at all, or prepared for it. It sort of terrified me really I think. I was no good at games, you know, I was no good at anything.

But you seem to be saying that you needed some adversity, so do you think it was good for you?

Well I suspect I did think that I needed it and that it was character training or something, I don't know. I certainly must have thought something of the sort. It was... The only good thing that I can remember about Pangbourne was trigonometry actually, and I hated the man who taught it, who was quite a bully and would pick up, you know, pick you up by your ear and lead you to the front of the class and say, you know, 'Look at the dunce, he can't do this'. There were one or two masters like that at Pangbourne, and I was usually the target, I mean, which says something about me.

Is that because you were no good at the subjects or because of the kind of character you were?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well it would be interesting to know. I did become something of a kind of outcast in this school, you know one kind of gets a reputation, it's true. How does one acquire that reputation? Well, there was a boy called Weystrall[ph] in the school who had been the butt of the school's contempt if you like because he was the one person who had been... We had a hundred per cent boxing contest, every boy in the school had to box, and Weystrall[ph] had lost, you know, had come out bottom of the list, he had not won a fight. And it was quite, I mean they had a gymnasium with a ring, seats all round it, it was really rather an occasion. And I was booked to fight Weystrall, and I was beaten, so Weystrall went up and my rating went down, and so then I became the kind of laughing stock, plus the fact that I wasn't in a cricket team or a football team. But it was a school where you did have, you did need a lot of physical courage I think to do well.

Which you didn't have?

Which I certainly didn't have. And another of these things we had to do was dive off the top board into the river this time, we swam in the Thames, and it wasn't...it was about ten feet I suppose, but it was pretty frightening, but we all had to do it, but I

mean I survived it but very unhappily. Yes there were various things like that. I mean there was a lot of beating and defaulters' parade where you stood in a line with, I don't know, a petty officer or prefect at either end and then you marched in one by one to Captain Blair who sat behind. It was very military.

So how did you keep going, I mean, how did you keep your own morale up?

Well basically I tried to keep a low profile. I didn't keep my morale up, I really, I mean it was... I had one friend called Danger, Richard Danger, whose parents lived in Lynmouth, he was a bank manager in Lynmouth, but he was killed in the war, but he was... No I did have another friend, McGregor. Yes I had a couple of friends. But it was, as I say it was the most miserable period of my life. The geography master was the only master who had any sympathy for me at all.

And were you no good at any of the academic subjects either?

I failed my School Certificate as it was called then, and left in really total disgrace having done nothing for the school. [LAUGHS] And went to Bedales. And the next year I passed with five, enough to get to Cambridge, or to get entrance to Cambridge.

So it was...your mother obviously knew that you were clever, and the school had been the wrong school.

I don't know whether she did or not. You see my brothers and sisters, Bedales did not have a good reputation, you know, they hadn't got many people to university, and I think they were quite anxious to improve their rating at university level, and so when I, you know, when I got this thing they pushed, they said, you know, I would be a fool not to take it. I didn't know really what to do, I had no ambitions as to what career I would follow at this point.

What had your elder sisters and brothers done by then? Your brother was doing mining.

My brother was, yes, he was mining.

And what about your sisters?

My elder sister was going to the London School of Economics studying sociology, and my younger sister was studying nursing, which she, I don't know at what point she changed to massage. She went to Sweden and studied massage at some quite famous Swedish school.

So your family, they were educating themselves quite a bit.

They were. And sort of encouraged but not directed by my mother I would say.

Had your father gone to university?

No. He had gone to Taunton Grammar School.

Had he left young and gone into business immediately?

I think so. I don't know what happened between Taunton Grammar School and his eventual arriving at Islip. But his father must, who lived in Northampton, did, must have been one of the people who started up the Islip Ironworks.

So your...

It's odd that he went to Taunton Grammar School that's all.

Yes. Your generation were more educated, more trained than your parents' generation?

Definitely.

Although your mother had been to art school.

She had been to art school. Oh yes I think she was keen that we should get an education, and that included the girls very much.

Yes. But it probably was quite remarkable, was it?

I don't know how remarkable, but it certainly wasn't... This is in the middle Thirties or, you know, in the Thirties. I don't know, I mean I think the girls were getting, beginning to be educated, put it that way.

So how long were you in Bedales for?

Well, about eighteen months. I spent a year getting my School Certificate and then I spent another half year I think cramming, well not cramming, I had to learn Latin, in order to get to Cambridge you had to learn Latin, and I hadn't learnt Latin, so I had to learn Latin. Oh, and it was more or less like doing A'levels really, trying to prepare for university, for which I was terribly ill-equipped. So then I went to Cambridge, I started Cambridge in '36, so I must have been at Bedales '35 to '36.

Did you have a bit of a gap between school and university?

No, straight through. No I didn't. I wished in a way, I don't know. No I didn't, but these were funny years. There was an awful feeling of the war creeping up; in a sense one didn't see a future very clearly at all, it was... I mean there were some days when the war was miles away and there were other days when it got close.

Even in '36? [BREAK IN RECORDING] I think it's fine. We were at 1936, and you had just gone up to Jesus College, Cambridge, with a sense of not knowing where you were going. What were you going to read there?

History.

History?

And Anthropology. But what shocks me in retrospect about this whole early period, well including Cambridge, is how incredibly un...how I hadn't got any sense of identity myself, or purpose or direction in the whole development of my life. I'd been...I didn't have an identity. I suppose...no I didn't. I had certain kind of romantic imaginings that were totally inappropriate to my personality, and of course I wasn't getting much from my environment either, well very little from my environment; I mean it was so protected, so unworldly in a sense that...well it's amazing to me now, looking back.

How did Cambridge strike you when you arrived there?

Well I went through Cambridge in exactly the same mood. I think the sense that the world wasn't, you know, that the world was confronting war, all this was...it didn't help. There wasn't much future beyond what seemed to be inevitable; one says inevitable but one... The Nine O'clock News was a very important item every day, because one didn't know what would be on it.

So you had become more aware to the extent that you had begun to read the papers and follow current events?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] One followed current events, I don't know that I read the papers very assiduously, I can't remember doing it, or even very intelligently.

I mean you were only 19 at this point, weren't you?

Yes, about that. Well that's quite old by modern standards. If you are not making it by 19 you are not making it.

Well how were you reading the news? I mean, how did you hear about the news, did you have a wireless in your [INAUDIBLE]?

Oh yes, I had a wireless, a marvellous little, you know, Bakelite wireless. Cambridge was as unworldly as my own home background, that we had bedders and we had porters and they all called you Sir and doffed their cap, and we had to be in college by 10 o'clock or get a late pass. It was all quite unreal, the whole pre-war period is totally unbelievable today now.

Did you feel comfortable in Cambridge?

Sorry, did I...?

Did you feel comfortable?

Now?

No, in Cambridge, did you feel comfortable?

No I didn't, no I didn't. I mean I made no use of Cambridge, I mean you know, there were hundreds of opportunities I think, I mean obviously there were, but I had no way of connecting to them. I was just stupid. I rowed. Jesus College was head of the river, and I rowed. I never made the first boat but I made the second boat, and we were head of the river in some race or other. I don't know. But I didn't really take part in the rowing club, you know, bonfires and drinking sessions and so on, so I didn't really become a member of the rowing club although I rowed.

And were you happy socially or did you feel that you were the wrong social class?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I don't think I... I don't know.

You weren't aware of being different?

It was the world, you know, it was the world I was born into, I didn't...

So you weren't different, you fitted in?

Yes, oh yes I fitted in. I accepted it as the way things were, and I wasn't critical really.

And how about the subject, History, Anthropology, did that mean anything to you?

When I started teaching in prep school I could never make sense of the kind of history that was being taught at Cambridge which, you know, you had a little section of economic history, 1600 to 1800, a section of Greek history, a section...and I couldn't...it didn't make any sense. My background reading was totally inadequate to link these things together. So it made pretty good nonsense. But years later when I started trying to teach history in prep school I was determined to try to make more sense of it, to myself as much as to the students, and so I started trying to teach the history of law in England and how the King's law and the Baron's law was in conflict and so on. And so instead of teaching history of the kings and queens I was trying to teach a history of law, and it wasn't easy, but I think in the end after, I'm talking, I'm jumping to a sort of period in Scotland in fact near Perth in this prep school where I was teaching, I felt fairly inadequate really, but a year or two after I left the headmaster wrote asking if I would come back, which I felt was very, I mean I felt in a sense that perhaps I hadn't wasted the time, as I felt I was wasting it, up there. So whatever rubbed off, all I'm saying is, I think something rubbed off from Cambridge but I'm not, I couldn't easily identify it. I think what really rubbed off was how much I didn't know, how inadequate I was at Cambridge to take advantage of it.

Did you pick up other things there, like...?

No. Social.

Having interesting friends, or...?

Absolutely not, absolutely not.

Did you at this point start to move in a more mixed society in terms of male/female...?

That's an interesting point really that occurred to me. No, I mean in terms of lack of identity, I had no sense of any, of sort of sexual identity either really. I had a very romantic affair with a girl called Anne Coquette[ph] at Cambridge, but only in the last year that I was there, and she eventually married a colonial servant who was working in Nigeria.

Was she also a student?

No, she was not a student. I met her...I don't know how I met her. We went to a May ball in 1939 at Trinity College, and it was a very romantic moment really, but it was a short-lived affair really because I had finished at Cambridge, she took up with this guy who I suppose was probably at Cambridge but who went off to Nigeria, and went out to Nigeria. I think...oh I don't know how to pursue this. I wonder if a lack of identity, of personal identity, makes it difficult to have any kind of sexual identity, or... If you're not in a position to support a family and so on, I felt as though one wasn't in a position to have any serious kind of affair.

Do you mean that you wanted to get more seriously involved with her and you felt you couldn't?

At the time I certainly did.

But you withdrew because you didn't have the means to support?

I had no idea how I could...yes, I had no picture of how life could be if it became more serious.

And you were at this point 22 or something?

Yes, quite right.

And already thinking about, can I marry or can't I marry, do you mean?

You see that, and the insecurity of the war, that...as I say, it was on the horizon but at the same time one kept trying to drive it into the background but one couldn't.

So you kind of stepped back and she met somebody else?

No, I didn't have a girlfriend. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] No, I didn't have any girlfriends, well till quite a lot later, and then more or less engineered by my sister, but we're skipping till after the war now.

So you left Cambridge, and it was just before the war broke out?

That's right, two or three months before the war actually broke out.

You came down in June '39.

There had been in '38 the Czech crisis in '38 when we really thought war was about to break out, and then Chamberlain, peace in our time, and so there was a period of sort of, I don't know, a possible future. And then, when I finished at Cambridge, which would be in June or May, June, my elder sister had married a Rhodes Scholar and had gone to live in America in 1937. He was teaching, he was a professor at Ohio State University, and he had, although he was trained as an engineer he had become very politically involved in a group called Americans For Democratic Action, and after the war he was posted to London as their London correspondent, as a journalist. He was quite all round, he was always very literary, as well as being an engineer, but his career eventually became journalism rather than... Anyway, for several years after the war he was in London as the London representative of the Americans For Democratic Action, which was by American standards pretty left-wing, by our standards pretty right-wing Labour. So they came, by this time she had, well two children and she finished up with three children, and they were living in London, Queen's Grove, and her house became a kind of place for me to stay in London, which was very good because just around the corner there was the Anglo-French Art Centre run by a man called Green, which was quite an innovative spot in London. He would invite artists

from Paris for a month to teach and exhibit. So, I used to go round there to some of their functions. I'm skipping till after the war.

Yes you are, yes. You are now in the 1940s.

Well I went, after Cambridge I went to visit my sister in America, and we...I was there when war broke out and there was the great business of whether I should return or whether I shouldn't, and I elected to stay on, and in fact enrolled in Ohio State University in the school of landscape architecture. I think I would have chosen architecture but for the fact that the landscape architecture school was a lot better than the architectural school. And I spent a year from 19...well September '39 to September '40.

So was that the first time in your life that you had made your own decision?

That I had...?

Made your own decision.

No. It wasn't even...I wouldn't even say it was my decision. What I mean is, there was a lot of pressure from my sister to stay, and I think also from Kaye to stay where I was, not to come home, although in fact of course that whole autumn was a non-war, I mean it didn't start for us. No, I felt somewhat guilty in a sense about accepting their decision, I think.

But landscape architecture sounds like the first time we begin to get near to what you later do.

Towards, yes. Well you see, my sister was certainly always interested in art, she is living in Washington still and working... Her flair was more for design than for art, and she finished up by being fairly conventional in the Washington scene and in being a local artist rather than a national artist, and she makes necklaces which are very

popular, I mean they sell...she has no problem in selling them. And she's exhibited, she's had, you know, one-man shows.....

End of F5080 Side A

F5080 Side B

So, I mean in one sense I was always feeling that she was pushing me to be an artist, and I wasn't at all sure that I was or could think of that as a career.

Well what...did she see you doing little sketches, or was there a reason why she thought that?

I don't know why she thought that. I don't think I had any, I don't think I showed any particular talent.

But did you draw?

The only thing, when I was at this nautical college in Pangbourne the only refuge I found was in a tiny little club called the Art Club, I suppose there were half a dozen of us who used to go there, and we were given a little room in a Nissen hut, and most of us were drawing battleships in profile; there were sometimes more exciting views. But anyway we were drawing battleships. But, I had been impressed by Fougas[ph] who was an illustrator in 'Punch', and I'd seen his line drawings, and I was trying to make kind of line drawings rather like, after Fougas[ph], and some of the sort of things he was doing, well I remember one of the things that impressed me, I don't know that it was Fougas, but the Shell advert, you know, 'Here they come, there they've gone', and there were sort of, speed lines advertising for Shell, and it was things like that that I was experimenting with. Anyway, so that's... I got back to Pangbourne...oh just because...

Just because your sister said that she...

That's right, the art. That was very little drawing for about, all she would ever have to go on. I think it was just that I was a member of the family and she was pushing me into the art world, that she wanted to go into the art world because she wanted to go into the art world.

You hadn't been drawing while you were at university?

No.

You didn't do life classes at...?

No, absolutely not.

No. So art dropped out at university altogether?

University is not a place to practise art. When I was resident at Sussex University, you know, the students made the rudest possible remarks in the visitors' book that I've ever had. There's a sort of anti art attitude, anti visual art, or there was; I don't know that it exists any more.

Anyway you weren't a member of an art club or anything at Cambridge?

I didn't even know that there was an art club; there certainly wasn't any gallery, the Arts Council gallery eventually appeared but only in, I don't know when, 1950 maybe.

And you didn't go to the Ashmolean - I mean sorry, the Fitzwilliam?

Oh there was the Fitzwilliam. No I didn't.

No?

No. No the history of art was not part of my...not at all.

Right. So, to come back to Ohio, did you enjoy the course that you did there?

Well yes and no. I did have a very good, very exciting friend whom I roomed with called Kurt Taylor, who was in fact a journalist, and, oh a very vibrant character who,

I think without him it would have been very, rather miserable really. I think the war did overshadow me, a kind of feeling that I shouldn't be there. At the end of the year I went up to Canada to volunteer for the Army, or really actually for the Navy, and oddly enough Ottawa was the headquarters, the naval headquarters; it couldn't be further from any ocean, but anyway that was their naval headquarters. So at the end of the school year I decided to go back, really go back to England via Canada, via the forces. So I went to Canada, and then I found that, I was going to volunteer for a sort of officers' course, and they had very minimal offices, I was surprised, I mean, how small they were, but it was the headquarters of the Navy. And I went and I said I'd like to volunteer, and I had had this training at Pangbourne, and they said, 'Well we conduct interviews every three months, and the next interview won't be till December,' or something. So, this was only, well like September, so I had to survive until the interview, and so I went apple picking, which was very...gorgeous in fact. I lived with an Irish family in Ottawa and then...no, then this farm was about, oh I don't know, a few miles outside of Ottawa, and the farmer had a son, in fact he wasn't really a farmer, he owned a big store in Ottawa, but farming was a sideline. And he had a son who was about my age, and we got on very well. And so, for the whole autumn I was living out on the farm. Yes, how did that happen? Anyway, then the picking season was over and I returned to Ottawa, and briefly I got a job putting up winter windows in this man's store. And then I had to find another job and so I got a job in an aerodrome as a timekeeper, working nights, and that was quite fun. And I had to tot up the day's wages, a big airfield they were building on the outskirts of Ottawa, and I went out there at about 7 o'clock in the evening and totted up the day's wages, and then the night watchman came around, who was a French Canadian, and...oh it was amusing. Anyway, and then, at 7 o'clock in the morning a bus came by and I went back into Ottawa to sleep. Oh, still awaiting this interview. No what happened was, I was out on the apple picking, the interview date arrived and they couldn't find me, and so I went back to the office when I came back into Ottawa to ask when the interview was going to be, and it had been; the next one wouldn't be for another three months. So then I got this job at the airport. Anyway, it was silly.

But you were actually quite enjoying yourself?

Yes, I was...I was in a way, I was...it was the first time I had really been really on my own fending for myself. The second interview came and I got there, but they said, they turned me down for lack of experience. So then I was in a bit of a mess as to know what to do, and I think in a sense out of...I said, well to hell with the Navy, and I just went and volunteered for the Army, and on January the 1st 1950 I suppose - no...

'40...'41 perhaps.

Yes, quite right, 1941, I walked into the barracks in Ottawa and became a soldier, and the first night, the only night of my life when I had got so drunk that I couldn't walk home. I can just remember lying on that bunk and the ceiling going round and round and round, and not being able to stabilise anything.

Was that because you were unhappy or happy, or was that just a rite of passage?

Relief I think, that this sort of tension was resolved, I think.

Why didn't you volunteer for the Navy?

Sorry?

Why didn't you volunteer for the Navy?

I think it was a sort of annoyance at the way the Navy had strung me along.

Right. So did you join the Canadian...?

Canadian Army.

Right.

About a week or two after I joined I got call-up papers from the British, the Americans and the Canadians. I had three call-up papers. Well that was when I was already in the Army, so that resolved that little problem. But I mean I had left it till the last minute. And then having joined the Army I went to Cornwall in Ontario and miserable long winter, totally white, totally colourless, square-bashing, route marching. And then we were all, at the end of our basic training there were two...they were distributing us for further training, half of us went to Signals and half of us went to the Tank Corps, and I think it was just a matter of luck which way you went. And it was incredibly lucky for me that I went to the Signals, because evidently the life of a tankman in battle is shorter than an airman, you know, it's something like thirty seconds. Anyway, that's another matter. I was sent to Kingston, Ontario, to train as a Signalman, to learn the Morse code and, I mean you know, and radio, and that was incredible. I mean we would go out in a little truck - this is in the summer - into the countryside and settle down with our, just the three of us with a radio and communicate with each other, you know. I mean, every day was a picnic in a sense, it was incredible. So I did eventually come over, I was eventually posted to England, with the Second Canadian Army, on the day, we arrived in England on the day that the First Army was almost wiped out in France, the kind of, they did a kind of attack on the French coast and the Canadian Army was almost wiped, the First Canadian Army was almost wiped out on that operation, and we arrived when people were euphoric, they thought the second front had started, and we arrived in Glasgow.

On a boat?

On a boat.

From Canada to Glasgow?

On a troop carrier. The slowest boat in the convoy. We woke up on the last morning, the voyage took about ten days, and we woke up, I guess it must have been about the ninth day, and found no convoy, an empty horizon, just, you know, in submarine, and so it was quite scary for a while, and oh my goodness! that voyage. I mean that was interesting, there were thousands of us all packed down. The first part of the voyage

had been quite rough and here we were, we were sleeping in hammocks above the dining, above the tables, or on the floor or on the tables, but we were all crammed into this room. And cockroaches, I can remember putting my plate, lifting my plate up and a great big cockroach came running out from underneath it, I mean you know, infested with cockroaches. But, yes, and then coming up and finding no convoy, and seeing a little something in the water like a telescope, and thinking, God! when's the torpedo coming? And it was in fact the log that the ship was trailing, you know, they trail a log to get their mileage. But, most of that voyage we spent playing poker.

And this was the first time probably that you were mixing with people from different classes.

Yes, well...yes.

Did you get on OK?

Yes, no trouble. I didn't make any very close friends in the Army. There was a Czech boy I got along with who had been evacuated to Canada in '39 and had been put on a railway to the West Coast, to the end of the railway line, and dumped with material to build a house. It was quite a terrifying story in a way, but he had...yes he was a member of the corps. No, they asked me if I would do an officers' training course, and I said no way. Because I really thought that the world had gone mad. Although I had no conception of what a sane world was like I had even less...my cousin in London, who had been following an acting, he wanted to become an actor, had the sort of, you know, the ground tier of acting, once he joined the Army really he became a heroic figure and he won, I don't know, the MC and several medals. In civil life he hadn't seemed to have any place really, he wasn't a natural actor at all, I don't think it was his profession, but I think he didn't know what else to do, or, just like that. I think there were a lot of people who had no...who had no place in civil life, who found their place in the Army, and vice versa.

But you didn't either. I mean you didn't...

No, my own position was that I had no place in civil life, but I found even less place in the Army. I mean my...I mean rather like Pangbourne, I thought the best thing to do is to keep your head down and wait till it blows over.

So you felt you were doing the right thing, obviously, because you had...

Well I think...yes, I mean I think I had sort of satisfied my guilty conscience. I had a guilty conscience about staying in America. My brother Pat had joined the Army, became a captain in the Guards, but he was lucky, he became sort of attached to headquarters and was driving around in Jeeps well away from the real fighting.

So you sailed into Glasgow, and then what happened?

Trained all the way down to the South of England, Angmering, being fed with enthusiastic crowds; it was a very slow journey, and the train was stopping and starting, and people were running up to the train with cups of tea and sandwiches, because they thought we were all on our way to the Western Front, I mean to the Front. And we disembarked in Angmering and were there all through the flying bomb era, listening to enemy radio short wave. It was very boring indeed, I mean there was in a sense nothing to do but wait. You know, there were moments of extreme...and I mean...you know, there were moments of crisis, bombings or whatever, you know, one of these doodlebugs hit the cliff just underneath the camp, that kind of thing, which would...and I mean the doodlebugs, we were right in doodlebug alley, so they were a constant source of alertness you could say, because, you know, you would hear these things and if it stopped you knew that they was going to be a big bang somewhere. So you were living very much on your senses, and with nothing to occupy your mind really. It was one of intense boredom.

And how long did it go on for?

Until D-Day, until '44.

So you were there...?

So, then we went over to France, oh, not on D-Day, we went on D-22 or 3; we had already got a little foothold. But it was quite exciting. We embarked in the Thames on a landing barge, and almost before we had left a flying bomb hit a building right beside the ship, all the...it was some sort of, I don't know, all their notepaper came fluttering down onto the deck, these kind of bills and receipts and things, it was semi-awe-inspiring. Anyway we went on, and all night long, these ships are like drums, and a bomb that falls in the water, or any noise in the water, is reverberated, even though it could be 60, 100 miles away. So all night long we had a kind of concert of bombs if you like, and never knew quite, you know, we just went on. And then we had arrived off the Normandy coast, and the tide was wrong so we had to anchor, and there were air raids while we were anchored out there. And then when the tide was right we ran into the shore and disembarked the trucks, we had trucks, they all had to be specially sort of sealed and they were driven off through fairly deep water and up onto the shore. And so the first thing we had to do was to get them off the beach where they were sitting targets onto the, half a mile inland, in order to un-watertight them. So we did that, that was all in the afternoon, and then that night we set off to a camp site where we had been assigned, and on the way we were bombed, and one of the trucks in the convoy was knocked out, but the rest carried on, and camped in an apple orchard, I don't know, quite near Caen[?]. And what was absolutely crazy by army standards at the time was to camp in tents, you know. And so, the next thing we knew was that we were being bombed, and not only bombed but flares were dropped, so you felt like a sitting target, you know, bright, as bright as day, just in your little circle. And so, this was in the middle of the night, and we had all gone to bed; this wasn't the first night we arrived, this was a couple of days after we were there. So we were the subject of a bombing raid. And we woke up all in, noise breaking out, so we dashed over to our little slit trenches that we had made - that was the first thing we had to do, build slit trenches - and dived into these, and I discovered that in my under-vest a mouse had crept in during the night, and I was busy in this trench keeping my head down trying to catch this mouse. Meanwhile there was all sorts of shrapnel shooting around, they were all anti-personnel bombs they were dropping. So, but I mean it was a marvellous way to survive the attack, to be more concentrated on this mouse running around. [LAUGHS] But anyway, that was that.

Were you all OK?

No, three of the people, people who were actually on duty who were sitting up in a truck, a couple of them were taken away.

And died?

No, one of them was only wounded, and he, I met him years later, totally shell-shocked having been posted, he wasn't...he was invalided out of the unit to a hospital and then re-posted to some front line unit. And when I met him he had been withdrawn from the front line in a completely shell-shocked sort of condition.

So, was that the first time people had died around you?

Yes. Yes it was.

So, was that when something came home to you, or had it already come home to you?

Well when we were landing there were corpses in the sea, there were, I mean washed up on the beach. [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] It wasn't totally... I mean it was sort of in a sense what you expected.

Did you imagine that you might die too?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well, one was aware of trying to stay alive. I didn't know, I don't know to what extent. Of course you were aware that you might die, but your concentration was more on staying alive I think, if you were...most of the time it was just boring, you know, there were only moments when, like this little raid I talked about, which was a minor raid, you know, nothing. And then for a while, well we went over there in, was it July, August, September; I don't know when the battle of Falaise... You see the Allies had built this bridgehead and the Canadian Army was on

the eastern end and the American Army was on the western end, and the eastern end, they built up a huge tank...for three days tanks went past our camp, this signal unit corps, you know, intercepting signal unit corps belonged to headquarters but it was posted to anywhere where the headquarters said that it should be, so sometimes we were close to the front line and sometimes we were back behind. I don't know in relation to the front line exactly where we were, but we were in tents, near a little church in Normandy, a beautiful little church, washing our clothes in the river, going to some field unit to take showers, and one occasion while we were taking showers there was a raid and we had to sort of dash out of the shower into slit trenches with nothing on, and..... [BREAK IN RECORDING - TELEPHONE] No, no, let's not talk about the war, it's pretty boring.

Well, just explain how it ended up, and how you came out of it.

Well we ended up in Oldenburg in Germany, and then we went right through, after the battle of Falaise the Americans broke through, you know, went behind and there was a race to cross France. Totally weird, there was no front line at all, we never knew where the enemy was or where the friends were, we just drove. We were stuck at Calais, Calais...the Germans made a stand at Calais and so we were in the hills behind Calais for, I don't know, a few weeks. It was...I mean, watched the town being bombed, and then there was the truce and the refugees came out, and then it was bombed again. And we were living in what the Germans had prepared for a possible invasion, you know, in their trenches. And then we went on to Nijmegen where after, you know, the failure of the Arnhem, we were stuck at Nijmegen where there's a big bridge over the Rhine. And Christmas Eve, must have been 1944, we were told that the Germans were going to, they were counter-attacking the Ardennes offensive, which would have cut us off in Holland just like they did at Dieppe, it was a similar kind of attack.

End of F5080 Side B

F5081 Side A

On Christmas Eve we were all issued a shot of...it was very cold and we were issued a shot of Navy rum, and told, go out and occupy a pigsty with all, you know this flat Dutch country, freezing, to go out and occupy this pigsty with our rifles, which we had never shot, in case a parachute landing, they thought the Nijmegen bridge would be a natural target for the Germans to... They didn't come, which was, you know, several times during that winter we were out in the ditch with our rifles waiting for a contingent of Germans and they never showed up. If they had, God knows, I would have had to shoot this gun.

Which you never shot during the war?

No, never shot a rifle. I mean I shot on the range, but I never shot in fear. I think people shoot in fear, not in anger.

Did you ever see a German soldier?

Not except as a prisoner, not, you know, a free German so to speak, an enemy Germany, no.

So this was...

I heard them on the radio.

So it was a kind of, almost abstract enemy who is somewhere but...

War is pretty abstract.

You never see your enemy.

No. Even less if you're in the Navy or, you know... But we were close, I mean when you hear a battle in progress, a tank battle in progress, it's pretty dramatic; the

conversation is...I couldn't understand the German but you could hear the tone of the voice.

So were you involved in a tank battle?

No, we were listening though you see, and they would only, I mean they would normally send code, but if they were sending plain language they were in trouble or they were, you know, it was an emergency, and so if you picked up plain language you knew it was, something was happening.

Right. And then you see, then we were in occupied Germany and that was...

You went from Holland to occupied Germany?

Yes, from Nijmegen we moved on, yes. I mean the Ardennes offensive collapsed and then they... Roosevelt died, that seemed to be a real tragedy, almost like a military defeat in the... And then the war ended. There was relief but there wasn't much change of... In fact it was very depressing.

Had you felt that while you were in the war doing your bit, did you feel it was worthwhile or did it feel fruitless to you?

Oh no, I was quite convinced that the Nazis were evil. I mean without knowing all that we know about them now, but I mean, yes Hitler was a menace.

So, but even though your own little part in it may have seemed futile, you didn't question the larger situation?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] No, I think it was part of life. I don't think I was... I say I was totally unconscious.

Well, if perhaps the fact that you didn't feel that your own role was futile, maybe that means that...

Well you see my own role was surviving amazingly, I mean in the sense of my brother was having a good war, if you want to call it that; Kaye, my mother, was living on the edge of an American airfield, she had moved, she had left finally just before the war, she moved to a country, just outside of Kettering, a village called Grafton Underwood, which became a flying fortress airfield, and she put up, she had to house, she had the old vicarage in Grafton Underwood so she housed a lot of American personnel. And so in a sense she was having quite an exciting war too, meeting all these people. I think really if one wants to be honest she probably quite enjoyed the war; I think she was probably anxious for us but... My sister, Audrey, the second sister, had married in 1939 John Cooper, the Coopers were a Plymouth Brethren family, and he was a naval, well he was captain of a mine-sweeper, and they had one daughter, and so my sister Audrey was looking after this daughter and staying a lot of the time with Kaye while he was in the Mediterranean, and his ship was blown up and he was killed. And she went through a period of very, she impressed me a lot, she went through a period of psychoanalysis. She grew up over this period of bereavement and with this child, and having psychoanalysis, and became a very sort of, I don't know, an impressive person. Then she married again after the war and had three children who were all around in London, and...but she was killed in a road accident in... Her husband is a paediatrician, her second husband, and he was posted to, or went to Ruanda, what is now Rwanda, as a child, well a paediatrician, and she went with him, and while they were on some safari their car skidded off a dirt road and she was killed. Which was a great blow to my mother, but I think to all of us actually, she...I don't know why, there was something about her that was impressive.

Whereas you came out of the war still no further...

But that was not a part of the war at all. Sorry.

How did you come out of the war then yourself?

Not until 1946, it was a long time to get demobilised. I spent '45 to, a while year in Germany, most of it in Oldenburg which is in the north, it's a sort of flat desolate part of Germany, I think. I transferred from the Signals to, what do you call it, a canteen, a sort of, leisure centre, I mean where soldiers come when they're not attached to their unit. An awful lot of what were known as DPs, displaced persons, in other words prisoners, you know, slave labour, were put, well were housed in this Oldenburg town and they were all in this desperate, well everybody in the town was in desperate kind of, selling; you could, you know, you had an issue of cigarettes and you could go and buy grand pianos for a packet of cigarettes, you know, it was totally weird. I didn't really want any part of that, but some people were trying to make a little bit of profit out of this.

And what were you doing?

Well I was sitting in a kind of information centre telling them what they could do, where they could go, where they could get this and that.

Telling English or German people?

Sorry?

English people or German people?

Oh no, Canadians.

Canadians.

Only Canadians. It was the Canadian Army, it was only for the Canadian Army, the Germans were not involved. No, and you see one didn't know...I mean one... In France every, all the civilians were your friends; in Germany you weren't, or, you know, you weren't permitted to mix in fact. So there wasn't much contact with the Germans except illegal, and there was curfew and you know, the whole thing. It was a boring year, and then I was finally demobilised to the sound of Dvorak's Symphony

to the New World as I walked out of the gate. It was a strange feeling, it was like walking out of prison.

What do you mean, it really was that music?

Literally they were broadcasting Dvorak's Symphony to the New World as I walked out of the camp gate for the last time. Suddenly faced with, I didn't know where the next meal was coming from.

And this was Oldenburg, Germany?

No, I was demobilised, no, I was shipped... Oh no, I had a period in England, I went to khaki university, studied philosophy for three months while waiting for demob, at khaki university in Watford.

Anyway, you were aware of this irony as you listened to this music as you left?

I was very aware, I certainly was. It was quite a strange...it was like walking out of prison, because as I say one suddenly was responsible for one's maintenance. And I had no idea, again, in what direction I was going to go. The Army I had, you know, we were given these tests, what are you suitable for and so on, and the Army said, 'Well you're suitable to teach, you are best equipped to be a teacher,' and that was all I had to go on really, and so that's what I did. It was a very undramatic war, and a very, I think, undramatic life as far as it goes.

So, you were then 29?

I was then 29 I guess, yes, quite right. With no future and no identity, no sense of identity.

But this is the way you describe it now; is that the way you thought of yourself then?

Well you see, no, I wasn't...I couldn't...I didn't have that kind of perspective.

Were you a happy-go-lucky kind of chap?

I don't think I was at all happy-go-lucky, I think I felt that I didn't know how to deal with the situation really. I mean I always had what had now, not the Crossways but what had now become Grafton Underwood, I could always go there and so I didn't, you know, it wasn't as though I had really to fend for myself.

No, apart from your family, did you have close friends to turn to?

No.

No?

No. The only people...

And no girlfriend to go back to?

And no girlfriends, no. No, I didn't. That's what I mean, it was...I...no, I had no idea of what life was going to be like really. It was a blank, the new world was a very new world. I might have been born into it that day, you know. I mean you see even then it took quite a few years before I...you see I went and started doing this teaching, and spent, well two or...two years in Pitlochry.

What, did you look in a newspaper and see an advert for a job and went up to Scotland?

I can't remember how I got that job. Could it have been through ads, or through some agency, some London agency? I toyed with the idea of reading medicine, but I felt it was a bit odd to start a course that was going to last for six or seven years after that. I kind of, I was lost.

You were an intelligent person who didn't know what to do.

That's right.

But you could have, because you were intelligent enough you could have taken up medicine, or anything you chose really.

I imagine I could have done, but I wasn't madly, you know, I didn't feel that it was a calling, so, and it seemed like a lot of work if you weren't sure about it. Yes, and also, oh I think I also did feel that I needed to have a job of some kind, a sort of, just to justify my existence. But I can't remember how I did get this job in Pitlochry, because it's certainly way out of my normal kind of range.

It was like in a boarding school?

I didn't know anyone up there. No, it's an interesting question, I don't know, I can't, honestly I can't remember. Mr Brown ran the school and his sister was the matron, and most of the children were, it was a boarding school and most of the children, their parents were mostly foreign, I mean were abroad.

What was it called?

Croftonloan[ph] It was about two miles outside of Pitlochry village and they had just begun to build the hydro-electric dam, which was quite interesting to watch. It was a very conventional prep school, we went to chapel on Sunday, a sort of school parade to chapel which us junior masters had to conduct, and back. And if you had a Sunday off it was the one day of the week when you were free, but it was, Pitlochry was absolutely shut, not a cafe, not a pub, not a cinema, nothing, it was Sunday. So it was a very Scottish experience in the sense of a Calvin Scotland. But I suppose it was quite a good prep school.

And you kind of taught yourself history again so that you could teach them.

Well then I really began to learn history.

So is that how you spent your spare time?

Really how I spent my spare time was reading up my history, it was; and it was, I mean it was very pleasant, we had one of the other junior masters. Mr James who was very much a born-again Christian and myself had a sort of apartment separate from the school, and the Northern Lights as we walked down, or back up from the main building up to our digs, I can remember the Northern Lights lighting our way on a few nights, and you know, things like that. And wonderful countryside, you know, walks on the moor, and making little fires, frying eggs. But this was only one day a fortnight or something on a Sunday. No, it was a fairly bleak period. I think, you know, I was getting interested in painting, and one of the reasons that I thought teaching would be interesting, or would be a good profession, was for the holidays. So while I was at Pitlochry I used to use the summers to paint, strictly as a hobby, but I used to, in the summer I would hitchhike down to Aix en Provence. I had decided that, because I didn't know anything about art I would have to learn... I had toyed with the idea of going to art school, but the art schools at that time were awful, I mean as a post-war experience you were treated like a schoolchild. You literally sat in wooden desks, children's wooden desks with inkwells, you know, and sloping tops, and...

So you had done a bit of research about art schools?

Well, what was it called, the ANDA or something, they had some name for the diploma you would get at the end of it.

So you were critical enough to know that that wasn't right for you?

At some point I did enrol. It may have been before I went teaching, I think it must have been. I did enrol at Goldsmiths and I was there for one term, and it was there that I met this John Copelands who is also a painter, South African, war veteran, and we both of us totally rejected the discipline that they were...

Do you mean the man who then became a photographer?

Yes, the man who became, who, first he became editor of 'Artforum' for several years, and then in his later years he became a photographer. Well I met him at Goldsmiths, but then I re-met him five years later when he made his...he was quite, he's a clever man, he made his money... You see he was South African so he had to establish him at all in London, and he bought very cheap, perhaps bomb damaged property and renovated it and resold it, and one of the houses that he bought was on Winchester Road, just next door to Swiss Cottage Library, and he turned that into a kind of studio. This is in the Fifties, the late Fifties. And, it was a kind of open studio. Denis Bowen, who ran the New Vision Park Gallery for a while was a friend of his and was a frequent visitor to this open studio, this house that was just used as a studio. And it was a very, it was a very exciting place to get involved in. We were all involved in American Abstract Expressionism at that time, and taking purple hearts and staying up all night and trying to forget we had a head at all, you know.

Now you've jumped on again.

Now...?

You've jumped on again.

I have.

Ten years.

I'm jumping, you're quite right.

But you met John Copelands in Goldsmiths for one term.

In Goldsmiths, yes, we were there for, I think John quit before the end of term.

But you had become a friend of his by then?

Yes, definitely, yes, definitely.

But you left Goldsmiths and went to Pitlochry?

Yes, yes.

Thinking about painting.

Well I mean Goldsmiths was a non-starter, and, yes I didn't...yes, I couldn't see any future, but I still did have a kind of desire I suppose to paint because I did take these holidays from teaching to the south of France, to what I call Cézanne country, trying to imagine how Cézanne, anyway from being in his environment, trying to paint like Cézanne.

And were you painting a bit like Cézanne?

Trying to. What little I understood Cézanne, which was very little.

Where had you even seen Cézanne?

My mother had bought a print and put it on the wall, a landscape. I must have been reading a bit. The Impressionists, my sister was mad about Gauguin. I was aware of the Impressionists. I didn't even, I wouldn't have identified Cézanne at that time as a Post-Impressionist.

Had you seen any paintings for real?

Of who?

Any real paintings.

No.

Had you gone to any art galleries?

Oh yes. Anglo-French. Yes, I had seen...yes I had seen some Cézanne originals, you're quite right, at the Tate. I don't think the Leicester Galleries ever put on a...they did put on a Cézanne show but not while I was around. Well the Leicester Gallery was one of the galleries that one would go to.

But, so you had begun to do that even before you went to Pitlochry?

Yes, I certainly was aware of the Anglo-French Art Centre and of the, well of Goldsmiths, yes, I was clearly orienting as a sort of hobby from teaching.

So this happened just after you came back from Germany?

Yes.

And perhaps when you were at khaki university you went to art galleries?

I don't think so. I didn't often come into London. London was a pretty dreary place, you know, it was all black paint, very few motorcars.

When did you go to the Tate Gallery then, or the Leicester Galleries?

The Tate Gallery wasn't a very...I can't remember being terribly impressed by the collection; they were showing all, you know, sort of Blake and English Romantics, and mainly, well mainly, all right, Romantics, or, I suppose you would call them Romantics because you're talking about... I don't remember being impressed by a show at the Tate Gallery. It's the kind of question I used to ask my art students, you know, the students when I was teaching at Corsham, as to why they became artists, and many of them couldn't answer that question, and I feel that I can't.

Well I'm just asking you a more simple question really, perhaps, which is, when you actually first started looking at paintings.

Cézanne particularly. The Impressionists generally.

And that was just at the end of the war that you began to look at paintings?

Oh no, that's not, that can't be true, because I certainly had a Gauguin print on the wall at Cambridge, a Gauguin not a Cézanne. No, I think I had been peripherally interested, oh I must have been, for much longer, but not at all actively, or not...no, I didn't think of myself as a painter certainly; at most as an amateur. But if I was going to be an amateur painter I wasn't going to...well I wanted to educate myself a little bit, but I didn't do it academically, I did it more by as it were adopting a painter that I liked; I didn't know why particularly but it appealed to me, and imitating the style as far as I could. Not literally copying the painting, which might have been a good thing to have done if I had gone to the National, which you could do in those days, but I didn't, I went to the source and tried to imagine that I was him, or whatever. Well that was the career. And I must say, they were not...I mean looked at in the way I'm describing them, I don't think they were very good, but looked at as paintings, they did have a certain intensity of purpose. I had decided to only draw lines that meant something in a sense, or when I put paint on it had to be, had to have the right...it had to be in the right position in terms of the rest of the painting. It was quite hard work. I used to...I settled on a place called Pertuis in the south of France, which is about twenty miles inland from the Mediterranean, and it's a very poor working-class town, in fact I think there's a prison there. And I used to, I stayed in some little lodging there and I would get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and hike out into the country, into the hills, which had kind of Cézanne-like pine trees and mountains and valleys, and stay there till evening, and then I would come back and have supper in the town, and go back and go to bed. So it was a very...

Intense.

Very intense, and monkish.

Did you talk to anybody?

Hardly anybody. I didn't know anybody in the town, and...no, I didn't.

And that was.....

End of F5081 Side A

F5081 Side B

And the painting, I think there's only one painting that survives from that period, the paint cracked off, but I really am rather sorry because I think it was a very intense moment really. But it still didn't make me feel, I still had to wait for this moment with L'Hote, with André L'Hote, before I was, before I saw that painting was really what I wanted to do. I still felt that I was cheating somehow, cheating. I don't know why you should use that word, that's the word I would use.

So, how often did you go down to Pertuis?

I think it was only twice. At least...I mean, and then suddenly it took me a long time. Once or twice I went, well, after I had met Marion I went to Dieppe and was waiting, Marion said she would join me, and I waited there for two weeks and she still didn't join me, so then I said, to hell with it and went on. But then I drifted through the Loire valley and, oh, through France, I mean hitchhiking, and it was a slow process but it didn't matter because I was in a different part of the country and I...and I was painting kind of watercolours at that point and painting rather experimentally, not really as intensely as when I was in Pertuis. Because I was in a sense on the move.

So, it sounds to me as if those two summers in Pertuis were the first time you really were passionate about something.

Yes. I certainly was, I certainly was, in retrospect. I didn't particularly realise it at the time, but yes, it meant, yes it was a very passionate period I suppose, it was.

And you didn't go back to Pitlochry?

No, I didn't. When he wrote to me I said...but this was later, I mean I had already decided painting was what I wanted. No, but I was teaching, I had a job then. Well, I... We're talking about the years '47 to '49 I think when I must have been in Pitlochry, and I think it must have been in 1949 when I met Marion for the first time through my sister, she had met my sister and brother-in-law on a train from Paris and

had borrowed 'Partisan Review' and returned it, and then became a friend of the family, and I met her when she was visiting Betty. And we went, we played tennis and we bicycled round London, no cars in those days, and... But it was a kind of, an affair, not very serious. And then this summer and I went off to Dieppe. Yes it's funny, I must have still been teaching at Pitlochry. Anyway I went off to Dieppe and she didn't join me, and when I came back she was there waiting, which surprised me because I had thought that it was the end of it, and, it must have been only about five months later we married, and that would have taken it to '52 - '51.

So, what happened to Pitlochry? You said to them, bye-bye?

Yes, I said to them bye-bye, for no good reason except that I didn't want to go back, so far away from London. I have to look at the...I made a little timetable of what I, of the years. I've totally forgotten the sequence of events of this period.

It sounds like you got more and more into painting.

Got...?

More into painting.

Yes I was more into painting, I was more into painting.

You must have made a decision at some point to take that up more seriously.

Oh I was. But I still didn't, I still felt like painting was a pastime, a fascinating hobby, but I couldn't justify painting as a career, to myself, because, well I thought, you know, I mean I couldn't...I couldn't earn a living by painting.

So when you left Pitlochry, what were you going to do next?

Let me see what I did do next. I started...well I met Marion. [PAUSE, LOOKING AT TIMETABLE] Sorry, here I am. Yes. After I met Marion I started theatre

design, I went as an apprentice scene painter to Bromley and painted sets for several months.

In the theatre?

In the theatre, yes, in Bromley Theatre, they had a theatre, I don't know if they still have. That was a strange period. We were living in Fitzjohn's Avenue where Marion had a flat before we were married, in fact we were living there before, yes, before we married.

So you lived together before you were married?

Yes.

Most...wasn't that quite unusual then?

I think it was not totally unusual but it was, yes, it probably wasn't...one didn't want to kind of advertise it, I think. But certainly, yes, we were living together, although I did have an address, I mean, alternative. That's right, I lived on Belsize Lane, which is not far away. But why, I mean I'm not quite sure, what puzzles me when you asks me is why I left Pitlochry when I did, apart from the fact that it was a long way from London, it was a bit kind of isolated, monastic.

Was it because you had fallen in love?

No I hadn't really fallen in love. I thought it was interesting kind of growing up. I don't know, it was a moment when I fell in love. It might have been this kind of, the frustration of her not coming to France when she said she was going to. I think it may have helped. I don't know, but I think it certainly got serious when I came back from France that summer and found her still there.

Still where?

Well still, I mean, when she didn't come I thought, well you know, that's the finish of it, so I didn't expect to meet her when I came back.

Did you think she would have gone back to America?

No I didn't really think that; I think she had decided not to go back to America. She wasn't getting on that well with her parents, I mean she got on well enough as long as they weren't on the doorstep. No I think she had decided to stay in England. In fact she was in the middle of an analysis which I think was keeping her here. I'm sure that she made me feel that in the end that painting was...she encouraged me to do what I wanted to do, but didn't dare to do in a sense, or didn't... Yes. I mean I thought, you know, she would be on the side of saying, well get a job and you know, and keep us, instead of which she said, you know, 'Do what you want to do to'. So she... Yes, without her I don't think I would have been able to make that jump.

So was she able to support herself?

Her parents were giving her a kind of allowance to live here.

So you didn't have to do the decent thing in the sense you had more freedom than...?

Yes I did, absolutely. We were both sort of surviving fairly comfortably really on our parents.

Did you have money from your parents too?

Yes, oh yes. I had one-eighth of my father's estate.

And that was enough to keep you going?

Just about, yes. Yes, I mean you know, it wasn't extravagant by any means, but it was enough that you could...yes it was.

So it was enough to pay a rent and buy your food.

Exactly, exactly, yes, exactly. It was. I had to learn to, you know, keep accounts and do all the things that everyone has to do. So that, yes, from that sense I was lucky. So, yes so when it came... I must say, it was rather an odd thing, I can't really fill in that period where we left, where I left Pitlochry and fell in love and started seriously living in London, or feeling that London was where I should be.

And is this when your kind of social base came through your sister's contacts?

When my social thing...?

Your social base was through your sister?

Well that's true, she always, I mean I did have a place to stay and she was always welcoming, it was quite a big house, full of children of course.

This was the sister who had been in America?

Yes, this is the American sister, yes. Audrey...well I think by 1950 Audrey had married this paediatrician, Bernard, and was living on Steele's Road. Yes, so, yes she had a flat there too, but it was rather small, or smaller than Betty's, so Betty had the place to stay.

And was it Betty who introduced you to a kind of new circle of people?

Well she...no, not really, not people that I was interested in.

So where did you meet the people that you were interested in?

I didn't.

You didn't? So it was you and Marion alone?

Well, Marion had various theatrical friends, Katie Michael I remember, who is an actress, Sonny Wax who was an agent, theatre agent, lawyer, and Sandra, and the Trillings who also were theatrical. No, I was sort of, yes, I was moving into a more theatrical environment really, and in fact it was Sonny Wax... What I did after Bromley, it was virtually through Sonny Wax who suggested I go to this school in Ealing to teach, and it was really an extraordinary experience. This was the school that Christopher Fry had taught English in, and Vernon Scannel had taught there. And they had an amazing science teacher whose name I can't remember but who is Hungarian. And, the headmaster was called, I'm not sure whether he was called Cook or Crook, but it turned out that he was...no he wasn't really a crook but he spent all the money that the school made on betting on the horses and the school went bankrupt two years after I, or a year I suppose, I don't know how long I taught there.

Was that another boys' prep school?

That was another prep school. No it wasn't a prep school, it went up to 16, up to 18.

So it was still boys.

No, mixed.

Mixed?

No I beg your pardon, quite right, boys. No you're quite right, it was boys, I was just trying to think. No it was a boys' prep school, and it was in a libertarian age, and it got into the 'Daily Mirror' because the headmaster beat a boy with a slipper, and he got calls from America saying - I mean from Paris, American parents - saying they needed their son to be disciplined, could he come to this school? And in fact the discipline wasn't...it wasn't at all ferocious, but I suppose this... You know, in the State schools there were laws against beating children who were coming in. So, it was an absolutely weird environment. I used to come...I wished we had kept a diary of all the things that went on there. When I would come home, it was quite a trek

from Fitzjohn's Avenue over to Ealing and then back, but I would come home, you know, with these stories of what had happened that day to Marion, and we had a whale of a time re-living the school history. However...

What was Marion doing?

I wish I could remember.

Did she work in the theatre?

Oh did...? No. No, I don't know how Sonny...I don't know how, what the connection. I mean Sonny was an agent for Christopher Fry, Sonny Wax, this man, and I suppose for Vernon Scannel who was also writing. I don't know what his connection was with Cook or Crook, how he...

But what was Marion's connection with him?

Oh, via the Trillings. The Trillings, Ossia Trilling was deep into theatre, he was writing a kind of history of theatre in England or something, I mean he just talked theatre all day long. He's not an agent, he's a reviewer, or was, he's dead, and his wife, Marie-Louise, is a Finnish girl who had quite a career in Finland before the war, but she was only Swedish speaking and so after the war she had no job there, so she came to England, met Ossia and married, and she still works from London with Finland and Sweden.

And how did Marion know them?

I don't know, I'll have to ask her.

At any rate Marion was not working...well Marion wasn't an actress or anything like that?

Well she came to England to read for a part, but with her American accent she didn't get it. She had theatrical aspirations, but I don't know how she knew the...it was the Trillings who were... Well and Katie Michael[ph], how she knew Katie Michael I'm not sure. I think through friends in America, I mean it's a kind of circuit of friends. Oh well, yes, that's right, when she...she first of all came to do some part in a film which took her to Rome, she was in Rome before she was in London and then she came on to London, and lived in Mayfair for a while in some actress's flat, I can't remember who.

So it was a glamorous life.

It was a glamorous life that she was leading, yes, so she obviously had contact with quite a lot of theatrical people. But I mean, somebody said of us that we were so alike that it was a bad...you know, we were too alike to be a good combination, and in some ways maybe she was right.

What did she mean, why are you alike?

Well Marion certainly had artistic aspirations; well I suppose that's not like I had. I suppose I had aspirations but I didn't know what they were; Marion at least did know what hers were. But we were neither of us really realising anything at the time we met. So I don't know really. Anyway, one of the best moments of our marriage for me, for Marion too I think, was when we both took a job in Barnstaple in a summer theatre. I was going to do the sets and she was one of the leading actresses in this company, and for the whole summer we were doing weekly rep, and it was a dream summer really because at lunchtime after they had done their rehearsing for the next week we went off to the sand dunes in Saunton and had some sun bathe and lunch, and then we would drift back for the evening performance. And my workshop was in a loft over a pub overlooking the cattle market, and on Friday's...and there was a door that you could open at the end of this loft and there was the cattle market, and all the farmers bringing in their cattle, and chattering away downstairs while I was busy painting the set or designing the next week's set. Though I couldn't paint the set, I had to wait... On Saturday they took, we all went into the theatre and took the set down.

And then you re-painted it?

And then had until Monday, 10 o'clock, to have the next set, and you know, they were big 18-foot flats so they were...it was quite a task to paint them. And the caretaker of the little theatre used to come in, he was a butcher who had his little shop on Butcher's Row, and she was...his wife, and she would bring in a great big steaming hot dinner at midnight on Saturday night to keep me going. And I had to go on painting until the thing was finished. No it must have been Sunday night, because the Saturday everyone was there, Sunday night, the theatre was more or less empty except for me. And she would bring in this great dinner. If you go and see that film 'Babe' you will see the kind of woman she was, she has a part in that film. Anyway, and so that was a marvellous moment.

So you moved from doing your kind of holiday Cézanne landscapes to painting huge theatre backdrops?

Yes.

Still without any kind of formal art training?

Well I had this time in Bromley. No, well I mean that wasn't a formal training but I was apprenticed, you pick up a... I don't think you can train to be an artist in an art school, I think it's more time to grow up, you know, I mean, I don't think painting is something you can teach by rule.

Well I imagine that for your generation it was probably an advantage not to have been to art school.

Well considering the sort of revolution that... You see I think, I mean the timing as far as I was concerned was incredible, to have had this period in Paris and to arrive in London just at the time that the Americans were sort of blowing people's minds, but having had just enough background to be able to appreciate it if you like. It was

challenging without too many backward glances. If I had already sort of accomplished a style as it were I would have been reluctant to change I would think.

Had you kept in contact with John Copelands?

Oh yes.

All the way through?

Oh yes, oh yes all the way through. Yes when we go to New York we see him. He's been rather ill actually this last winter.

But I mean in those, in the Fifties, between Goldsmiths and later, did you keep in contact with him?

Well no, no he disappeared out of my life until I bumped into him in Haverstock Hill where he was house-painting somebody's house, and... Yes, I've...yes, we've kept in contact on and off. I mean then in '61 or something he moved to America and so I only see him if I go to America really, he doesn't often come to London. When he does he comes here.

I was thinking that when you were working in Bromley...

That, he wasn't around then.

But in Bromley, this is, we're now talking early 1950s?

Yes, Bromley was right after we got married, it was the first job I had after we got married.

And that's 1950...

'51.

'51. At that time you presumably weren't meeting any professional painters?

No none at all. I didn't know anybody in London. No, you see I really didn't know London. I had been going to the Anglo-French, but it was very odd. I had met an Englishman there, Perry, not P-E-R-I but P-E-R-R-Y, who lived on Downshire Hill and who taught life drawing at the Anglo-French, and I had quite...I found him quite a good teacher. But I didn't have, I wasn't a regular student, I would go in to odd classes really, because I wasn't around in London long enough to enrol. That was a place, it was a very social place. I mean they had a little cafe and tables and, not unlike the Camden Art Centre today. But the contacts you made tended to be with other amateurs, professional painters didn't use it, and I think it was a great pity because I think they could have benefited.

So when did you first come into contact with a professional painter?

At St. Ives. Trevor Bell I would think. When we came back from Paris in '55, we spent a year in Barnstaple, in the country, while I was really trying to sort of assimilate what I had...my understanding of Cubism, which most Cubists would reject I think but nevertheless. And during, we used to take, well we had made a visit once or twice to St. Ives and we had spotted a painting that we liked in one of their open exhibitions, and it turned out to be by Trevor, and so then we met the Bells and... I don't remember. And he said, 'Why don't you come and live in St. Ives?' and the next year we did.

So until that point you had really been finding your own course all alone?

I didn't know any painter.

And when you...

No painter, no writer. I mean, I say it was the provincial upbringing, you know, that was remarkably lacking, I think.

But you were also working through Cézanne and Cubism totally by yourself?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well, yes, Cézanne, I can't explain why I like Cézanne, but Cézanne led me to the south of France which brought me into contact with L'Hote, which, as I say there was one week of revelation when I said, finished with all this, you know, teaching and everything, I want to be a painter.

So, but we haven't really talked about the week of revelation. I'm getting a little bit confused. When did that come along?

It must have been in '53 or...no, probably...the summer of '53, while I was teaching at Ealing, or you know, yes, while I was teaching at Ealing I went down to the south of France. Then, Marion wasn't with me on that occasion, or was she?

End of F5081 Side B

F5082 Side A

So, we are at the summer of 1953?

I think it must have been 4.

4. And you went down to the same town in France?

We went down to, yes, that's what I... Well we must... Oh I know, Marie-Louise and Ossia, we must have been visiting Trilling, this theatrical couple with whom we became really quite friendly, and they had a house in Menton, and we were invited to stay with them, which was marvellous, Menton was, it was before this horrible motorway they've built, I mean it was a terrible road but it was a lovely little town in those days. And I think it must have been that we were staying with them, although it's quite a long way to...it was La Ciotat, he has a summer house, it was a tiny village called Salcière which is five kilometres from La Ciotat, and he ran a summer school there.

L'Hote, we're talking about André L'Hote?

André L'Hote. And, I can't think how we happened to stumble on that course. He was running one of his summer schools, he ran two or three every summer, and the last one in the year was on the south coast. And he had a house in La Ciotat - in Salcière[ph], and he used to go out with his wife and students into the country and sit down. He would go, followed by his wife, carrying mattress, lunch, magazines behind him, and the students behind with their easels and everything. And I saw this procession, and I went to his house after the end of the day and he said, 'Yes, you can join if you want.' He only speaks French. His wife speaks some English but not very good. Anyway, I gathered that we could come along, or that I could come along, and join the class. And it was amazing. He would sit down, he would choose a spot. He was a funny little man, and he would...yes, and he would sit down, put down his easel and paint. His wife would sit down beside him, feed him lunch, open, I forget what the magazine was, it was quite a literary magazine, and read to him while he painted.

The students looked after themselves, they sat down in the same area and painted the landscape. On Saturday they would all gather in his house and he would criticise their work, and he would criticise it, well not as viciously as he did in Paris but still pretty, you know... You can't do that, and he would make a great paint mark on their careful painting, you know. But he would be talking so fast I couldn't really understand, but I did...that's right, I think we met...no we didn't. Anyway there was somebody in that group who could speak English and who translated more or less what he was saying. But, I mean basically what I realised was that painting the landscape wasn't respecting the space of the landscape, which I had always been trying to do, but respecting the space of the wall if you like. A painting was something different from the landscape, basically. So in other words I stopped being an illusionistic painter really, and it was...it suddenly made painting respectable; it's difficult to say why. I distrusted illusionism, and I trusted the notion of construction I suppose. But it...I mean it was exciting at the time but I didn't realise quite how exciting, so that it was another nine months - well, it took some arranging to go and join his atelier in Paris. But Marion, this is where Marion's encouragement, I might not have done it if Marion hadn't encouraged me to go on, to arrange life so that I could go to Paris and study with L'Hote. And that was between I suppose September '54 and the spring of, I think it was March I went to Paris in the end in '55, to the Bateau Serb[ph], which was owned by Alfred Green[ph] used to run the Anglo-French Arts, Centre which had foundered for lack of funds round about 1950 I think and he had bought a London barge and sailed it over to Paris during a boat show, moored it opposite the Plâce de la Concorde as a part of the boat show, and never moved it. So he fell into trouble with the civic authorities, they cut off his electricity, they cut off his water, but he didn't move. And eventually a television company became interested in the boat, and this was for two or three years while he was surviving, he had clochards come and fill the tank once a week, and lived on oil lamps. But a wonderful environment in the middle of Paris.

And you went to live there?

Yes, for the first month I was in Paris I lived there, while I looked around for a place to live. It was a lovely experience. And they are charming people. But anyway, the

boat sank on them. When the television company finally got them permission to stay there, they said, 'Now we can go and get a re-fit,' and they had to bring it back to Ipswich. And they brought it back, they had it re-fitted, and on the way back to France it sprang a leak and sank. And it was loaded with contraband paint, they were agents for Windsor & Newton paint. [LAUGHS]

Oh dear!

It was very sad. But they went on and built a huge place in the south of France, in Cavaillon, or near Cavaillon. They bought a whole village with immense trouble, they had to buy from 25 different claimants. This was a village that had been derelict since the Albigensian crusade, but the new village was in the valley, founded 1200 or something, that was the new village, and all the people who claimed houses were living in this new village, and they had a hell of a time going and getting legal documents.

So, if we stop there we can resume with Paris next time.

[This is Friday March the 29th, the second session interviewing with Michael Kidner in his house in Hampstead Hill Gardens.]

So, at the end of the last meeting we got to you having gone to André L'Hote's summer school.

Right. Only to his summer school, not to Paris?

No not really to Paris. But...

Oh that was...that was a great period.

But you have other things to say first.

Well, yes, I was going to...I was thinking about our last meeting, and I felt disappointed, or, I felt unsatisfactory about it, because I had been falling into the trap that you in fact pointed out during the talk, where you said I seem to have been directed by other people or events outside myself, and having had no, in a way no say. I mean I think that was absolutely true, I mean I didn't have a goal, and...you know, the masters at Bedales said, 'Go to university,' well I took their advice. If I go to the doctor I don't look for a second opinion but I think, oh well, he knows better than I do. So I tended...in life I do tend to do what I'm supposed to do.

But you could say, I mean I got the impression that you had a very happy childhood...

Yes, certainly.

With no doubts or worries, and maybe that left you ready at the right moment to be confident enough to take on something of your own. Just, it seemed to take a long time to come.

Yes. There was no direction in my childhood. I mean the fact that my father died when I was 14 did take away the sort of authority in the family, and my mother was far more liberal in her thinking. What rather surprises me about them in recollection is how unaware of any internal conflict I was at that time.

But then, there may not have been internal conflict.

Well, no I don't think there was really, but they were leading pretty separate lives. I mean my father was living a very public spirited life really, I mean he was...you know, he was a successful businessman and he took part in civic affairs, and he wasn't very much at home, you know, I would only see him very briefly at breakfast time and nothing was said at that time, and then he would come home and have high tea at 5 o'clock in the evening before, well we had already had our tea and we were going to bed. So I hardly saw him. And I always had a slight suspicion that he didn't approve of me very much, I don't know quite why, except that I was taken away and looked after by the women, and so had very little contact with him. And I think that might

have been one of the reasons why I chose myself, this was my decision, to go to Pangbourne, and it was in my opinion looking back a disastrous opinion.

Was that, do you mean an effort to feed some respect from your father?

Yes, partly, to be a bit more manly, what I imagined was manly.

One of the things that struck me was, in some ways you seemed to have this idyllic childhood without worries, and you said you didn't have a strong sense of what you wanted to do.

Right.

But the thing that surprised me was that you also gave the impression of yourself as being quite alone, not particularly extrovert, not with lots of friends, quite isolated.

No, this is...this was another feature. It's very true, I mean we had this rather big garden with a fence all round it, and that was my world.

Because I would have thought that possibly someone who had a happy confidence-giving home would have had a sunny disposition and naturally attracted friends. But you didn't give the impression of having a lot of friends.

No. When...well the first school I went to I had a lot of friends, this is in fact when I went away to Gresham's. Yes, I was surrounded by friends. But after that, I had friends through prep school, but then in Pangbourne I became very isolated and very turned-in, and...yes I think maybe that habit persisted thereafter, I'm not sure why really. Well partly I think it was this sense of... You see in the art world I did take responsibility for more or less everything, but in the real world I was buffeted around rather in a sense, or accepted what the real world was, what was happening.

I think that if someone listened to the last interview we did they might come to a conclusion which might be too simplistic, but you kind of hinted that it was when you met Marion, that there was a kind of pre-Marion period and a post-Marion period...

Yes.

...which was that she made things start happen.

Marion you see did encourage me to go to Paris, I don't think I would have gone on my own, off my own account, but she was all for going into the art world really, or into the art side of me. Because, I mean she herself was an actress, and so she was rather on the side of the arts, and I, well I did have one, my elder sister who was also encouraging me in that direction. But not...it was not really until I met Marion and as it were cut off from the family to some extent that I came into myself.

And is that because she gave you the confidence to...

Yes. I think so.

...look outwards rather than inwards.

Well, I don't know whether I would say look outwards. Maybe look more inwards.

So it wasn't that you had been too introspective previously?

Oh gosh I don't know. I suppose I've always been a bit introspective, yes I have, but...you know, if you're introspective and you don't connect with the world, then the world directs you in spite of your, you know, I mean against your introspection if you like. I think there was something like that. The notion, I'm always horrified by my 10-year-old infatuation with this Arctic explorer, Wilson, who was, in fact he was I think a biologist or a doctor, but he went on this expedition, brave man, braving the world and so on, which is, you know, part of the thing that led me to Pangbourne, it was that ambition to be a worldly person, which I wasn't suited to be, I think.

When did you drop that infatuation? It didn't last so long, did it?

Pangbourne saw me out of it.

Yes.

Absolutely. And that was a pretty grinding experience.

But, was the next driving passion then in fact the Cézanne experience in Mont Sainte-Victoire, was that the next time you became obsessive?

Yes, I mean, yes. Definitely not until I met André L'Hote really. You see I had been dabbling in painting, well I suppose in some ways a bit more than dabbling, I mean while I was teaching I was going off to the south of France to get into Cézanne country, and I suppose I was perhaps a little bit more sophisticated than I remember being at the time, but it still, I was unconvinced by my understanding of Cézanne, who I had adopted as a model. I wasn't engaged fully in art, up until this one week that seemed to be like a revelation.

So, after that week, did you go back to London, and then pack up and go to Paris?

Well I was...I was asking Marion about this. She says I met L'Hote before I met her, because certainly she wasn't around at that moment, so I'm a little confused about the timing, but after meeting L'Hote I was much more seriously interested in painting, and I told her, you know, it would be marvellous to go and spend more time at his atelier, and because we had these friends in Paris it made the first step fairly simple.

So what did you do, you packed up your things and...?

Yes.

Took a boat.

Well first of all I contacted them and they said, 'You can come and stay on the barge,' and so I did, and then I went out and looked for a place to live so that then Marion could come, and so after about a month she came over and joined me and we lived in the Rue de Seine.

In the Rue de Seine?

Yes.

How?

It was lovely. In those days as you know, it's changed now, the whole movement has shifted over.

So, this was 1950...?

'54 or '55, I'm not sure, '54 or '55.

And you found an apartment, a studio flat or...?

Well no, we had a room on the top floor of a tiny little hotel, the Hotel Pyrénées.

The Hotel Pyrénées.

Which is no longer there. On the Rue du Seine for, you know, like five francs a night or something.

And you lived there together?

And we lived there...no, we lived there for almost a year. And we were eating in all these little restaurants, these little student restaurants as you know.

Yes.

And we had this one very good friend, Ahmed Segrue, who was an Egyptian but he was studying with L'Hote, and in fact was L'Hote's kind of master pupil, painting pictures very much like L'Hote at that time.

Where was L'Hote's atelier?

In...yes, the station, Montparnasse, above the station; it was above a music hall. It was a marvellous rambly place with a great wood-burning stove, you know, and the smell of paint, and people just came in and went either for a day or a month or a week. It's the French atelier system, and if you didn't like him you went on to the Grande Chaumiere and, you know, or the Julienne Academy or...

Yes. And were you quite regular in attending?

No, not... For the first few months I was pretty regular, and then gradually, once we moved out to Lamo Boileau[ph], which is close to the Bois de Boulogne, into Mortensen's studio, then Ahmed used to come over to the studio and we used to paint.

Is this Richard Mortensen?

Yes.

The sculptor from Denmark?

He's dead now, I think. He was the grand old man of Danish painting.

Danish, painting, yes.

But he was, at the time he was Denise René's lover, and her number one painter; Vasarely had kind of faded out of the picture a bit, although he was still important in her...

Well when you arrived in Paris you knew no artists.

We didn't know anybody really.

So how did you get from...?

Connect.

...get from there to knowing all these people?

Very much by chance. I don't know. I mean Denise René was pretty important by this time already in Paris. She had a gallery just off the Champs-Élysée.

Did you go and introduce yourself to her?

Sorry?

Did you introduce yourself to her?

No. It was really on account of Mortensen that we met her, because he...she had negotiated this studio for him. It was in dispute, you know, in legal dispute. His landlady was trying to get him out, and so they were fighting this case, and since he didn't like the situation, we met him by sheer chance in the south of France, he just said, 'Well you can have my studio'. And of course we leapt at it, and went. And we didn't have to see the landlady, Madame De Chmer[ph], because we were kind of persona non grata really, although we did eventually meet her and she was, you know, she was a very, a white Russian who had married a Swiss banker or something.

So this was like a year after you had arrived in Paris?

This was almost a year after we had arrived in Paris, or...

So, in the beginning you went to the L'Hote school very kind of green, knowing nobody, just...

Yes. Except that I knew I wanted to go to L'Hote. I mean my day was literally between L'Hotel Pyrénées and Montparnasse, which was just a nice little walk.

Yes. And, was he a good teacher in the end?

No, I hadn't done any...had I done?

No, was L'Hote a good teacher?

Well I couldn't understand, he spoke very fast and very explosively. He was a proud little man. He was a very good critic I think, and he wrote a couple of quite important books I think at the time, which I read and found useful. But it was really through Ahmed that I could understand what he was saying.

And who is this?

This is this Egyptian student of his, who spoke English like I do but who was in fact Egyptian. He went back to Egypt and, oh, I haven't seen him since then, since this time, but friends of mine went and visited him, he's living on a lake somewhere outside of Cairo.

And he's called Ahmed...?

Sorry?

His name, his surname.

Segrue, Segrue, funny... I've got a couple of his paintings upstairs, they look...well it's a period of Piñon[ph], Estève[ph], sort of, Picasso was still very important.

Yes. So, I suppose what I'm wondering is, when you arrived you were almost a Sunday painter or an amateur painter.

Yes, absolutely.

And you had been painting landscapes.

That's right. And so this whole time in Paris, there was a lot going on that simply went over my head; I wasn't interested in Picasso or these people.

And what did you paint when you got to L'Hote's school?

Well, sort of abstracted figures, Cubist inspired. L'Hote was very keen on the Arabesque, which is a sort of, you know, rather decorative interpretation of Cubism, and I was very...you know, I was painting figurative, figuratively-based Cubist-inspired paintings really.

With a model, was there a model?

Well, on one of our excursions, this is curious, we...it was night time and we were in some sort of alley, and sticking out of a rubbish bin were two beautiful American boots on legs, apparently. And we really quite nervously opened the thing, and it was a life-size dummy, dummy's model, fully dressed in American garb. And so we took it out of the dustbin and put it in the boot of the car, we had a Morris Minor, and felt rather as though anyone looking at us would think we were disposing of a body, you know. And we brought this back to the studio, and we used this as a model for quite a while, and at one time Madame De Chmer[ph]n we were out, we discovered she would come and poke around our things, though I don't quite know what she was looking for. Anyway we thought we would give her a scare. So we hung this body just inside the door as though it had hung itself. And...not a very...we thought it was funny, but anyway, she obviously discovered this thing, and we got a sort of imperious telephone call, `Would Mr Kidner come over to Madame De Chmer[ph]nd so I went over, and she said, `You should be more careful with your things. Gypsies

are about, they might steal.' That's all she said, she didn't mention the model. But that was her retribution. She was an imperious 80-year old white Russian, very, rather an impressive woman, and she was the friend of Madame Kandinsky's in fact, they both lived in that part of Paris.

And did L'Hote use models?

Sorry, no not L'Hote.

Did André L'Hote use models though? When you went to his school did you draw from...?

Oh no, he had life models.

Life models.

All the time, permanently.

So your day-to-day work there was drawing after a life model?

Yes it was definitely with life models, absolutely. Well sometimes I would go upstairs and use a still life, but most of the time I worked from a model.

And he would occasionally come round and say something?

Once a week.

Once a week. So mostly you just got on with your work yourself?

Absolutely, oh yes.

And apart from your Egyptian friend, were there other people there who were interesting to meet?

Oh there were a lot of other people, quite a lot of them...well, a number of American GIs. Yes, all, everybody, I mean it was very international, and you know, they would come, as I say, maybe for a day, maybe for a week, maybe for a month.

Anyone who later became known as a painter?

I wouldn't be particularly interested in where they had come from. But he had this rather charming.....

End of F5082 Side A

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.....still I think at that time.

How did you then go from painting in L'Hote's school to understanding which painting you were interested in and getting a sense of what was happening in Paris?

Well, I mean there was an exhibition of seven Cubist painters, and it was...I mean that in a sense was a revelation, that Cubism was... You see Cubism... I'm sure there were lots of exhibitions. There was, oh, somebody doing Tachist painting, Kau Wu Ki[ph] or someone, who...no.

Zau Wu Ki[ph]?

Sorry?

Zau Wu Ki[ph]?

Yes, I think that was it. I think he came over to London. Who was the French Tachist painter who was sort of very theatrical? He came to the Marlborough and did an exhibition of, rushing at the canvas like a matador, and... Things like that were going on. And of course, yes, Cobra, gosh, yes, that gallery. Well these things went completely over my head, I wasn't interested.

But did you go and see them in the galleries, did you know...?

Oh yes, went to see them.

So someone, people told you where to go to look at paintings.

Yes, well in Paris you can't help it, I mean the Left Bank where we were living, you know, there's a gallery wherever you go, so you can't help but see. But you know, I thought this was just nonsense scribble at the time. Yes, I mean, early...oh God!

Dubuffet. Well Buffet was the great man at the time, but Dubuffet was painting kind of, what do you call these...coke, or things that looked rather like lumps of coke on a white ground, black on a white ground, and I thought that's ridiculous, it's...I only adopted sort of, very anti.

So you at that point were still looking to Cubism?

I was...yes I was literally looking at Cubism quite concentratedly really. And you see for a year, when we left Paris and we went back to live in Devon, that was a very isolated year, because we were in, right in the country, but basically I was trying to digest, I was trying to handle flat space and not abandon figuration, and this has proved to be a pretty impossible task but I struggled with it as long as we were in Devon and was painting kind of beach scenes, cork on the sand or something like that, and not really able to make a lot of sense of it, or at least not able to...yes, I was trying. And then taking a trip over to St. Ives and meeting this painter, Trevor Bell, and then deciding, well we had to go to St. Ives, so spending, not very long, six months I suppose, in St. Ives, getting to know, well getting to know Roger Hilton, Terry Frost, and Trevor.

So, although you were in Paris in a very interesting moment, are you saying almost that it brushed, it went past you because you weren't ready for it?

Well I'm sure, yes, if I had been more mature I would have possibly made more use of Cobra. Cobra was an interesting group, Jorn and Appel. Yes. I don't know that I...I didn't...I never felt that I wasted Paris, I thought it was terribly important to get this sort of Cubist period in.

But you were looking backwards rather than at what was happening at your own time.

Oh yes, oh yes, I definitely was. I was learning.

Yes. But presumably that suited L'Hote, I mean someone like L'Hote was still looking to Cubism himself.

Yes, he was really. I mean, yes, if one sees what was happening. You see we weren't...American painting hadn't, certainly hadn't come to Paris really. There was a gallery, one gallery that was showing one or two American paintings, and, yes, we met Yvonne Hagan who was an American critic and had a Sam Francis on her wall; I thought it was an unprimed canvas when I went in, but it was in fact a Sam Francis. And what's her name, Jenkins, who made something of a name as an Expressionist painter, American, whom we met in her flat. But all these things I ignored really, or, you know, I looked at but I couldn't accommodate.

So this exhibition you mentioned of seven Cubist painters, where was that and who was in it?

I can't remember all the people. Metzinger, I remember Metzinger. Oh God! Léger probably. I can't remember who they were quite honestly. And Picasso had an exhibition of paintings from Russia at the time, which was very impressive, of the Cubist paintings, but they were his later Cubists, they weren't his really analytic Cubist paintings, they were his more figurative paintings really.

So which galleries were showing work that was interesting for you at that point?

Well anything that was to do with Cubism was interesting.

And were would they...?

Anything that extended to the sort of American scene, Expressionism, Cobra, and Fautrier and Soulage, you know, they were all around. Yes, and also the man who took drugs, what...he died quite young, but he made paintings that attracted attention, in Paris, but which I couldn't and didn't find useful.

And, although you came in contact with Denise René, were you interested in the kind of artists she was showing?

She never said so. No, I couldn't possibly have been, I was far too primitive, I mean far too behind the times for her.

And did you like what she showed?

Not particularly. I realised that it was important what she was showing. You see Mortensen himself was totally dedicated to Kandinsky; I think that's probably how he came to find the studio. All his drawings were derived from his analysis of Kandinsky, whom I...Kandinsky was a name that...because he wasn't the school of Paris was not well known at all in Paris, or in London. It's very hard to realise how little of what we now call sort of modern painting was actually around at that time. I mean there were just the beginnings but they were regarded much as I was regarding them I think, as sort of nonsense.

Yes. But, I suppose I was thinking that Denise René for instance would...later on what you and she might be seen to be quite complementary, but this was...

Not at that time. No, we didn't...I mean apart from business of the studio we had very little contact with her herself; we would go to her galleries, I mean to her exhibitions, but wouldn't really see much of her, you know, gallery owners tend to sit in the back room. But we did, you know, she did...I don't know how it came about that we got to some of her dinners in these sort of Russian restaurants off the Champs-Élysées, which were very nice affairs.

So how long were you in Paris for altogether?

I suppose it must have been about eighteen months.

And when you left, did you leave feeling that you had made a certain circle of friends?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well, yes, but foreign friends, friends who, like us, were not from Paris. We didn't make...well we had...yes we had one French friend, who

was really a friend of Ahmed's, but, no, we... I don't...I mean yes, we left partly over this studio business. I think I felt that I had got all I could out of Cubism, and I didn't really know what staying in Paris, what it would do for me. In fact it was a good decision because really what happened after that was more in London than in Paris. It was the Americans.

Yes.

But, of course, I mean I had...I don't even know whether I had heard of the Bauhaus, I must have probably heard of it but I certainly had no idea of what it meant at that time.

So, you left Paris but without feeling that you were attached to a particular circle of painters?

Yes, really.

You were still looking really?

I was definitely looking, oh yes. I still felt a student, you know, I still knew I was a student, and trying to learn, and wondering what followed Cubism really.

And this is when you went to Devon?

And this is when...well yes, first we went to Devon but this was when we really went to St. Ives.

Why was it Devon, how come?

Only because I had a brother, and he had a cottage and he said, 'Come and stay in the cottage.' A very primitive cottage, we pumped the water and lit the oil lamps. A very physical existence.

And were you still living off the small allowance that your parents gave you?

Yes, indeed. Well inheritance. We were each given an independent inheritance, which was...you know, it wasn't very much but it was just about enough to live on.

And it gave you this time for thinking.

Absolutely, absolutely, oh yes. Very...I suppose, I mean in a way it was quite wasteful. I don't really think that an artist can...I think an artist needs to live in a town, or in a city really, like Paris, London, New York, Berlin, any big city where there's a lot going on. You don't...well I wouldn't have developed at all without outside influence or...

But what about St. Ives then?

Well it was fairly [INAUDIBLE]. It was all abstracting from the landscape in the generally sort of Cubist way which more and more, I mean, I suppose Lanyon has emerged, I must say I do respect his work. But he was a rather remote figure; he was the only real Cornishman in St. Ives, that he adopted that attitude. No, the people who were most accessible were Roger Hilton and Terry and Trevor above all, and Karl Weschke, they were the people I knew best after being down there. And, well, yes Trevor, Trevor was good. He went in a totally different direction from myself in the end, but he was a very good friend and a useful companion. And, I mean, he had this cottage on the cliff above Henry Moore's beach as we called it, and it was way out of St. Ives, about four or five miles out, and... Yes, we had a good time in St. Ives.

Did you stay in Trevor Bell's cottage?

Yes we did, first of all, and then eventually we moved into St. Ives, into, Bruce Taylor had a big place in the middle of St. Ives and we rented a room from him, which wasn't nearly as nice as the cottage but it was a base.

How long were you there for?

Not very many months, for about six. We seemed to come and go a lot. I've been looking through a diary and all it says is, you know, 'Left for St. Ives,' 'Came back from St. Ives'.

And where were you coming and going to?

London.

To London?

Oh yes. We had a flat, a room really, on Fitzjohn's Avenue.

That's what you had had before you had gone to Paris?

Yes, and we kept it.

You kept it?

And we kept it on. And then eventually we, in '57 we bought a house in Belsize Square. Amazing, £4,000 for a three-storey, four-storey house which, I mean, it made more money than I would ever make.

Yes. So, was it in St. Ives that you began to find your feet?

No.

No?

Well I suppose if I had realised it, I might have been. I was trying to... I certainly was beginning to get into truly abstract work as opposed to... I was still thinking of balances and taking balances from nature if you like, or symmetry, but... Oh I think

that may be Monica. Anyway, but yes, I was... I suppose I was, but without really realising it, you know, I mean I was making these rather crazy experiments without really knowing quite what I was trying to do with them, not being at all sure what they meant or what they were about.

But you were no longer using...

It was grouping.

You weren't using landscape any more?

It was in a sort of intermediate stage. Sometimes I could abandon it but other times I would come back to it. In a way, I would have said it was still really based on landscape, on the sense of landscape, even though the landscape kind of disappeared.

But whereas in the south of France you had actually gone to Mont Sainte-Victoire and painted through the day...

That's right.

In St. Ives you...

No, in St. Ives...well, the only painting...yes I recollect a curious painting, it was...I know it was ochre, orange and pink. It was really a colour abstract but I thought of it as being landscape. No one would have recognised it. But it was...two things influenced it. One was a sense that the topless sky is more distanced, so in order to counteract the space of the sky you needed to make it come up to the picture plane. Equally the foreground had to be pushed back. And I found that, you know, arranging colours in this way, do you see what I mean, there were three, there was this sort of middle ground, the background and the foreground, and relating this to colour made it easier to cope with these shapes. In fact colour became a way of coping with figuration, or, you know, in a sense getting rid of figuration. You could manipulate it more easily.

Did you paint in the cottage then?

No. Where did I paint in St. Ives? I painted in the room in Fore Street. I guess I wasn't doing much painting when we...maybe mostly drawing.

And did you actually draw from the landscape, in the landscape?

No, not really, from memory, from feeling of the landscape, which is very dramatic along that coast; three-quarters sky and a quarter land. Sky and sea and light reflections in the water, it's an extraordinary landscape. And Brian Winter who had a cottage way up on the top next to an ancient Stone Age circle with a raven that he kept, I mean it was full of tin mines and history, it was a very romantic landscape, although when I say romantic it's not sweet romantic, it's rather dour romantic.

Yes. Did you get involved in all the Penworth Society and...?

Mildly. I showed pictures in them, I can't remember what they were now, but yes I did, there were sort of local artists' exhibitions.

Yes. But did you feel there was a group of artists in St. Ives that was really quite stimulating, or was it more individuals? Did you meet them separately or together?

Well, I think I was experimenting rather on my own, in a sense alert to what was going on but not...I didn't pick up as it were a model in St. Ives that I could... I suppose Roger Hilton would have been the nearest, and at that, I mean he went through many phases in his painting, and at that time he was referring to a pre-war experience of Paris and to...but to more abstract painting than anyone - well I think Heron claims to have been doing the same sort of thing, but he was again a rather remote figure on top of a hill and he didn't mix with most of us down the hill. Although, I mean, yes, Deborah his wife was very friendly, but not as far as painting was concerned.

And did you meet together, all the painters down the hill?

No, not...it was...there were a lot of parties and pubs around where you bumped into people, but we didn't have... No, we didn't have many. I mean, the evening, say, I don't know where Roger Hilton was living at the time, usually with another artist, he didn't...I don't remember him having any permanent place down there, but he was the best, the most interesting person to hear talking about painting; very sharp, very insightful I would have thought, at this time. Yes, the Porthmeor Studios was a very, there were several artists. Heron had inherited Ben Nicholson's studio I think the year we, just a month or two before we came; Ben had gone to live in Switzerland and Heron had inherited the best Porthmeor studio, and Terry had a studio there, and I don't remember who else. Everyone was ambitious to get studios in Porthmeor, which overlooked...Trevor Bell eventually got one. You could take a ladder from your studio window straight down onto the beach and into the sea, they were nice studios. But, I never felt as kind of attached to St. Ives as I did to Paris, in the sense that I was learning a lot. I suppose, I was in a sense making a first few strides on my own.

Because, presumably you were in a bit of a kind of goldfish bowl, that people would be watching what you were doing in St. Ives.

I don't think so.

No?

I was far too unknown really. I mean you see most of them were already fairly well...Waddington had just opened, the young Waddington had just opened his gallery, I think it must have been about then, because Trevor was one of the youngest painters taken on by Waddington at this time.

So, do you mean you were just a bit of a hanger-on?

I was really, yes, a hanger-on, exactly, I was.

Making some sketches...

And really, you know, not a part of the St. Ives scene. A friend of Trevor's, or, something like that. And Brian Wall was there, we became very good friends with Brian, and Willy Barnes Graham.

But nevertheless this must have been the first time you were really talking to artists?

Yes it was, absolutely. And they were artists who were equally outside London. When we went back to London in '57 and moved into this house in Belsize Square we really did know nobody working in London. I mean Roger Hilton, yes, people... Eventually, you know, Brian moved into London, Brian Wall, but there was... And of course I had met up with Copelands, John Copelands, from Goldsmiths days. They were the people, the only people we knew in London, and they weren't really much in London at all.

So why did you go back to London?

I don't know. Well because I wasn't in love with St. Ives, I didn't feel rooted in St. Ives at all, but it did seem to be, I mean, we could have gone anywhere in a sense, but London seemed to me the most obvious, and we did have a place in London.

What was Marion doing all this time?

Being...well in France she went to the Alliance Francaise and studied, and, not doing very much really, I mean not in any practical sense. Well, trying to learn French. And I mean, you know, the French music hall was absolutely marvellous, I think, and there was this funny little club called the Fontaine de Quatre Saisons, which did the most original skits, really remarkable I think, I still do. There was quite a...you know, there was enough going on I think that she... But she was not, she never got, she never felt any inclination to paint, I think.

But she wasn't working as an actress at all?

No. I think she was...she did have...I mean after Barnstaple where she was doing rep, her American accent was a distinct disadvantage to her if she was trying to find jobs in London. And it was the time of 'Look Back in Anger' and you know, some very fascinating plays.

So she was essentially enjoying herself and being a companion to you?

I would say.

Were you married by this point?

Yes.

Yes.

Oh yes, we were. Yes, and she, I mean yes, she certainly, because she made a very good atmosphere. I mean when we had this big studio, Mortensen's studio, she would entertain very well, you know, friends who would come in. Yes, she was living more or less an artist's wife existence. And, I mean I'm afraid this has been true all along, she hasn't really...well found a career. She's marvellous, I think, at advising other people who've got problems and troubles telling them what they might do, that kind of thing, she's very good, and imaginative in that sense, but she's not very good at....

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At the moment, now that she is, I mean she's away in New York, but before she left she seemed to be more concerned stocking the fridge or worrying about what I was going to be eating and doing than about herself, and I think this has been rather the pattern of her life, which is that... You know, sometimes it's a bit of a responsibility to feel that; you know, sometimes I wish she would strike out more independently, but she hasn't.

But she's looked after you and made a nice atmosphere for you both to exist in.

Absolutely marvellous, yes, she's been...possibly too supportive. No, I don't know, because she can be very critical too when we are alone, but in company she overdoes the support sometimes, I think.

Of you?

Of me. [LAUGHS]

Oh!

She feels I'm not very good at supporting myself so she does it.

But I suppose, I mean that wasn't so unusual in those days, that once a woman got married they looked after their husband.

Of course, we adopted a son in 1962, this was after we'd been in London a few years, a marvellous boy who was killed in 1983 in a car accident, or a motor bicycle accident actually. But he was a totally, I mean her life was very much involved in his, at least for the first years. I think we messed him up badly by changing his school. We were torn between State and private, and we kept switching from one to the other and it was bad, a bad...bad for him. I do think that within reason it's important to

leave a child in one school, you know, because changing schools is like changing worlds, you go back a year every time you...

This was after your own experience, because you had changed a lot.

Well, this is in some sense where Marion and I had arguments. I would have wanted to leave him in the first school we chose, which wasn't perfect but it wasn't bad, but she was more anxious to change him, having come from America, and so we changed him to a State school and then there were all sorts of teachers' strikes, and they were learning to read, not alphabetically, sight reading, the new Nuffield... And then he went back to another school and he went back to reading, you know, b-a-t sort of stuff. And so he got really confused with his education, but he was very bright, imaginative, well charismatic, he had thousands of friends.

Did you adopt him as a baby?

Absolutely, yes, two weeks old.

Two weeks old?

I mean, no, earlier than that, ten days old. No, the first time I, the first I saw of him, Marion went up to Leeds to get him and brought him back in a carrier bag, and the first I saw of him, she got off the train with this carrier bag, and we walked up the platform with this carrier bag. But he was walking at the age of nine months, he was a very physically active child with a very kind of quick thinking mind, and I think rather artistic, although I never felt like encouraging him to follow an artist's career, because I thought it would be, it would really have to come from him if he was going to be, if he was going to follow that trend. But he did make some very extraordinary drawings when he was quite young.

So he was with you for twenty years?

Yes.

He died when he was 21 or something?

No, actually he was 19. Yes, it was a terrible shock. Marion was in America, and a policeman came to the door and said, 'I've got bad news.' It wasn't the first time the police had come to the door, he wasn't exactly a law keeper, but, so when I saw the policeman I thought, oh God! he's up to some mischief, but it wasn't. And, it was awful, I was alone in the house, and I just remember feeling...having to call Marion, who had only just arrived to visit her mother in the States, and break the news. But then I sat absolutely frozen for the whole evening. And then a friend of Og's, one of Og's, the mother of one of Og's friends came around and made some hot soup and gradually I, well, learned to live with it. The funeral was really, we had him brought back here to this room actually, and he was in this room for three days before he was buried, and that was a very good thing. It allowed us to sort of take it in more gently. And then when he was buried, it was absolutely incredible the number of people, the church was completely full, and his girlfriend at the time climbed up on the coffin and kissed it, and kissed him before it went off into the cremation, into the furnace. No, he was lovely. I feel guilty about this business of his education, that I allowed Marion to overrule my judgement on that. And she feels guilty because she overruled it.

Did you feel like his father, or did you feel like you were looking after him?

A little bit of both. I didn't really feel like his father.

And was it a joint decision of yours to adopt, or was that more Marion than you?

I'm sure it was, I'm sure it was, yes. But I certainly didn't oppose it, but you are right, it was her decision, yes. Again it was one of these life decisions, not painting decisions, which has gone on for a long time.

You didn't adopt a second child?

We, in the end we didn't, we very nearly, we almost adopted two at the same time. We had two babies in the house, and my brother-in-law is a paediatrician and he came and sort of looked at them and... Yes, we should have adopted two at that time rather than one after the other I think. In a way I wish we had; the second, the one we didn't adopt had a rather strange, was adopted by a rather strange family, not far away, and he was the second child that they adopted, and he was never popular, the first child was the popular one, and he was always left to cry in the dark over long periods and so on. I don't think he had a very happy childhood. I don't know. Oh I think Og had a very happy...we called him Og, it was the most primitive sound we could think of when he was that big.

That was his name?

And he...well he grew up as Og for, until he decided that he had outgrown it and changed it to his proper name which was Simon. But, yes, for many years, until he was about 14 or 15 he was known as Og.

Was the other baby his brother or sister?

No, totally separate, totally separate. It was in a sense, the second one was someone who really wanted us to adopt her child. She had come from Canada, I think from a family that didn't approve of illegitimate children, and in a way it was, that was partly why he was there at all. Because we had decided on Og, and never regretted that. He was amazing, he got interested in, well he got interested in many things but shortly before he died he met up with some black kids in the school who were Rastafarians and he got quite involved in Rastafarian religion and everything, you know. He was very full of enthusiasm for life, I would say. But anyway that was a chapter, and it did, yes, I mean it did occupy Marion more than me in a way. She would take him, we had this little house in Majorca and she would go off for the summers with him and I would maybe join them for a week or two. Well of course through him we did meet many friends, through his friends in a way, I mean, parents do tend to meet up in that way.

So for a while you were a...did you feel like a family group, an ordinary family group?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I don't know what the answer to that is. I don't know what an ordinary family group feels like. You see, we spent '68, '62, he was six, and we spent this year in Washington when I was artist-in-residence, and there all the kids, you know what it's like, it's an age group rather than a family, and so these kids would come streaming through the house and out into the garden and round the block, and that suited him very well, he liked that. But then he got some frightening illness, I forget, something to do with the leg, bones soften in the leg, it only happens to boys evidently. Anyway he was diagnosed as having this disease with a...I have a feeling it may have been over-alarmist, but this was while we were in Washington, and that really, we came back to London and took him to the hospital here, and the doctor said he's perfectly OK, just don't let him play football for a few months. And he was. Then, yes, his great passion was to go up to the heath and play football on Saturday morning in a sort of club, a little boys' club. But yes, so yes, so we had to come back, and we came back, for some reason we came back by boat. Oh, because we had quite a lot of luggage I think; anyway we came back by boat, on the Queen Elizabeth. I remember having to carry him. At that time we didn't dare let him walk for fear of deforming the...so I had to carry him around the deck, and we saw whales and dolphins, it was rather nice. But, yes I don't know, I didn't feel, I suppose, one child is not a good base for a family I don't think, but this brother whose farm was in Devon and has a family of six children, he would often go down to stay with them, and, well we all went down there fairly frequently. He's the same brother that had this cottage in north Devon. He was a doctor and then persuaded by his wife he switched to farming.

Successfully?

Yes.

So, I suppose we ought to go back to when you came back to London.

Oh yes.

And you said you bought a house in Belsize Square.

Yes that's right.

So you went back to Fitzjohn's Avenue?

Yes, well we had to clear that out, it wasn't a big problem, it was a one-room flat.

And then you bought this house quite quickly afterwards?

Well I think we had sort of started it... This is what I meant about, between St. Ives and London we were coming and going, and I think we made an offer for the house, and you know, it takes a little while. But when we came back in '57 we were able to really start moving in, I mean we took...you know, we emptied out Fitzjohn's and took up residence.

So you got a house...

But we lived in a flat in the house, the rest of the house was all, well I think we had two statutory tenants in the basement and the first floor. So we, you know, they...yes, so we moved into the top flat in fact. And I had a studio in there, I made a studio, which was half loft; it had a sort of mezzanine which was under the loft and then a room like this. It was quite nice actually, I quite enjoyed it.

And then what happened?

Well then I started changing. Then, all this business of living, I was living there and I had met John Copelands and we were rather exploring the American, the impact of American painting, which was just really at the ICA. But the other connection that we made with the London scene such as it was was the Artists International Association on Lisle Street, they ran a kind of picture library, and the first thing we

did was join their picture library and contribute pictures to the library, and then we began gradually to get to know other people using the AIA. And it was a sort of mixture of professional and amateur. It was a very good institution at the time, I think, at least, I don't know how I would have got to know anything about the London scene without it really. You see and John was equally an outsider, I mean because he was South African and he had been building houses and what not.

In England?

Yes, well he sort of moved between South Africa and England, but yes, I think for the two years before I met up with him again he had been doing this house business, buying houses, doing them up and selling them.

So, he turned out to be quite a catalyst.

Well he is a very dynamic person, and as I say he opened this house, he bought, one of the houses he bought he turned into a complete artist's house. He was kind of having wife trouble and he had set up his wife and daughter in a house nearby and then he bought this house and turned it into his studio and more or less began living in there. And you know, there was a lot of coming and going, and the whole house was virtually a studio.

But you didn't do teaching at that point in London art schools?

No, I had no connection with any art school.

So you were painting at home and then going to visit galleries...?

Painting at home, and going over to John, and often night long sessions, we were trying to be Abstract Expressionists and taking purple hearts and things like that; staying awake all night. And, it was pretty intense.

So, at that time, when you say you were trying to be Abstract Expressionists, do you mean that was the painting that was really exciting you?

Absolutely. Pollock.

So, is that Jackson Pollock, or is that Barnett Newman? I mean which side of it?

No no, it was Jackson Pollock to start with. Definitely gestural painting and, you know, the whole business of where does a painting start and where does it stop and when is it finished, and, oh there are so many things. Alan Davie was probably the most prominent painter at this time in London who had been to Jackson Pollock's studio. And we went out to Ware[ph] to see his studio, I was impressed with his description: he stopped painting when the bell went for lunch, and he would paint a dozen pictures, on paper, he would lay out the paper on the floor and go round painting one colour on each and then go round and paint another one, and it would all be... You know, people were devising strategies for painting expressively.

That was Davie?

Alan Davie.

Yes. But, it's funny because it's like a contradiction between expressiveness and non-expressiveness. I mean if you have...

At this time I was going full-scale into the American experience, of flat painting. The great thing about the Americans was, they had overcome my problem with having subject matter, and you know, trying to paint flatter paintings, or as flat as I could. It seemed like the Americans, people like Jackson Pollock, had resolved it, they had... I mean their paintings weren't flat but they were all on the plane of the picture, successive planes if you like. Very physical paintings, and totally expressionistic. And of course, again it's something I experimented with but didn't follow in the end.

And where did you see them, these paintings?

Do I...?

Where did you see them?

Oh in the Tate, well at the Tate in '58 there was the first one. But at the ICA they had the odd... There was Clifford Stills who was rather, he had a show at the ICA, and then later there were people of course, people like Rothko and the black painter, Reinhardt.

But, so it was the museums rather than dealers?

Yes, definitely, oh yes. Oh you didn't see them in any private home or, and didn't meet the painters, I mean the Americans who painted them. No, we looked at the museum and we discussed what we...in the magazines too, and we discussed. It was the time of the avant-garde, you know, it was in full swing.

And was John Copelands painting then?

Was I...?

Was John painting?

Yes he was, absolutely, and painting Abstract Expressionist paintings.

I've never seen his paintings at that...

For years we had painted on hardboard, and then we moved from Belsize to here, I don't know, I think it got damaged and eventually we threw it away, which was a pity. Well rather a pity because it would have been quite a historic... I don't know, I have no record of these paintings any more, but they were very Expressionist. And a frequent visitor, a friend of his, who ran the New Vision Centre, Denis Bowen, used to come up for a lot of these sessions. And I think, I must say Denis did run a very

interesting gallery, he often got more...I mean he introduced the Mac[ph], that German group, Zero[ph] group, to London. So there was an awful lot going on in the painting world in those, in the late Fifties, early Sixties, and it was an awful lot to assimilate if you were sort of learning, and so it did, it took a time. But it was really only '59 that I began to sort of settle down into colour, using colour. I don't know how that came about. I wasn't happy with Expressionism certainly, I could never decide, I could never feel that when I did that it was...very interesting. And so, I suppose I really only became happy when I could find as it were a problem that I needed to solve, when I could define what it was that I was trying to do. Most of the time you don't really know what you are trying to do, you sort of hope that it will look right when it's finished, and when it works was what a lot of painters were saying at the time. I mean if you ask, you know, when was a painting finished? Well Alan Davie said, 'When the bell went for dinner,' but other painters said, 'When it works'. Well I couldn't decide when it worked or when it didn't work.

So you actually wanted to set yourself a particular problem and solve it?

That's what I liked about landscape you see; if you have a landscape then you had to sort of respect something about it.

But you're still working in that way, aren't you, that you give yourself a problem and you try and solve it.

Yes, I think so. I agree.

And has that been then consistent since the Sixties?

I would say, yes, if you define it like that it probably has, problem-solving. And problems which occur to me but probably, you know, don't seem very interesting to other people very often. It's a kind of curiosity that needs to be satisfied I think.

So, how long did it take you to work through Abstract Expressionism?

Not very long. I think only probably the winter of '58. Yes, I think probably, it must have been about that time.

And, you kind of...

By '59, you see I had my first exhibition in '59, the end of '59, that was at St. Hilda's College in Oxford, and by then I was already painting coloured squares, doing these simple coloured squares, looking at the...you're trying to colour the content of the painting.

And that was something that you did for yourself without looking to any other sources in particular?

Well, early colour experiments, yes, it was trying to make two colours occupy the picture plane, trying to fit... I mean it was very concerned with the picture plane always, and, yes, and having reduced the problem to a two-colour problem really. And I experimented with several different solutions in terms of shape. Yes, Jensen Sailman I remember coming, sitting in the studio.

Who?

No, an architect friend who went out to Bogotá or British...I mean, Colombia. There was a lot of building going on there at the time. Oh no, but anyway he was...yes, no, it's funny, it's just an incident where he was visiting and I was painting this one painting, which was just a yellow stripe. I mean it sounds a bit like Barnett Newman but it's not, it was much more painterly, but it was a yellow stripe against a sort of violet background, a sort of sunset with open...well, from the window of the flat in Belsize Park the sun did used to set over the top of the buildings, and it was a sort of painting inspired by that, by that sunset. But that was, things like that I was doing at the time, but I mean, yes I painted one or two paintings just with a single stripe across the middle, but the stripe was horizontal, not vertical.

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It was a sort of non-event.

Why did it happen in, why was it in St. Hilda's?

Well all shows I think are a bit of a non-event. I mean, you get very little feedback from them, from people. Maybe, I think one of the surprises was at Sussex University when I had a - this was in '67 - I had a show, a sort of, and the remarks in the visitors' books were very specific and very rude on the whole, I had no support at all, and that rather shocked me because I thought you know, I was beyond the area of graffiti. But I have a suspicion that a lot of graffiti comes from the universities where art is concerned, or certainly did. I mean Cambridge was very anti, you know, there was no art club that I was aware of.

But your first show was in Oxford.

Was in Oxford.

St. Hilda's College. You said St. Hilda's?

St. Hilda's, that's right.

Why?

In their common room.

But why was it there?

I...well, this friend David Hawkins, was it David? who had a show there and had some connection, and he introduced me, and they wanted pictures in one of their common rooms, and, yes, it was done through a friend.

But nevertheless, that was the first time you had felt ready to show?

I didn't...I wasn't sure that I felt ready but it was a challenge that I thought it was time I took, and that was '59. And then the following year I had a show at the AIA gallery, which did attract some attention I must say, and basically it was Adrian Stokes who... By this time I was painting an after-image, I had sort of stumbled onto after-images, and this must have been the spring of 1960, and I think it was really at that point that I felt a direction in my work, I felt more confident.

But you had just stumbled upon this, just stumbled upon it?

Which, St. Hilda's?

The after-image. No the after-image you said, you stumbled upon it.

Oh, well not entirely. No, it was this one week again in Leeds, Harry Thubron course, that made me...yes, that made me more confident of the sort of colour direction that I had been stumbling along really.

Oh I see. So when did that happen?

This was in December of '59. It was a Christmas, the 26th of December or something like that till the 1st of January, you know, it was a very short intense course. It was supposed to be run by Pasmore and Thubron, but Pasmore arrived three days after the six-day course started, and in some sense he rather destroyed it for me. He was suggesting you made a dot on a piece of paper and then made another dot and then a third dot and then let them grow and feel your way till you've created a balance, and that didn't seem to me nearly as impressive as these little colour exercises that Thubron was promoting, and the results. I think, it gave me...yes it sort of, it focused my experiments in a way that they hadn't really been very focused before, although, I mean obviously, I had had this show a couple of months before we went up to Leeds, I was...I was ready for the message that Thubron gave, I think that was what I would say, and it just kicked the starter. And things happened very quickly then,

because...and then it was Yasha Reinhardt[ph] who suggested I approach Grabowski, and I did, and he was a charming man, and he gave me my first one-man show, the first sort of solo show, well at least two had been solo shows but, the AIA you had one small room, so I had what, two or three paintings, four paintings maybe. But you see the AIA in those days was a place that critics did review; today they wouldn't I don't think, maybe 'Time Out' but none of the others.

And Stokes reviewed that show?

Sorry?

Did Adrian Stokes review that show?

I don't remember that he reviewed it, but Margaret Mellis who knew him sort of reported back that he had been interested and curious, I don't know, that he had sort of picked out my painting from a show of four other people.

And did you then meet him?

I never met him. I met members of the family. Well I met him, yes I did, but he was difficult, very intellectual, very... Well I was shy, I don't know, I didn't make much contact with him. But I knew his son, the younger son, Telfer Stokes, who taught at Corsham, and whom I liked very much, and I like very much, but he's retreated, retired to Scotland, to the Lowlands of Scotland, and is specialising in books, very nice books I think some of them. But we were, yes we were quite good friends while he was living in London and teaching at Corsham.

But, did you mean that Stokes' appreciation of your paintings made a difference to your reputation?

Well, certainly when I did have this show at Grabowski I think he was one of the selectors who, I mean one of the selectors. One of my paintings was bought by the Tate Gallery, and I was sharing the show with Bill Tucker, who was kind of, Caro, St.

Martin's, had a kind of reputation in sculpture, and Caro had... I called Caro when, having arranged this show with Grabowski I called Caro and asked him if he would suggest somebody to share it with, and I wanted to share it with a sculptor, and he said, well he had two names, and he gave me Philip King and Tucker, King being preferred to Tucker for some reason. But anyway I called Bill and he was living just around the corner in a basement in Primrose Hill, a kind of...with a wife and a baby. And I liked Bill, he had a good mind I think, very perceptive. I've got one, well his milk bottles, we exchanged after the show. But the fact...well I don't know, I don't know whether any of this is true or not, but Marion is rather keen on the story that having a painting bought by the Tate from your first show didn't do you any good in the art world, I mean it made people, I don't know, suspicious, they thought... I don't know, I don't know why, or why it shouldn't have done. But whereas they bought mine, they hadn't bought Bill's, that was I think one of the problems.

Do you know who chose it from the Tate?

Well, I'm not sure that it wasn't Adrian Stokes, and it may have been Sylvester, the two of them I think were buying for the Tate. I can't think who else it might have been. I know Sylvester, I saw Sylvester years later and he sort of challenged me, why haven't I been to see him or talked to him or written to him. Oh well this was a good many years later, and I hadn't in fact. I had been remarkably, in a sense unaware of, I suppose what some people would have called my success. I thought it was another thing that happened. And so I didn't really capitalise it politically anyway in the way that, had I been Damien Hurst I would have done ten times over.

What other artists was the gallery showing, the Grabowski Gallery?

They showed, well Geoffrey Steele I remember, because I knew him later, but the man I really, who went to Houston and is teaching, I think still teaching at Houston, oh God! his name; I think he was very good, he was sort of, somewhere between Op and Pop at this time. I can't think of his name now. The trouble with age, I get very bad about people's names. But he is quite well known. Oh, I'm stepping on... He's quite well known.

But, I don't know anything about the Grabowski Gallery. Who was running it, what kind of gallery was it?

Well it was in Sloane Street, as opposed to Sloane...or do I mean Sloane Avenue? Anyway it's not the main street, it's another little street that runs down. Kensington, South Ken. And he ran a chemist shop, he imported, or exported pharmaceuticals between Poland and London, and in the back of this shop he had quite a large space which he turned into a gallery. And he ran it for several years; he died about 1970, but he ran it for several years, and in fact it was his...when he died he left his collection of paintings to Wudj[ph], to the museum that Strzeminski founded in Wudj[ph]. And it was on that account that I eventually met up with, that's my Polish connection.

Right. And what of the Jastia Reichardt connection?

Which one?

The Jastia Reichardt[ph]connection, was she a friend of yours?

Well, Tony Reichardt was working at the Marlborough Gallery. Yes, she used to have open evenings, she and Tony, and they were living, well she is still living in Belsize Park Gardens. She's marvellous, actually she has a most incredible... She is now living with Nick Wadley, and they have the most marvellous...she's got a wonderful sense of interior, her sitting-room is to be seen. Oh, not only...and her stairway and everything; she's got a stair carpet, a black stair carpet and bright yellow edges, I mean it's very dramatic. But anyway, no, she's got marvellous sense of interior decoration. And pictures, she's got a Peter Straud[ph] on the wall that is really very nice, dating back to his reliefs. And of course she ran the ICA Serendipity, if that's the way you pronounce it, after Alloway, she was appointed director and ran that for several years. But now she is more into computing or into reporting on computing, computer.

So, apart from the Tate buying that painting, what other...was it a success in other ways, that show?

Well there were...yes, I made several sales at Oxford college, Manchester City Art Gallery, Suter[ph]. But that could have been...I had two shows with Grabowski, '62 and '64, and I can't remember which, you know, where...but he did sell a few. That, I mean you know, in terms of reputation I think those two shows and possibly a third show at Axiom was...the Sixties was the time when I had some sort of public recognition. By the Seventies when I as it were moved away from colour and into systems more there was very little interest or notice taken. The Lucy Milton Gallery, she struggled very hard for a few years and then gave up.

But you said that you didn't notice your own success, so, if you didn't notice your success then you wouldn't notice a lack of it.

No, well by success I suppose I would say, reviews, the newspaper reviews or magazine reviews. I mean I did have a few reviews. Well, Norbert Lynton, I remember we had met Norbert Lynton, he became quite a sort of regular visitor, on that week's winter course; well I knew him before then, I don't know how we met Norbert and Jan, they were living in Putney with, maybe it was the children. No, I don't think so, because we hadn't even acquired Og by, well yes, '62 we had... No, I can't remember how we met Norbert and Jan, because he was married to Jan, but when we got to know him best was when, after he had split up with Jan and had a second wife, Sylvie, who was a student at Leeds, not a bad artist either, and a nice sort of, what I call northern, Leeds, she was from Leeds, person. But anyway, and so he wrote reviews, in 'Art International', and there was some Swiss magazine that was international. And anyway, yes, I suppose I...in answer to your question, I did get reviewed then and haven't really been reviewed since, I would say, not in this country anyway.

But did you have a sense then in the Sixties that you were doing well and that London was doing well, that it was the place to be?

Well, I don't...I think everyone was optimistic, there was a sense in which anything new was good, and it was in a way rather uncritical acclaim, but it was optimistic, you know, we were building a new world after the war. Because don't forget that black paint, all the cars were black in the Fifties, there were no coloured cars, and everybody's fence was black, if it had been painted at all, and everybody's doors were black, and clothes were minimal. So it was a pretty sort of dank, dark kind of feel to London, except for the red buses. And then the Sixties came and Carnaby Street, and 'This Was The Week That Was' and things like that. Suddenly the country seemed to wake up.

But did you feel that you were part of a group of London painters?

No.

No?

I didn't know... You see the Royal College, I mean Hockney and...

Blake and...

Kitaj and Blake were the people who were in the news. And Bridget to a small extent I suppose, but not nearly as prominent as the Pop artists.

So, in terms of the kind of more prominent movements, you had been interested in Abstract Expressionism but kind of put it behind you.

Yes.

So where did you place yourself after that, in terms of what other artists were doing?

Well... [PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I don't know, I didn't place myself, until... I mean Grabowski was very supportive, and Gallery One was showing Bridget. I can't remember the...quite an interesting character used to run that gallery. But my

recollection of Bridget's work was purely black and white at that time, '64. At Gallery One, was it '64 or '63, I saw an exhibition of hers, which was just a black and white exhibition, but people were coming out of it and said it generated all sorts of colours in the eye, yellow and blue. Mildly, I think it may have done. I don't remember when I first saw a colour painting by her. I don't know even if she put in to that...there was an exhibition, '7-64' at McRobert & Pannard, and she actually invited me to show, she had been invited to organise the show, and she invited myself and Geoffrey Steele and, seven people and I can't remember all their names, but it's in the catalogue. And that was '64, and that was when I had my second show at Grabowski, which had more to do with stripe paintings by then, and I don't think...stripe paintings, reliefs. I saw a relief funnily enough only the other day, not really a relief, a painting, by...oh, forget it. But it was rather nice, four dark blue rectangles on quite deep stretchers, but the sides of the stretchers had been painted gold, and there was a gap between the four so that you got a kind of reflected gold cross against this dark blue background, and it was...

By you?

No no, this was by somebody, just the other day, contemporary, but it was the sort of, it reflected my interest in '63, '64, when I was making these relief paintings with hidden colour reflections. Thomas Sellow[ph] I discovered was doing the same thing, I didn't know of him at the time but I went to see his exhibition, I think it was at the Redfern, and there was a Thomas Sellow painting in there of reflected colour. So, a lot of these things in the Sixties I think were in the air, that almost anyone would have picked up on if they had been interested, and I just happened to be one of them, you know, I was sort of in time, in tune with the time.

That's why I was asking you who the artists were that you were in tune with, but actually you...

Well I suppose you would say Thomas Sellow[ph], Geoffrey Steele, and a lot of these recherche visuel people in Paris, Yvarel[ph] and... I mean in a sense, if I had been in Paris then maybe Denise René would have been more interested at this time. No, I

had sort of caught up in the Sixties, but after, when... You know there was this article in 'Time Out'[sic] that I identified what I was doing, what Bridget Riley was doing, what Geoffrey Steele was doing, as Op art, and what Vasarely had been doing for years of course, and Yvarel[ph]. And that was, I happened to be in New York and Grabowski called me in New York and it was great excitement, that 'Time' was going to do an article. And I went to Time Life and I met the reader and his research team, very impressive set-up altogether. Art and religion on one floor in this 40-storey building. Anyway, and then Op art broke, and that was November when this article came out, and the next year they had this big exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art which, I forget what it was called but it launched a very wide range of Op art, and I mean widely interpreted.

And you were in that?

Yes.

So the way you became fashionable, suddenly trendy, was by being called an Op artist?

No, I think really I was becoming more, I mean this was '65 and in a sense it was almost the end of my moment of fame. I mean, that's the year when I won the second prize at John Moore, and Mike Tyzak[ph] who was a friend won the first prize. And it was the American critic, it was Heron and this American critic.

Not Alloway?

No.

Not Greenberg?

Yes, that's right. Who were the selectors. And, because Greenberg didn't really know anybody on the English scene it was a less political choice than I think is often the case in those big exhibitions. Anyway, so that was '65. And then, whereas Bridget as

it were stuck to her guns and painted these Op...she had been very successful at the Responsive Eye exhibition, Geoffrey and I and anyone else who was involved at the time, Smedley - not Smedley, Peter Sedgley I think shortly after that went to Germany and, he had done some quite interesting things there. Yes, he was another person involved. Bill Culbert. Yes. Anyway, after '65, that was really the era of these amazing summer schools in Barry in Glamorganshire County Council. Geoffrey and I taught at one of these summer schools in '65, and then, a couple of other occasions I teamed up with Geoffrey or Dick Allen[ph] who was another person, and Dave Saunders came in at the younger end. And Lily Greenham, who I have a lot of respect for. Anyway, yes we taught in these, and they were great occasions because they involved such a wide range of activities, you know, it wasn't just painting or sculpture or, but it was sailing, I don't know, everything, jewellery, hat making.

And that was the first time that you had taught?

Oh no, I had been teaching, no by this time... I began teaching in '63, the first job I had was with Tom Hudson at Leicester, and he was the kind of, he had been teaching at Leeds with Harry Thubron and had as it were cut off, but very much influenced by the Bauhaus kind of methods in a way. And he was running a pre-diploma school as it was called in Leicester, and I taught just what, a day or two days a week up there. He had an interesting team of painters working for him, Newsom[ph] who was quite an interesting painter but evidently a very difficult, socially difficult person. And, well I can't remember all their names, it would take forever to remember them. Anyway, and then Harry...and then Tom, at the end of '63 he got a job in Newport or Cardiff, I think, maybe Cardiff, anyway he moved to Cardiff, and he took a lot of people with him. But at the same time I got offered a job at Corsham by Clifford Ellis, and so I started teaching at Corsham. And that, in a way what I really enjoyed as much as...well I enjoyed the teaching but I enjoyed the journeys. We used to go down, various teachers, this is where I got to know Telfer Stokes, but there were all sorts of.....

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I mean, you know, a lot of interesting people were teaching there. I was more associated with John Ernest and Malcolm Hughes in a special studio, 16, which was the constructive studio, but then in the other studios there was Harry and Gillian Mundy, and Michael Craig Martin and Howard Hodgkins, and Adrian Heath was a very good teacher, I think, and a great womaniser. But it was the journeys down with the...you never knew who might be going down that day. It was a time when tutors were hired to teach a day a week here there and everywhere. And, yes, while I was teaching there I was also, you know, I would be, sometimes I would be going up to Hull, or, all over the country, Newcastle.

Why did you want to start teaching?

When...?

Why did you want to start teaching?

Well it was a sort of, it was an income, and painting wasn't an income. And I never taught full time, I never got a full-time job, although, as things went, when I started part-time was far more profitable really than full-time teaching. By the time I finished it was the full-time teaching which had become the more secure sort of teaching.

But until then you had still been living off the allowances, your...?

I had indeed, yes, it was the first time I was earning really, apart from the odd few paintings that I could sell.

So do you feel that you went from being poor to being more comfortable?

It didn't make very much difference, because in a sense expenses were higher too, with, by this time with Og growing up and, you know, a house and so on, to mind. So

it didn't really seem that it changed one's lifestyle very much, but it was, it gave me a sense of connection with the art world, because at the art school you got the gossip and exchanged gossip, which up till then I really hadn't had.

And you enjoyed that?

Yes, I did, yes I did. It made me feel more connected. Yes, it made me feel more connected, that's true. And of course I kept on teaching at Corsham right up till it moved to Bath.

So how long was that for?

Twenty years I suppose.

Twenty years?

Yes.

So '64 to '84?

That's right, or even later, I don't remember when I finally stopped; I don't remember which year they went into Bath, that they moved into Bath. It was supposed to be one of these rational moves to save £2,000 a year that the council was spending on Corsham; they spent half a million in moving the school and still spend, and have to pay the rent to Lord Methuen for his, for the part that Clifford had arranged, a lease for 100 years, with Avon County Council, and they couldn't get out of it, so they're still paying I suppose. I don't know what they're doing with it now. But it was an extraordinary place, I mean Ellis was quite sort of autocratic, but quite a genius in what he was aiming at. He was of course very interested in making art a practical...really his interest was in the graphic school rather than the fine art school, though he recognised what fine art offered. And my only complaint about that school was that there was such a barrier, due I think to the tutors, between the pottery, the graphics and the fine art. In the fine art we felt we had all the ideas but none of the

technique; in the graphics they felt that they were the real school; and I don't know how the pottery felt. But also of course it was a school for teaching, I mean you know, for art school teaching. I mean we thought, or at least he always told us, the assumption was that all the students were going to be painters but the practice was that most of them were going to be teacher in art, in school.

But one hears so much about Corsham and Clifford Ellis.

Yes.

And, you know, I can never work out, what was it, was it his personality?

Yes. Absolutely, it was his personality. He and his wife.

That drew people to Corsham?

He was...he was...he had high blood pressure, but he used to treat the staff incredibly well. In '68, which is really what killed him, that Corsham got involved in that revolution, and after that, the students had much more freedom, but they had to pay for it. In other words he had been providing at very low cost quite good meals in the canteen, you went and you didn't have much choice, this or that, but it was good. And hostels, it was all, you know, all the students had to live in hostels and I think there was a sort of 10 o'clock curfew, just like university before the war. And you had to have a late pass if you wanted to stay out after 10 o'clock. And so it was a very kind of, you were treated a bit like schoolchildren at Corsham, no doubt in Clifford's mind, but you were very well treated. After '68 all those sort of rules were relaxed, and you paid for what you bought in the canteen, and the canteen was the great loss-making institution actually at Corsham. But he...essentially it was, he did collect interesting people to teach there.

How did he find out what was going on and who would be a good person? Was he travelling around a lot?

Did he find out?

Yes, how did he do that?

I don't know. I think he did tend to take fashionable painters. William Scott had taught there for many years; I don't think he was teaching there when I joined, it was...I suppose it was towards the end of the great time, I mean of Corsham's biggest reputation, but it was...I mean you know, Robyn Denny and, there were some interesting people meeting there at coffee breaks and at supper. Clifford provided the staff, he had an extraordinary room in the kind of kitchen end of Lord Methuen's...he had a flat above, but he had a room for the visiting staff where we all had supper in the evening, and you know, you would get salmon and, what do you call it, hare, and you know, all sorts. He did us very well.

And did you stay the night there when you were teaching?

Yes, yes, it was too far from London to go back.

So there was a real possibility to talk and relax together?

The journeys and the evenings, in the evenings you would usually go to the pub and mix with the students, but the journeys up, to and fro, sometimes by car, sometimes by train, were great moments of relaxed chat. And you see later when I was teaching at Chelsea in the Eighties I found it more like a factory; you would go in at 9 o'clock and you would leave at 5 o'clock and you would barely talk to anyone else, just sort of do your job and go. Although there was a bit of a thing about lunch which, I mean you know, local restaurants or pubs that people used to have lunch in. But...no, teaching really was an important part of the week. Living in London and teaching in Bath was a good arrangement I felt because it separated the week. I used to call teaching my weekends, but it was a totally different activity, you were sort of, it was all very introspective during the week and then it would become very, you know, extrovert, I suppose, or more or less, while you were teaching. And I would have

found it quite difficult I think to have separated the activities if I had been living on the premises or in the village.

How many nights did you spend away?

Only one.

Just one.

Two days.

Right.

But then you see, at the same time I was visiting other schools, Winchester and other places, so the week would vary between three or four days teaching, and the rest painting.

And you came back to your house where you painted?

That's right.

The studio was at home?

That's right.

So, you said earlier that '65 was already the end of your moment of fame, so what happened after that?

Well, it petered out in the latter half of the Sixties I would have thought, because after Grabowski, and this was a silly mistake, not really my choice but persuaded, to move to Axiom Gallery, which lasted for a year. It was in Duke Street just opposite, or almost opposite Selfridges. And this architect called Crabtree had made a fortune on some contract and decided to put it into a gallery, I think largely because he wanted a

home-from-home to keep his girlfriend, and he had a flat above the gallery. And he left it to Nigel Greenwood to run the gallery, and Nigel had just graduated from Courtauld and selected, who was the upside-down pyramid man who went to Australia?

The upside-down pyramid man?

Pardon?

Upside-down pyramid man?

Yes, well he did these curious paintings.

Oh I know, Richard...

No I don't think he was Richard. He finished up in Melbourne, he's still in Melbourne I think. He made quite a name with Duchess of Malfi, he had a whole exhibition of the Duchess of Malfi. He won the third prize at the John Moore's in '65 with a huge cigar kind of flying out of a canvas. But he did, he had quite a prominent career, he was...he got an American scholarship for a couple of years, and then went to Australia. No, I can't think of his name, it'll come back to me. Anyway, why did we get onto him?

Axiom Gallery.

Oh yes, that's right, Axiom. Yes, well Crabtree ran the gallery for about a year and then closed it. But I had I think only one show there, and took part in one or two group shows. Yes. And from the Axiom I went to Lucy Milton in Notting Hill, who for several years, three or four years, ran a little gallery there. Because she's a funny woman, she was Irish, her parents were from Northern Ireland, and she was...well you know, she had a hard time because she was pushing, she had a policy which was more or less Systems and that. But, I don't know if she gave Morellet his first showing in

England, Francois Morellet, but she certainly showed his work, and... But mainly she showed us.

Who is 'us'?

[INAUDIBLE] us. [LAUGHS] Well it ranged... Evidently, though I didn't know it, Doug Alsop had his first show with her. But 'us' was Geoffrey Steele, Malcolm Hughes, possible Jean Spencer though she might have been a bit young, I think she was possibly too young. Dave Saunders. I can't remember all the people she showed. And John Ernest.

Would you have seen your art as Systems art by then?

Well this is now already in the early Seventies. Yes, oh yes my work had become quite systematic. I went through a period in the late Sixties, when I came back from America in '68, I missed all that revolution because I was in the States, and I came back at the end of '68, and it was a rather difficult moment. While I was in America I had been totally... Washington summer school, I mean, the home of colour painting, Colour Field painting, Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland. And I had begun doing things that were not at all Hard Edge, in fact I was trying to stay in canvases. The space of America I found quite overwhelming. I mean, parking cars, you know, you had a hundred yards to park your car in. No hedges round the garden, there was a sort of space round every house. Just open space everywhere, even in the cities - well not downtown Washington but in the suburbs. And I had begun as it were expanding the space, and I wasn't quite sure where this was going, and when I came back I felt a bit lost, I had sort of lost my direction that I had left in England, which was actually more like that print over there, kind of wavy line drawings which were beginning to break up into sections, so the wall was coming into the painting and the painting was coming into the wall. And so it took me a little while to get back into the right frame of mind, or get back into a frame of mind. And the frame of mind really came with the column. I had seen a column in an exhibition in Washington at the Henry Gallery which had rather impressed me, and it was to do with colour, and it was a column where there were little gold flecks sunk into the surface so that the surface seemed to

be deep, rather like looking into water, you could sort of look into the surface. And I thought I would like to try and achieve a surface like that, but I didn't...I started by picking up a stick out of the garden and painting it and thinking every day I'll paint another coat and another coat, and this would go on for at least a year building up a surface. And then I thought, well this is silly; if I'm going to paint this stick and it's going to take me a year I might as well paint something more interesting. And so I began to play with, actually it was with some of Og's building bricks, I just began to sort of see what sort of shape I could get interested in. And then I built this column which has two profiles, one with a single curve in it and one with a double curve, and that seemed interesting. And so then I... Another thing which has bothered me in my career is always confronting new techniques and never being a real master at any, but in order to make this column I got into fibreglass and making...there was a teacher, one of the technicians at Corsham was a specialist in fibreglass so I was able to get his directions and advice. And I must have spent months making this wretched column, first out of these wooden blocks and then skinning the wooden blocks with P38, stuff you mend cars with, and then polishing it and separating it and then casting the mould in order to cast the column, and so on. But anyway, I eventually got this column. And then the column began to interest me as a...the fact that a wave changes according to your angle. And so then I began to wonder how I could in fact paint a three-dimensional line, is what it amounted to, and so I started rotating the column and recording the rotations, and evolving a pattern. And that occupied me from '69 till '72 virtually. In '72 the System's Group, which had formed in '69, I think out of Barry summer school, I'm not sure other people will agree with that, but I seem to recollect a meeting at the end of one of the Barry summer school sessions in which Geoffrey Steele's wife, who was a Finn, had connections with the Amos Andersen[ph] Museum and arranged for this group that we now call the Systems Group would take part, would have a venue, and this in fact is what we did. But that then led on largely through Malcolm Hughes' energy and administrative ability to a big show at the Whitechapel that we had in '72, and we had Steve Reich's orchestra who, he had come over to do a concert, I think it was at the Roundhouse. Anyway his band was here and so he came to the Whitechapel and did a little show there, to accompany the exhibition. And it was really quite a big event in all our lives that show. And it was Nick Serota who was, yes he was running the Whitechapel that's right, and he had sort

of masterminded...it went on tour for a year round the country and he masterminded the tour. And I must say my painting...and it was a column painting, came back from that better than it left, it really did; after a year on the road I thought it was amazing. Anyway, and it was a very, it was a big painting, it was about twelve feet long, so it was a monstrous thing. I called it my folly because it had taken me, I think it must have been six months to paint the thing, and I didn't know...it consisted of so many little dots of black and white, and I didn't honestly know, because it required taping and un-taping, I never saw it, I never saw what was going to happen until it was finished. And so it was really, it was like blind, a blind project that went on for a long time.

Where is that now?

In Germany, Heidi Hoffman. Anyway, yes, that's one of the things I would say in my sort of working process, I find having a tedious job but a practical one, to go up to the studio knowing, yes I've got to do this, it's very boring but I've got to do it. It's a bit like Steve Reich's music really, you...boredom, and very much like the book, or at least it appears that this book I've just acquired from Waterstone about ways of thinking, and he's arguing in that book against artificial intelligence. He's saying there are levels of thinking, a scale of thinking, that starts with the alert mind thinking logically but...and he makes an analogy with driving; when you're a learner driver you're very alert and tense and, he would say logical in that sense but I don't know if that's quite accurate. And then you slide down the scale to a point where your analytic mind is half asleep and becomes, allows for discontinuities, or breaks in the thought, and you know, at the very bottom end of the scale it becomes dream. And he kind of analyses this process. He relates it to the spectrum, colour spectrum, saying that the only thing that changes is the wavelength of light; well the only thing that changes in his view of thinking is the wavelength of thought in a sense. And he says that creativity, or he claims, he's claiming in this book, that creativity only occurs, only generally, particularly with poets, he refers a lot to poetry, but only occurs when the analytic mind is half asleep. And, so what I was going to say really about these very monotonous jobs that I do get involved in is that I enjoy them just for that reason, that my mind drifts and wanders. If I go up to the studio in a sense with no

job in mind to do, I can often sit there the whole day doing nothing and sort of, just doing nothing; if I'm waiting for an idea it doesn't come.

But if your mind does wander when you're making something quite systematic, where can you let it wander to? Because you can't stop the job in hand, or it'll go wrong.

Well that's why it's...that's why it can wander, because half of it's engaged.

What does it feed into, just a thought, or does it have some concrete result?

Half the things I think about never get realised, they sort of pass by. It would be nice to do this while I'm bored doing what I'm doing. It would be interesting if I did this instead of that. And sometimes I sort of make a little note on a piece of paper, but I very rarely pursue them. And I must say when I go up with no idea I don't often think of these ideas that I've as it were shed. They don't seem to have much substance, but they are prolific, sort of prolific unrealised. If I stopped to think how I would do it I might not do it. But when I'm bored, when I'm bored but occupied, they come of their own accord, you know, it doesn't...if I'm not occupied and I'm waiting for them they don't come.

But the column is something that went on for a long long time.

It did indeed, yes.

If it started in '69 it must have gone on a good...

Well no, I did several paintings but this was the major one. No I did some in colour and some in black and white. Yes, several. But then after that show I had sort of, I felt like I had exhausted the column, but what I did realise was that the column was just like the body without the background; in other words I had been concerned with only the interior of the shape and I had totally ignored its environment. And so that, then I sort of started thinking about the environment and forgot the column, and I started exploring space. There was...yes, one of our friends was teaching at the

London School of Economics, well he's still there actually and he's talking about starting another Bauhaus at the London School of Economics and inviting architects to work with sociologists, and sort of has got ambitions to start another Bauhaus, but... Yes, when I started thinking about space I was already on fairly good terms, well on quite good terms, with Ken Martin in his...after he was widowed he was living alone in Eton Avenue in a basement flat, and he used to come over. He was rather, I think rather lonely, although he had a lot of friends, but, you know, sort of, living alone in this flat, so he would come over for supper quite often and make his kind of cryptic.....

End of F5084 Side A

F5084 Side B

Yes that's right. Well through Ken we met...he had two very loyal assistants who had worked for him, apart from his son Paul. Who is professor, the fine art professor at Leicester? Susan Teddy[ph] was one, and the girl who worked for a long time at Sussex University, Sussex art complex, her name escapes me at the moment.

Not Julian...no.

No no. I'm not sure what she's doing now but she's...anyway it doesn't matter. Well Susan Tebby[ph] has become, well we see her now and again when she comes down to London. Amazing girl, woman. Anyway, no, well Ken. Yes, he used to come round to the house and reminisce quite a lot about his own life and philosophy, and he was working at this time on his 'Chance and Order' series. I don't know that that affected me very much. No, what really affected me at this moment in time was a friend of this economist who was a young American teacher, and she recommended a book called 'Number, the Language of Science', it's a paperback and it's written by an American art teacher - not...a mathematician, a teacher of mathematics in America. And he wrote what seemed to me as I read it a kind of poetry describing how number accounted for, or attempted to account for experience, and it somehow impressed me. He was talking particularly about time and the way number had decreased the interval between one second and the next if you like with all the various number systems that evolved. Until the 20th Century it had been a kind of empire which had all been devoted towards describing life as we experience it, which is I thought exactly what painters tried to do but less methodically. And so my first attempt to describe space was very much based on an idea of counting and of the infinity of counting, of the fact that there is no last number, and it's a fairly ingenuous approach but at least it was an approach. And so with my wavy lines I began to experiment, putting them out of order, out of phase, and building up grids or lattices of these wavy lines, and I discovered that if you shorten the interval in the lattice to less than a wavelength you can create enormous numbers of shapes gradually. And so I began to make lattices based on the wavelength reduced by a proportion and creating...and what I was interested in, not the line but the space between the line, the shape. And I produced

an...well my ambition was to produce an infinite number of shapes which would be kind of visible as an array. And this is what in the end led me...well by the middle Seventies... So after about three years I had tried all sorts of, transposing the shapes into colour or into simpler shapes. But by the middle Seventies I had got to the point where an irrational proportion of the wavelength, in other words root 5 of the wavelength, of the diagonal, should produce an infinite number of shapes. But the problem of drawing them was beyond physical possibility, and so I did approach the computer, which in those days was fairly, well at least the ones that they had at Chris Briscoe, were pretty primitive instruments. You had to learn the FORTRAN, you had to program your own work; in other words you really had to do the... Yes, one thing that I liked, a remark of Geoffrey Steele's, he said that...he said that...he distinguished cybernetics from computer, from using the software as a computer, and he said all his paintings are virtually programming the work of art that's going to follow. And what he's interested in is in the cybernetics, not in the result. And, I think that's a very perceptive remark; in other words I think, I would totally agree with him that the work I do, and I've just finished one at the moment, that seemed incredibly laborious when a computer could have done it in ten seconds, but a lot happens in this tedious process of working it out, that if you accept the software you don't get, you just get the result and you take that as complete.

Yes. But I suppose the interesting question is, what is the lot that happens, is the lot that happens between deciding what you're going to do and the end, something to do with...

It's very hard to say exactly what happens, but if I relate to the work I was doing yesterday in fact, using these fibreglass rods and elastic and slightly unstable supports, a lot happens that the computer wouldn't record.

But is it human error that you like?

Well material error in this case.

Do you like that?

Well I'm interested in it, it makes the computer solution...you have to...you know what you want to see, and in a sense the computer would do that perfectly, but what you actually see has to be adjusted.

But also the computer would do it so quickly that you wouldn't understand how it had done it.

Well exactly, it would do it quickly and you wouldn't understand how it was done, but it's not only that. The computer would produce the flat image and it could rotate it and you could see all the angles flat, but when you actually stand in front of the thing, you know, you've only got to sort of move your head like that and all the lines...this is a very three-dimensional linear, all the lines change. It's...I think it's the most sort of kinetic lattice if you like that I've managed to make.

But do you like this visible touch of the human hand?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I'm not...I sometimes think that I accept it as an inevitability, but when I see it more professionally done it often looks better. I often don't get a very professional finish on the work because in a sense I can see the idea, although of course the spectator doesn't actually see that, but I am satisfied if it works, and I rejected that as a solution. But, yes, if it performs. You know with an elastic chord, I mean you've only got to sort of touch the thing and the whole thing goes into sort of vibrations. These are little perks that the computer couldn't offer really.

Do you think you've become less concerned about the finished object than you were thirty years ago?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] I'm absolutely fascinated by the third dimension, the difference between what I think is the cybernetics and the third dimension, which is the experience.

Because in your paintings of the early Sixties the paintings were beautifully made and beautiful as objects.

Well I don't know if they were. My first stripe paintings were not very Hard Edge at all, they were rather soft edge, and in fact I think Norbert rather commented on this as a plus at one point. Gradually they got harder edged as I got more sort of into the intellectual, I mean Op art takes place along the edge and if you have a soft edge it doesn't happen. So I tightened up on technique to some extent. But you see it's like I say, when I'm doing a boring job I become impatient with the next idea, and as long as the idea is more or less realised, that I can see that it's going to work, then I'm more interested in something beyond that, and I don't spend much time in being critical about the product. And that would be my own criticism of myself.

So, once you know how something is going to work out, do you then stop doing it or do you finish it off?

Well I finish off a piece, usually, not always. But again, if we got back to this work with elastic and fibreglass rods, yesterday Adrian was here helping me. Now he's much more critical of the finish than I am, and just tying off the knots and finding little crimps to neaten it up instead of the tail ends that I'd left, he sort of insisted on, and I thought, well this is rather a waste of my money and your time, but he insisted on it, and he did it. And I appreciate that the thing looks much more intentional.

Mm. I think this question of thinking out a problem and then the beauty of the end result is a difficult one, because all the works I've seen of yours have an elegance and, you know, a pleasing, they're pleasing visually, and yet...

Well that is an excuse which I tend to make for myself; I tend to say, well this is spontaneous, it's not worked over, it's not become self-conscious. And one of the battles with students, with today I think is that people very quickly become very self-conscious, and I think when you become self-conscious it's a bit destructive of the creativity.

But for instance, to go back to your lattice works, you were saying that you were working out all the different shapes you could make in the middle by moving the lines closer or further apart.

Yes.

But...

But this is not with the elastic, this is with an ink line.

Yes I know that, but, on the one hand you were interested in following through all the different permutations.

That's right.

But on the hand, surely you were interested in their visual aspect, and in making...

Well I was rather disappointed in the visual aspects, because I realised that they were going to be very boring if they were stretched, you know, they would take the whole of this room and probably more to actually display the concept, and you wouldn't have been able, you know, you would have to look from there over to there, 200 drawings later.

Yes. So at some point you use your visual judgement, your aesthetic taste, to decide this, I will stop this now, or I will cut this here, because it looks better this way.

Well, the fairly practical consideration, I have to...I can't draw them except on graph paper, unless I trace them, and graph paper does...I mean, yes, you can get dewy[ph] sheets but they're more difficult to work on, so I use the standard size, 30 x 20 graph paper, and my grid is confined to roughly 16 inches square.

But, do you understand what I'm saying is that, you start off saying you wanted to see a problem through from beginning to end...

Yes.

But then, you also bring in a visual criterion which means that you display a section of your work to visual advantage, which means that you might not follow...

I think I see what you are saying.

It seems to me that you let the two run together so that what you make still looks nice. You're not just the scientist are you, you are also arranging things so that they look nice.

Well you know, often I'm not at all sure that they do look nice. Often they come out as the result of an idea, and what I look for is whether that idea is in the finished product. I'm disappointed... Well often I don't know if...sometimes they don't look nice, sometimes I decide in the final analysis that it's all abandoned.

And if they don't look nice then, do you put them in the bin, or do you put them in the bottom of a cupboard, or what do you do with them?

Oh, I just destroy them.

You destroy them?

Oh, I do destroy a lot of work.

So the visual result is important?

Yes it is important.

So you're not just working things out?

No. It's important if it doesn't fall in fairly short time. If I can live with it then I am pleased, but at the time that I finish it I have no idea, I really don't. And I've found often that it's the first one that survives better than variations.

And are you sometimes tempted to slightly disobey the rules and regulations of the system to make something look more attractive?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] No I don't...not very often. I think it's got to be effective on its own terms, it can't, I can't decorate it. It could be that accidents will occur, I mean sort of unexpected; maybe the material imposes a certain kind of result which I hadn't intended, and I can then start to cooperate, or explore, what the material is directing me towards. I'm thinking of this more in terms of coiled or looped objects. It's difficult to be very, it's difficult to cite an example. I mean, there's a thing in the hall, what I call a woodpecker because it sticks into the wall on a nail, which, I had no idea what was going to happen, but I was curious to know what would happen if I trapped one of these rods in elastic and then let the elastic go, and the thing would... I mean, and it was really quite interesting. I had a kind of wrestling match with these things once it began to curl up. And then, it's true I tried to find a shape that they would...in which they would become more or less stable; in other words they would flick around, but at a certain point they would seem to become stable. And that was in a sense when I could say I had no control of the shape, only of the idea that created the shape.

Yes. But in many other works, I suppose I feel that you have a kind of innate gift for colour and composition which makes things, you find a way to make things look nice, and I wonder whether that sometimes comes in conflict with the actual mathematical seeing through of a given...

I really can't answer that. I mean, this business with the pentagonal tiling has involved, well I mean I've gone back to colour, and colour becomes quite an important part of this exercise, because really I've taken the shape now directly from, I haven't...I don't think I could alter it. And so, but now the colour becomes the organising principle in interpreting the pattern. So I'm on a different wicket suddenly.

Yes, but you still choose attractive colours.

I'm very pleased to be getting, or to feel... I haven't used colour you see since 1970, and so, it is a very nice feeling to be using paint and colour again. But at the same time I'm in some ways more interested in these elastic lattices you could call them, because what I was really trying to...they seem to be quite closely related to the early lattices of the Seventies, but much more interesting in that they have this ability to change and... But there's a sort of, underneath the rather chaotic array of shapes there is a very clear organisation.

Mm. So, I suppose, this has been a long diversion which came out of you talking about the column and its atmosphere, the space around it.

Yes.

Which is kind of the point you got to.

It's the point I've got to.

The point you got...

There's been many changes on the way.

No, but that's the point you had got to, I think after the Systems show wasn't it?

Yes, it was, you're quite right. After the Systems show I became interested in space, and in sort of, in...yes. But, you see I think one of the biggest things, and in a way one of the things that had changed, is the notion of the idealism of the Sixties has given way to a much more... Well I think the notion of idealism is very compromised by the sort of experience of the Russian Revolution and more particularly when we were visiting Brazil, the effect, first of all of Max Bill in the first biennale, and then ten years later the generals took over Brasilia and it was the perfect place from which

to suppress any uprising, I mean it seemed to be built for the generals, and yet it was a tremendously idealistic intention that it was meant, you know, for the good of the people. But Legia Clark[ph] and, I can't remember the other guy's name, both, I mean he went back to Fravella[ph] and she became the witch of Brazil and did all sort of weird things. That was a very dramatic demonstration of where planned idealism is not a good answer, is not an answer, which is why I am so impressed recently by these Boolean nets and the notion of order organising itself. It's a little bit Thatcherite really, it can be read as that. But the notion that order arises spontaneously, that the market finds its own level if you like.

But you feel this gives you something to hold onto?

I felt...?

This gives you something to hold onto, this notion?

In a way, in a way, yes. But, going through it means at least I make it real for myself. I mean, my problem with mathematics at school was that it was a totally nonsensical kind of gibberish, it made no sense at all to me. When I read this little book by Danzig, mathematics suddenly became a reality for me, and when it became a reality I could deal with it, but as long as it was somebody else's reality really I found it very difficult to deal with. And when I read Roger Penrose's book I try to make, I try to understand it, I try to make it real, and most of the time I fail.

So, what you've been saying in the last half hour or something is that, although you've been worried about computers in the last ten years because you have been thinking to yourself, am I ridiculously doing something manually that could be done by computers, your answer now is, no, you need to do it manually.

I think my answer now is, no. Yes. Not totally no, because, I do think the computers are...we couldn't imagine the world without computers now. The world that the computer has revealed, which we want, of these space flights and so on, which is made possible with the computer, and quantum mechanics, it's made, it's revealed a

world which pilots are supposed to reveal or painters are supposed to reveal, but their imagination has been extended by the computer so that the computer isn't totally a waste of time, but I think it can be used in a very wrong way.

So, you don't just think the computer is an analogy for our own way of thinking.

No, certainly not. That, I've no love for the AI[??] ambition.

So you see it very differently.

I do, I do. But that doesn't mean that I wouldn't like to be able to use a computer. But I wouldn't use it with that ambition at all, no, I don't think. Well, Yasha Reichardt[ph] once told me that she thought that the next generation would be of computers, that we were destined to give way to a mechanical...they're better adapted to survive than we are. Well I don't know. I'm not interested in the survival of computers so much as I am of my own survival.

But you're interested in the way, I mean your interest in the human being is in the way we think.

Yes, it is. And I'm very interested that Penrose is, you know, having switched off his twisters and string theories, or not having switched off but he is more interested today in the, where consciousness began, what is the different, where do we become self-aware, at what point in the chain of evolution, and what does it mean, self-awareness? Because that is quite an enormous jump. If it's a jump it may be, you know, we may trace it back through all sorts of different levels of, I mean chimpanzees are not so far removed from being able to.....

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....really working on these drawings of wavy line grids or lattices and possible ways of translating them in colour or in other simpler forms, more graphic forms.

From '72 to '79?

No, to '75.

'75.

And in '75 I reached the point where I had to take them to the computer, and it was at that time that I got onto the elastic. I can't explain what I was doing wandering around the haberdashery department in John Lewis, but I was, and... [LAUGHS]

Looking for elastic.

And I saw a role of elastic you see, and I thought, this might serve my purpose for making these wavy lines a little bit, you know, reducing the length. If you've got a line with, say, nine waves in it and you want to shorten it by an inch, to do it as I did doing it with a compass and ruler it's a daunting, impossible, I would say, task. And so really I went to the Slade for the drawing table that Chris had evolved there, but then I found that my way of drawing the grid was totally unsympathetic to his way of thinking. And so he introduced me to computing really.

This is Chris...?

Chris Briscoe, who used to teach in the Experimental Department when they had one.

And the Slade?

At the Slade. And Malcolm Hughes was sort of running the department, the post-grad, and this Experimental Department was a section. And anyway, and so Chris

introduced me to computer thinking and absolutely astonished me. I mean I had no idea really how computers did think, but when I found, you know, I had to know exactly at what point I was going to start on the paper, what direction I was going to go, and when I was going to turn: everything had to be planned to a degree that had never occurred to me that I planned at all.

So do you mean originally you had thought that computers would be a means to an end, but actually they showed you a different end?

They revealed, well they revealed the computer mind which was so far removed from the way I'd been thinking.

So that changed your course altogether really.

Well if I had...yes, maybe... It did, yes it did; it certainly put an end to the first phase of exploring space. And then I became infatuated with the material, with this elastic material, drawing on it, because you know, it was like stretchable tracing paper and you could transform. I mean what I found in the end you see was that it could do things with the wavy line but it was a bit crude for doing the kind of fine drawing that I would have needed, but whereas it did humanise geometry, in other words a compass circle, what I would do with the elastic, I would take a strip of this woven elastic cloth, which is white, and then you can actually see through it, so it was tracing paper virtually, and I would stick it, stick a section of it to wooden rods and lay it over this compass-drawn circle and then trace the circle onto the elastic, and then I would move these rods and see my elastic circle turn into an oval, and then I could trace that, or pin that through back onto the tracing paper and get a distorted, get an oval, and I could keep on doing that for as long as I wanted to, taking the same shape through many transformations. So it was a sort of, well I thought of it as being rather like a friendly computer, although I must admit it didn't, it couldn't produce all the answers that a computer could produce.

The white elastic cloth was like a friendly computer?

Sorry, did I...?

The white elastic cloth was like the friendly computer?

Yes. It works, you know, it works on a grid, the only thing is the grid is not rigid, it's... And it has that physicality which is important to me, that, you know, while you can sort of stretch it as far as the elastic will go, or you can watch the shape evolving and changing... I mean, if I could have found elastic that would stretch in both directions I would have been much happier. This elastic only stretched in one direction. But, in the latter half of the Seventies, if you want to fill in that section of time, I was very much involved with what I could do with the elastic and with these kind of elastic transformations. And then there was this man in America, Ackerman, Martin Ackerman, who was commissioning books from artists, and he commissioned me to do a book on 'The Elastic Membrane', which I did, with the help of Jack Sherriff, who was the, he taught etching, silkscreen and etching, in fact printing, at Corsham, and he was very helpful indeed and a very good printer. I think he prints only now for Joe Tilson or somewhere like that. Yes, he's gone from strength to strength. But anyway, we evolved, we worked this book which was quite a big undertaking, because he wanted an edition of 350, and it was rather, looking back I think overly ambitious because it was housed in a kind of box container, it contained six prints, a working, drawing book, and a working diary, and sort of, it was...it was a bit ambitious. But anyway, that took up the latter half of the Seventies really, '79-80. In the meantime I was using it more to make prints than, well and a couple of practical drawings, and I went to Kelpra Press and did a silkscreen with Kelpra Press, and I found that interesting in that the first thing, it worked well for me, and the first thing he did was to lay down the paper, what's his name...anyway, and then he put... Oh sorry, the first thing he did was to lay down a wooden board onto which he then lay the paper. He took a print of the board and then he took a print of the board with the paper on it, and then he took a print of the board with the drawing on the paper and so on. I mean he went through all the stages in the printing that I would have had to go through in the actual making of the object, and I found that rather interesting. But I haven't done very much silkscreen printing since then, which was what, the late Seventies, might have been 1980.

But was it...you said earlier on that you haven't used colour since 1970, but weren't you using colour then?

Not in these, no. Well, he was literally imitating the colour of beach ply, or graph paper, or whatever material had been involved. It was really a facsimile kind of effort. No, when I did use colour for a little bit was when I was trying to transpose these ink drawings of grids into some other medium that would read more clearly than these shapes; the shapes were a bit anonymous really.

But your work then in the Seventies and the Eighties was linear, and it was black lines?

That's right.

Or elastic black lines.

Yes, it was. Or else transposed into etching, into photo etching. It was indeed. And after the Eighties, I mean after 1980, it was almost entirely material. I did very little drawing, and certainly no colour, it was all what the material would do or could do. Because you see, I mean the problem I found with the elastic was literally this one-way stretch, and so I needed to find an alternative kind of thing, which led me to the nets. I couldn't find elastic that would stretch all ways, but the strip, you know, the...elastic bands if you like, I could construct a net with those, which I did, but that involved in a sense a whole new technology, finding a source for the elastic, knowing, you know, what sort of frame to put it in. It's kind of new technique all the time and not...in fact I'm quite envious in some ways of people who work very conservatively and only if you like make one painting but do it over and over and over again, like Peter Joseph.

Yes. But you don't miss painting?

I don't...?

Miss painting?

Well I do sometimes, yes.

You do?

I do. Well I mean I very much enjoy getting back to paint, or, I say that, I do enjoy getting back to paint, but at the same time I can't use...the reason I haven't used colour is that I couldn't find any reason for using it, I mean it didn't fit into my cybernetics, if you like.

Mm. But many people would probably still think of you as a painter wouldn't they, but in fact you've not been a painter for over 25 years.

Well that's the trouble, and yet sculptors don't regard it as sculpture either; it's three-dimensional... It doesn't seem to have a category.

So it was useful for you when they happened to coincide moments of art movements like Systems Art into which you could fit.

Yes absolutely. I mean I wonder, well evidently, Heidi Hoffman told me, I didn't see it but she said there was an exhibition of hanging sculpture somewhere outside of Cologne just this last summer, but she called it sculpture, I don't know what the Germans would say, but anyway very sort of airy stuff. And, I mean it certainly isn't new, hanging sculpture, after all Calder's done it and, oh before him, Cobra has made things that, or Cobra, hanging pieces that I can think of. But it's the way of thinking about material that doesn't suit. I know Philip King said, you know, that I'm not a sculptor; I don't know what he would call it.

Well what do you see yourself as? Do you see your work as sculptural?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well I certainly see it as three-dimensional, and if I take Gabo's kind of description of sculpture then, yes I do. It's sculpture of volume. You see whereas I think painters are mainly concerned with space, sculptors are mainly concerned with volume. Yes, and it's a bit of a sort of hybrid between those, because... I don't know how, I don't know how I categorise myself, and I think that's because...I mean in a sense I didn't know how I categorised myself in the early Sixties or the late Fifties.

But people found a way for you at a certain point.

Yes, the works acquired an identity.

But after the Systems show at the Whitechapel, how were you shown after that, in what kind of context?

Well not very, I didn't have very many shows in the Seventies or Eighties that I can recall. I would have to look at the... I mean there were, the Sussex University, at the Gardner Art Centre. I put some catalogues... Oh no, it doesn't matter now. What did I show in the Eighties? Oh well of course I had the show at the Serpentine which was kind of...oh yes, and at the Air Gallery, and then I had this show in Poland, and Helsinki, Amis Andersen[ph], a small show in Hungary. I don't know, I did have shows.

Where was it, the Serpentine and the Air, but that's the Seventies or Eighties?

'84.

'84?

'84.

The eastern or central European interest, that's been more in the last ten years or so hasn't it?

Yes, definitely.

It almost seems that in the last...

I did have...what I had in the Serpentine was some elastic cloth, stretched elastic cloth things, and that was as far as I had gone, and etchings made from stretched elastic cloth. And then, oh then I did have this show in New York which, this is only, in the Nineties, and that did consist of rotten[??] elastic work. There was a brief kind of introductory room of earlier work but it concentrated on the elastic. And that was when the 'New York Times' critic - not the 'New York Times', the 'New Yorker' critic, called me an Abstract Realist, if there is such a thing.

He said, 'if there is such a thing'?

Well it was a woman, quite a young woman apparently. I didn't meet her, but she wrote this review after I was back in England, or I saw it after I was back in England. But I quite like the term.

Mm. But in terms of your finding a home, have you felt more at home in Germany or Poland recently than in Britain?

Well I would say, Heidi is, Heidi Hoffman has sort of become my agent in Germany, and she is the only agent I have.

But isn't that partly because there's more of a tradition of your kind of work on the Continent?

I think so, I think that must have quite a lot to do with it, and she is certainly devoted to spreading it. I mean, yes, it's true. And then there's the Swiss gallery, what's it called, who is also pretty devoted to constructivist art. But, yes there isn't much future in this country, that I see, for it. Although there's a rash of exhibitions, I'm going...well, colour presentations, colour, there are quite a number of people working

quite, with quite severe sort of systematic approach, more through music but to colour. There's an exhibition opening next week in some strange building that I'd never heard of on colour extension. Yes, and one or two painters I've met are working with colour that I had no... Anybody that I feel is working along the lines I'm working on, with...and I don't know what you...lines you would call those. Well, sort of quasi-science, quasi-crystals, quasi... I don't know, I'm very interested in the, what the scientists in Santa Fe, these evolutionary...they are making a sort of plastic repetition of what they regard as how life has evolved on the planet, and they're getting into a debate on Darwin and his theories. Dworkin doesn't...well Dworkin says it's the best, since we don't know of any other civilisation, a plastic civilisation is the best we can come to understanding our own. And this is where the Boolean nets come in. But you see this is where I am also confronted with the same problem I had with the, it takes generations, these Boolean nets, in order to evolve order out of a low state of order or what popularly is called chaos, it can run through hundreds of generations or hundreds of generations of computations, and it would be something like a repetition of the Seventies if I... I mean at Loughborough one of the professors up there has got the program of the evolution of order out of Boolean network which, and which I'm going up to see shortly. But what little I know about it, it seems utterly daunting from a visual point of view.

Explain, what is a Boolean net?

It's a net, it's to do very much with neighbours. If you have a cell which has two neighbours, and it can be either, say it has a red neighbour and a blue neighbour and the cell in between can be either red or blue but it can't be both, then the Boolean net goes through all the possible, say, computations of choice. I mean this is only one node of the net, a net would have a good many nodes. And if you start from a net of just red and blue dots and you give it neighbours of red and blue and decide whether it's going to be, in the next generation whether it will be red or blue, it evolves along those lines. And most of the time you see it doesn't evolve, or even if it begins... Well there are two - there are many problems. One problem is to recognise order, if you get it, and that it's not... You know, I sort of thought, well it would be an order

that I could easily, you know, that I see it when it comes, but with the Boolean nets they are strange shapes but they have an ability to survive.

And you see them on the computer, screened?

You see them on a computer.

And you actually did see them in Loughborough?

I will just sit and watch at Loughborough. This would be the paper, you know, this would be the prepared tape, and I would simply see it and I would have to take it from there, which is not, again it's a new situation which I haven't confronted.

So they offer you something and you can decide whether or not you can see a way of using it?

What would I...what would they offer me?

The scientists.

Well I went up there, you know, for four or five days last month to what they call a workshop; there were only four of us, each with our specific problem. Well my own[??] was a Boolean network, and they had no tape that they could show me at the time, but the man who was helping me did give me the primitive mathematics. It was a little bit like one of Ken Martin's systems only it's a little more complicated than that. So I got to as it were the first stage of the Boolean net, but I haven't actually seen it in operation, and I think it's quite dramatic. You see forms evolve and then die out, but the sort of stability, I mean the form that survives, I doubt whether I will recognise, because there are all these other ones which die out. I mean it does, you know, there are certain sort of, well these people in Santa Fe, I forget what they call themselves, theory of complexity, do go into a lot of analogies that can be made between the way these networks perform on the computer and the way evolution has evolved.

If I was to ask you a much too simplistic question but nevertheless I wonder if there's any kind of answer, which is, what now comes first for you, is it science or is it art? Would you read something and then think, how can I make that feed into my art, or would you see some scientific model and then think, yes I can use that, or would you think about...?

I think it's rather the latter, yes I can use that.

But do you see something that's in a scientific world that you...?

Yes, that I could use.

And, what is your process of adaptation?

Well it's getting more difficult. I mean like when I said yes, I can use Penrose tiles, you see, I am as it were beginning to go too far into the mathematic world, because I simply take his pattern, I can't interfere with the pattern; it's like taking the software and seeing what I can do with that, at this stage. Up till now it's not been like that, I mean, say, with this number theory book, and some of these elastic things which makes a mathematician laugh, I call, what do you call it, imaginary numbers, meaning, you know, the square root of minus one is a totally imaginary number but it evidently is practical in terms of mathematics. And my reason for using that is that the back side is a complete reflection of the front side, and so the back side is as it were the minus numbers and the front side is the plus numbers. That's my analogy, which is a bit wild I think for mathematics, mathematicians to accept, but it is a sort of meaning that made me want to do it.

Because you have to make wild analogies to be able to act at all, don't you?

Well, as a non-scientist in science, yes, I certainly do, absolutely. Yes I take wild analogies from science.

Do you find that scientists are sometimes impressed that you have managed to extrapolate but also condense one of their ideas?

Well I wish I did. I don't think I've really talked to scientists in, or have heard them talk to me, about what I do.

Oh I see. So you are kind of coming in as an outsider and running away with some notions.

Well, I am trying to make sense of subjects which have not made sense to me, and I say that I am trying to...I feel as though I am in the same position as most other people, and that if I can make it clear to myself I will be in some sense making a communication that might close the gap that I think exists. But you see I do tend to think that mathematics is the clearest, purest form of language that human beings have evolved.

And are you...if therefore you are tampering, or adapting something that is already clear, why are you doing it? To make it more simple?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well let's then talk about Penrose's tiling[??] of the plane[?]. What really appealed to me, what I saw was, his book, 'The Emperor's New Mind' or whatever it's called, page 537 I think it is, has a reproduction of his tiling pattern, and it reminded me very much of, because it's all sort of circles and you can't ever settle on it, it reminded me of watching a river over a parapet of a bridge, sort of swirling underneath, so that, it was that aspect that first appealed to me and I thought, well I would like to make this but I...and I thought, the shape of the page wasn't very satisfactory, so I thought I would extend it. And I realised I had no idea of how to extend it, there were no apparent rules that I could discover. And it took me ages to work this out, to work out the rules that govern this pattern, which, and they exist, and they are quite simple when you know them, but they're not at all simple when you don't know them. And so.....

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.....it flow and its as it were relation to water and whirlpools which have a direction and yet in a sense no direction, I mean they are compelled without purpose. But hopefully, I mean on a bigger stage it's completely logical what they are doing, and they relate to the whole environment, their behaviour, you know, to the whole connection between everything in the universe.

So, do you feel that you are making a connection between a very abstract landscape model and reality as we perceive it, visually?

Well when I looked at this drawing of Penrose's I did think that...I mean I made the analogy, I don't think he does necessarily. No, I only read, I just read it the other day, that the only practical use for these... What they are actually called is quasi-crystals, because they don't fit together like a normal crystal. The only practical use that science, that industry has found for them is these non-stick saucepans. Evidently they are coated with quasi-crystals, but so far that's the only practical use they've been put to. And I don't know that that means that they are pentagonal crystals, but, I don't know what shape the crystal is. But the next book I want to read has been published early this spring by some woman from America, it's called 'Quasi Crystals', so there's a whole range of quasi-crystals evidently.

When did you start reading science?

When did I start? Goodness knows, when did I? I mean not that long ago. When I look back I did very little reading in the Sixties or even in the Seventies. No, I began to start reading, this one book on number set me off, and then I didn't do a lot of reading in the Seventies. I think Eighties and Nineties, I seem to read more and more in fact. Maybe more desperate for ideas or something, I don't know. My ideas have come...I mean this is one thing that I have definitely noticed, is that my ideas have come from reading whereas they always used to come from landscape. But reading, the relation... It's easy to see a relation between landscape and experience; it's not so easy to see a relation between reading and experience, unless... I don't read poetry,

that's curious; maybe I've got to start reading more poetry. I was going to say, or you know, or go into plays, I mean Shakespeare is an incredible experience.

Of a different kind, a very different kind. I wonder how...do you make a connection between your two different sources, landscape and reading science?

I haven't thought about it very much. All I know is that my ideas tend to come from reading and not many come from looking.

But do you think it's because you've spent a lot of time looking at landscape, that now when you read about science you relate what you are reading on the page to what you've seen outside?

I think until the present school age children grow up we'll never know the answer to that. I think that there's less and less people experiencing landscape, I mean obviously the towns have been growing, I mean everything conduces to less and less direct experience and to more and more second-hand experience.

Yes, but when you say landscape, you don't mean trees and fields, you mean your experience of how to see landscape and how to translate that experience onto the page.

Oh, but that's...that's totally dependent upon the experience of landscape, I think.

But that landscape could be a townscape couldn't it, just as easily?

Yes indeed it could, you're quite right. Well I meant visual source. Yes it could be, indeed, I mean as a schoolboy my fascination was with the Bluebird, somebody Campbell's Bluebird, or Sopwith Trophy.

All I meant really was that, do you relate your reading now to your physical experience in the landscape earlier?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well, maybe we should use the word, something real, outside myself, something that I can challenge, that acts as a... What I was saying about abstract painting, in a sense, particularly with Abstract Expressionism, there is no way of knowing whether it conforms, whether it represents a feeling or not for anyone but the artist. If you are painting from landscape you can refer, you could judge the result from, as it were, with an objective point of view, and I think it's more to do with the sense that there is a measure for what you were doing, or for what you were attempting. With abstract painting there is a real problem there, that you know, your measure is not necessarily shared by the other spectators. I find this very worrying, which is one of the reasons why the column, why I had these column paintings with the column and the painting, and why in a sense the material pieces appealed to me, because they don't...well they explain themselves, I mean the material explains its own result.

Yes. So...

So it is a desire to communicate to that degree.

Yes.

But what one is communicating is in a sense, I suppose it is a private sense of reality, of what is being represented.

Well, so the shared concern across your work is the measure, that there should be some kind of measure?

Yes.

The measure in the early work was a landscape that any of us could see.

That's right.

Whereas the measure in the work now is, I suppose you might say popular science, which some of us read and some of us don't.

Yes. Popular science. Well, there are many measures. I mean a painting without a frame, or rather...yes, that frames itself, which is, you know, I mean, an illusionistic world is a world, you know, is a sort of, a painter's heaven if you like, because he can make it as he feels heaven could be, but it remains an illusion and it's put inside a frame and separated from its surroundings. And so, with the sort of rods and elastic they make their own frame, they make their own world, which is a world of physical material, a materialist view. And I think, I would certainly call my philosophy very materialist at this point. I say that, and yet it could well be a slight shift. I've been walking down a kind of winding country lane, you know, going this way and that, but confronting the computer, and my present line of interest is likely to be to a more human method of thinking than the computer's, or exploring that line. I'm a bit daunted by the prospect of Boolean nets at the moment, but they still, I mean I'm fascinated reading about them but I can't really find how I can use them, and I don't know where the next step is coming from, at the moment. I have faith that it will come from somewhere.

But if people say to you, are you the same artist who did those paintings in 1960, do you feel you are?

Well I... Stephen Bann once remarked on the consistency of my painting. The fact that these nets made out of elastic do to me relate quite a lot to the earlier nets twenty years ago I think is... I think my ideas just go round and round really, I mean, and maybe there's a twenty-year interval because the column recurred twenty years after the first ones, and if I do get more involved in colour, well there'll be an even bigger gap.

But do you feel there has been particular moments when you've been more successful in realising your ideas?

Well, yes. At the moment, I feel the column was always a very important moment, I don't know why but it was; it was a stage of evolution, a stage of kind of, an evolutionary stage. And then I think, yes then I think the shift from drawing to material was another rather important one. I don't know whether I can name a particular work. Well, in that series, well I tend to think the most recent ones, which are the ones in the next room, in a way summarise that search for the use of material, and I suppose from the beginning it was colour. But it's always been pursued in this rather unexpressive way, I mean in the sense that expression has not been a major component. But then you see my attitude to expression is that it exists in all of us, you know, why single it out as, I'm the one? And if one is not the one then it's not self-conscious; I mean I think expression, for me I can only be expressive when I'm not being self-conscious, or you know, attempting to be.

So, when you forget yourself?

That's right, exactly.

Which is this thing about the methodical work.

It's true, you do forget yourself when you're doing that.

And is that when you think your self comes out?

Well, yes if you dissociate that...well yes, it is. Yes, I think that's right. I mean really harking back to this book, you know, he relates it to this kind of scale of thinking. Yes, I mean, in one sense from the Fifties, from the late Fifties onwards it's been a struggle to make, again in Geoffrey Steele's words, an infinitely slow Jackson Pollock, which I think is a very nice expression.

But it's a kind of, in a sense it's a work that is yourself and not yourself, that you...?

Yes, it is.

It's not idiosyncratic.

That's my complaint about the more self-conscious work. I mean, it has to be idiosyncratic in order to be impressive as well as expressive.

Whereas yours is kind of the individual and the general. But there is something quite religious about this, I mean it's almost like that the, I suppose in meditation you only arrive at your goal once you've forgotten who you are and where you are and your surroundings, or, like, you kind of...

Well I suppose I'm not very interested in myself, I'm more interested in the goal.

But almost as if by putting yourself through...

And yet, if you do feel at the end of the day that you've done good work, there's an enormous feeling of self-satisfaction, which is not very frequent but nevertheless it does happen.

But what is a good work?

Well that's exactly it. Well you don't know but some days you feel you've done good work; it doesn't mean that that day will survive, but you feel satisfied, you've put in a good day's work.

But there does seem in your work to be this curious combination of through an absence of self, finding self.

Well I think inevitably when you're making art you do, I mean in a sense you expose yourself to a... Oh you do, I mean having a public exhibition of work does feel like stripping off one's clothes a bit. I mean it is...could be embarrassing. Well I mean, you certainly could, because sometimes you don't know if your ideas are really tenable, you know, I mean they could be ripped apart, or I mean what you put on the wall. No, it's an anxious moment having an exhibition I think.

I wanted to ask you about Constructivism, because I know, well either you've been put into or you're [INAUDIBLE] connected to a group of Constructivists?

Nobody has ever in that whole, in that group that I've worked with, it's been a constant source of argument, what, you know, what, how to...how to see our relationship to Constructivism. All I would say is, I can't imagine, I mean they've been an enormously important influence I think on the art of this century.

The Constructivists?

The Constructivists.

And by that do you mean the Russian Constructivists, or would you...?

Largely. No, Mondrian and the Dutch Constructivists too. But they have been the main proponents I suppose you would call it.

Is it a book that you've been put into alongside other Constructivists of your generation?

A...?

I remember you showed me a pamphlet with little biographies of people.

Biographies of people.

Brief biographies of a group of Constructivists of your generation.

Oh.

Like, and mostly...

Good Lord! Well Marion might think of it, I can't think of it.

Mostly Continental, and there was Bill and others.

Not, I mean, could it have been Cyril Barrett[ph]? No, but that's more on Op.

You're not part of a...?

No, that wouldn't be the one. Oh George Ricky.

No. Anyway, I mean essentially my question is, are you at the moment part of any kind of organisation to do with Constructivism?

No. Not at all.

No?

None at all. No. I would like, I mean I would like to find people sympathetic, yes. Sorry, that isn't entirely true. Frayulgin[ph] and his Pro[??] Foundation has...he's very active as an organiser, as well as an artist, and he did run this group, the Pro Foundation, and from about, it was most active from about '87 to '91 probably, and he organised conferences and so on of... You know, there are quite a number of people who work rationally I suppose you would call it, quite a number of Belgians and, not many French but Dutch, Belgian, German, and England, I mean Peter Lowe[ph] and Norman Dilworth[ph] and, well, Gary Woodleigh[ph] whom I think a lot of. And, there are a number of people, yes, who do work, but in isolation, in this country; in America they would certainly get together more regularly, I think.

Yes. So, and do you find there are any artists in London who you can exchange ideas with at the moment?

Well, I feel very sympathetic to this very much younger, in fact of Og's, James True[ph], I think he's got very nice kind of... One of his things was snails. Evidently

snails eat blotting paper, and he made a little box for his snails, I think he had twelve of them, and they ate; he had three layers of blotting paper and they made a kind of pattern eating this blotting paper which he collected, and he collected all their shit as a transformation of the blotting paper. And has made quite a study of snails. One of his pieces. Another was to watch the stain, he put a block of plaster in a tank of water and watched the stain change. It's like really dropping ink on blotting paper but much slower, so in three months the block had been finally totally saturated with colour, but the changes that it goes through in the process and the shape that evolves is rather beautiful. And he's a very good photographer so he has a good photo record of it. And, oh, and he's done a number of things. Dripping water into a tank and taking photographs of the circles, reflected, lighting it so that the reflection fell on the wall in rather clear patterns. Susan Durges[ph] is a photographer who did somewhat similar things with iron filings, you know, a plate hung over a loud speaker and then vibrated, and according to the pitch of the sound, different patterns in the iron filings would occur which she would then photograph and record.

So, it's natural patterns and time...

I think pattern is very important.

...speak to you.

Yes. Pattern is a very, I do think... I mean, I think pattern is very indicative of a culture, and the pattern that it regards as useful. I don't mean pattern of wallpaper, I mean pattern, more like Islamic pattern or...yes, a pattern that expresses a culture's aspiration and belief and so on.

But your patterns are not those kind of patterns?

Well, up to a point the pentagons are, but if I could only, you see when I, when I got onto these Boolean nets I was hoping I could get a pattern out of them, and maybe I can, I don't know, but it seems rather daunting because it's a pattern, well that has to change over time, and over...I mean, computer time is very different from real time.

So maybe I'm wrong. I thought your patterns were models of scientific theory.

Objects.

But do you think your patterns are also to do with society, culture?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well obviously the pattern that comes out of, say, a column is very limited, I mean it only refers to the column. Well, at that time, yes, I was curious about how the brain interpreted objects, and it can only be in a very abstract way. I mean it's a black box and yet we seem to see colours and shapes, and it's all coming in little chemico-electrical signals along nerves. So, whatever's happening in there is incredibly abstract, and at one point I was thinking of these patterns more as maybe something that goes on inside the black box, you know, I mean, and any brain surgeon would scream, just like your mathematicians, you know, when I make analogies like this they're pretty far-fetched.

But that doesn't necessarily matter if they are analogies that speak to us.

No I don't think it does. I mean it's sort of poetry really. But I certainly don't feel that I am a poet.

Yes. That's what I meant by kind of, a condensation of your reading, because you might be bringing it down to a simpler but perhaps more eloquent level.

Well, I would like to think so very much. I mean I think that would describe the activity. But I think you are the only person that's said it. [LAUGHS] So I don't think it is a general... So.....

End of F5085 Side B

F5449 Side A

Just so I can test the machine, could you tell me what your name is?

Michael Kidner.

And do you know what today's...?

11.09.17.

Do you know what today's date is?

Oh gosh. 4th of August.

Very good. Year?

Yes. [inaudible].

Which year?

'96.

[break in recording]

I wonder, can you remember what your reaction was, presumably Ron King approached you about making a book; how did it happen, do you remember?

Well I was teaching at Corsham, and, Jack Sheriff, who was the printmaker there, had a contract with Ron. I don't remember meeting Ron before that. Anyway, Ron had this, you know, this contract with Ackermann to make a lot of books, and he approached Jack, and Jack had made prints for me before, and so he said, 'Well, why don't we produce a book?' He had produced... Well I haven't got any on the wall, but anyway, he had made some quite nice etchings. He saw what I was doing, and said it would translate beautifully into etching, into photo etching.

What were you doing at the time?

Well I was drawing on elastic, and then stretching the drawing, you know, similar to that. And Jack saw all the various textures you see, so he thought, well this is fine for my, for my bit of the object, of the project. So he, he was really translating these, the texture of the elastic, of the graph paper, of the wood, into black and white.

Can you just say a little bit more about the drawings you were doing on elastic, and how they'd come about?

Well, yes, that's... I'd been...I'd been using a grid of wavy lines, and I wanted to create an infinite number of different shapes, just by the combination of these wavy lines. And it reached a point where my capacity to draw so accurately, I just couldn't do it. It needed a computer, because I could have made drawings to go all round the room in order to create a small change. And, so in a sense ducking out of the computer world, I found this elastic, it was, you know, John Lewis has it on the shelf, and it suddenly occurred to me that I might use this. And when I got it home, I realised it was like tracing paper, you could see through it. So I could draw a circle for example on a piece of graph paper, put the elastic over it, repeat the circle on the elastic, and then stretch it, and the elastic would transform.

How big a scale were you working on?

Not very big. I mean the biggest print was probably a little bigger than that, not very big.

The whole size...

Yes.

...size of the elastic membrane.

Yes.

And had you been doing that for quite a while, or was it very new still, or...?

Well yes, and there I'd been both... You see the book actually, the book is I think dated 1980; I'd actually started to use elastic in 1976, and I'd made several prints with Jack before, during the Seventies.

Based on the elastic?

Based on the elastic.

Right. And had it ever occurred to you to make a book, had you thought about the book form at all?

No, I hadn't. Not at all. In fact it was very embarrassing when, you know, when there was the suggestion of the book inside the book, inside this, these so-called notebooks. What I had done is, make notes that interested me in a Woolworth's book, and part of the project became to reconstitute this Woolworth's book. And it wasn't Jack actually, it was...oh gosh, I can't remember his name.

The person who worked with Ron?

No.

Not John Christie?

No, it wasn't John Christie at all. It was another, somebody else who was teaching at Corsham.

Right.

And he was teaching in the graphics department. I didn't have a lot of...until this came along, I didn't have a lot of contact with him. But he was a very fine, what do you call it... He used to make mass production prints, but he made, he used the

twelve-tone instead of the six-tone scale, if he was printing off photographs. So he made... I mean there are some... Three of the prints in this book are by him.

Can you actually take me through...

Offset litho.

...the contents of the book then?

Well I could, I could. I mean the book, the books... You see the book that I was keeping in the studio was never... You know, you said had I ever contemplated a book; well certainly this wasn't thought about, publishing it. It was a private notebook. And it became extremely embarrassing to me, because it was so well reproduced that all sorts of remarks that I would dearly like to have eradicated, well you couldn't change it.

So this is a facsimile of your...

A facsimile.

...of your notebook.

Printed by this man, what is his...he must be on the colophon sheet.

Yes. And did you always keep notebooks of this kind?

I... No, irregular. I don't know why I was doing it. You see that doesn't...I mean it has nothing to do with elastic, the first page, it was to do with an exhibition, I mean not even an exhibition, that piece of work.

So this statement, for example, 'I need a purpose to direct the experimentation and determine the aesthetic.' Was that something you would have written thinking about

having to make a statement for the exhibition, or would you have written it just for yourself?

No. Yes. No, this is something I was trying to...yes, to make a statement for this particular exhibition.

Right.

You're quite right. [pause] Offset litho.

Can...I mean, if you look through the book, can you remember sort of certain moments, or not?

I should think they did quite... Yes I think so.

I mean, supposing we take that page, what comes back to you from that page?

July 16. [pause] Well, I know, I had read a book, *Number, the Language of Science*, by Danzig[ph], an American, schoolteacher I think. But it was a very impressive book, almost like poetry. It was describing the growth and use of number from the beginning, right from, even animals have the sense of number. And it was amusing and very poetic. The last three chapters... He always thinks of number as an empire. Every...every...I mean, it was an empire because it was always added to, until, until the last century, or till this century, when the notion of infinity became questionable, you know, all sorts of notions which mathematically should be proved to infinity, or else it entered the realm of mathematics, no longer applied; mathematics solved problems, and that was enough, in this last century. And, I'd been very impressed by that book. And part of the notion of making these drawings with wavy line grids, had been to create an infinity of shapes, which, you know, which led to the elastic.

Right. So this book would have had thoughts about what you were reading, thoughts about what you were going to do next presumably, and drafts and statements.

Right, and about people I was impressed by, and seeing.

Find me one of those.

I mean here I see a quote, Adrian Heath, and I can't read it. 'There is the artist's intention, that as an artist is the main preoccupation, but then there is the' something. I can't read my own writing. Not that I expect you're very...it doesn't matter.

Would you have been seeing Adrian, would it have been something he said to you?

Oh yes, he was a teacher, he was the teacher. Oh he used to...I used to drive down with him to...he had a car and I bummed around with him, down to Corsham. Those journeys down, to and fro from Corsham, were very rich in making friends and communicating ideas with people.

And all that would be recorded in this probably, little snippets?

Well some of it, not all of it.

What it says is, 'There is the artist's intention, that as an artist is the main preoccupation, but then there is the projection of the work onto the spectator, the degree to which the work invites participation at the level of imagination on the spectator's part.'

Yes, well that presumably was quoting from some sort of conversation I'd had with Adrian.

A debate between David Sweet and, Geoff Speel[??]?

Oh, yes. Oh yes. Well David Sweet[ph] was very anti 'the grid' as he called it, and...

On what grounds?

I think he thought it was anti-imaginative.

And then you've got Kenneth Martin. 'Mary Hilder[??], baking tin with plaster, and carved her first relief. Since Mary was into making reliefs, I had to do something else.

Oh that was quoting Kenneth.

Yes.

Yes, quite right. Yes, he was...after Mary died I got to know Ken quite well, because he lived quite nearby. He used to come down. He was a bit lonely in his old age.

So what is it that you wish you'd taken out? Do you feel these are too private, or what is it?

Well, or ingenuous, I mean too, unsophisticated I think I would call it.

But because they were letters to yourself so to speak, rather than...?

That's right.

Yes.

Exactly that.

That's interesting.

Which I never really re-read I must say, but still, the effort of writing them, tended to make it stick in the mind more.

This is interesting. 'I feel unable to make any freehand lines or marks any more. If I do there is nothing to look at but my own lines. That my own mirror image, the roll of

the line is paramount, it is there because its performance interests me, but it is not of me.'

No, I don't know where I got that idea from. But I mean, yes, that is something, is in my mind. Because of course, there's so much emphasis on the personality, the individuality of the artist today, and I was rather critical of that notion.

And is the other book similar? What is the other book?

No, the other book, I wasn't so happy about at all. It was, the idea was to produce some of the images and drawings that I had been making up till then, or during 1976 I think. I don't know what the date of that book is, I think it may be '76.

'77.

Oh it's '77.

Right.

But then... Oh all right, '77 then, yes.

So this one was actually a series of images you put together from the work that was around?

That's right, that's right.

Right. So it was never in book form until this stage?

That's right. Absolutely.

So why is it you're unhappy with it?

Because, they were... It seemed more artificial than that book. I mean, hunting around to scrape together drawings.

But also presumably, because they're reproductions and they're not in the form they should be, they're not...they weren't ever done to be illustrations in a book, they weren't done to be printed?

Well they didn't seem to me to be quite like drawings, you know, yes, to go... It seemed to be like... I mean that is virtually reproduced in one of the prints in this book, or, near enough. It didn't extend the, the book.

Mm.

Well that's a better drawing, in the sense that it tries to show the kind of working process of the elastic, how one would proceed.

I mean, it's nice for somebody coming at it from the outside, to have the documentation.

Yes. Yes, yes it is, it does document the time, the period. Experiments with mirror, creating moiré patterns. No, that's just the...

Ah, I was going to say, it looks...

Yes.

So the mirror is behind it?

Yes.

Right.

It's stretched over a mirror.

How did you discover it would do that? By chance, or you knew?

No, I had a fairly good idea, I'd be interested in moiré before this. Well there you see, I am playing with the moiré effect very directly. What I was hoping when I made this one, I had pins in the elastic before I stretched it, and I was hoping that I would get patterns around each pin, rather like a breakwater in the sea, that would kind of break up the pattern, but it wasn't very effective.

And what are these?

Well they're ways of interpreting this stretched square. I think... No. Sorry. There's, I think... I spent a long time on the square, the whole of one summer; all sorts of interpretations of what starts out as simply a square, and is then stretched. But you see the stretching process can be repeated. Well I mean, you can see in this one, there's a square, that would be the first stage, and with each stage the square gets more and more distorted, ending up in this kind of axe-head shape. And these drawings, they're kind of exploring the transformation.

And so, what you would have been doing was making the work and looking at it and then doing the study, rather than doing the study and manipulating the work to fulfil it so to speak?

I think I was trying to find what I could do with the elastic. I mean I'd become somewhat infatuated. You see the wavy lines, the elastic... I did make one or two wavy line drawings on elastic, which weren't...I don't think there's any of them in here, at the start of the game, but then I realised that the elastic was much more effective when used with a geometric form. And virtually, I hoped, giving a kind of organic feel to a geometric origin. It was, you could say, trying to close the gap between nature and geometry.

Mm. And you obviously at that time were reading a lot about mathematics, and physics presumably?

I think that was when I began to get more interested in mathematics and physics, yes.

And do you still read it, have you kept on?

I...I actually read much more, I don't read very much about art any more, I do read a lot more about physics.

Right. So this work, the Elastic Membrane, I mean is it reasonable to say that it relates to a very core period of work that still feeds into what you do now?

Oh I think it was. I mean, in a sense, with all these bits of elastic and rod, it was the idea of containing the pictures surface. I mean, you see, when I was looking for infinity, infinity has no, no boundary, but if one interpreted, interprets nature as a sort of combination of forces, of energy really, and not a vacuum, which is what infinity suggests, then you have to find as it were where the other forces contain themselves. And it was in a sense the notion of the rod operating against the elastic, so that...

So is it... Are you partly trying to find where the edges are?

In a sense, that's right. I mean this has been, this goes back to the Sixties, you know, those stripes and wavy lines end arbitrarily at the rectangle. And that has always seemed a bit arbitrary. But I mean, how does one, you know, what's beyond the Big Bang? Everyone always asked that. There's always something outside of whatever you're thinking. But, nevertheless it seemed to me the elastic had its own kind of energy which was a substitute for the kind of energy that I was trying to contend with I suppose in my reading of physics and...

Can you show me the other parts of the book?

Well, the rest of it is only etchings really, and...

Were you part of the design of the whole structure?

Yes. I was, part of it. We had to do this...I mean Jack Sheriff and I did it basically, although I must say he did most of the hard work, I mean, organising a box like that. An edition of 300.

Did you design it though?

Yes I did do that.

And did you always know...

I think he... It was... I mean it was a kind of, a sort of stupidly complex design really, when we realised what it meant to make it. You know, just to make, just to make this board. And we had to make 350 of these things you see, and I mean, just to make 350 little strips of wood like that is...is not just...

Can you just talk about this, because this presumably is the core of the work, this is how, this is the heart of it, yes?

Yes, this is supposed to be a practical.

So can you tell me about it, in words so the tape recorder can understand it, when we haven't got it in front of us.

Well it's a board that slips down inside the book. And it contains a circle drawn on a piece of elastic which is stretched over the board.

What's it drawn with, the circle?

Rapidagraph[ph] ink. The circle behind was just drawn with pen and ink, on the graph paper, which is underneath the elastic was a sheet of graph paper, with a circle and a cross drawn on it. And then, the elastic is stretched over, over that drawing, and the circle repeated before the elastic is stretched. There isn't a lot of room to stretch it

on this board, but, given more space it would have been more dramatic. However... When I stretched the elastic, I then inserted this Plexiglass strip; one wasn't strong enough to stretch it so I made two parallel with each other, and that gave more resistance to the contraction of the elastic. But anyway, it created a distortion in the circle, and the centre of the circle is marked with a cross to indicate how the centre has shifted. And that became interesting to me, to notice, if you're doing a lot of stretches, you need to keep track of the circle, of where the centre of the circle is moving.

So, what's the balance between this and having the function of doing more stretching, and having an aesthetic show?

Well this was later. The original ones were just a wooden, I just used a wooden strip, or even nails, like, like these, to nail the elastic into position. Here I was beginning to think about some kind of natural resistance, not me pulling it and nailing it, but something that would counteract the elastic. Which ended up with fibreglass rods being more effective. So that really is, is the, what I call the, the sort of work, work sheet. And then behind that are these etchings and lithographs, which, [inaudible] lithographs.

Oh they're beautiful.

Well that's one that...that's a fairly typical one that Jack made from a photo. You know, they're photo etchings basically.

That's extraordinary. God! that's really beautiful.

Well yes, they're very nice, I mean, he's a great printer I think.

Gosh it's wonderful.

You see, his comment about the different textures works quite nicely, really.

God! that's really wonderful. You must have been very pleased, weren't you?

Well, I was, you know. I mean but these weren't the first that he'd done, you know, I'd made them as editions. Well I mean, this was an edition but it was a somewhat different kind of project.

Mm. [inaudible].

Now I'd like to find one that Barry Millard did, because I think his work... That, well that's another one of Jack's, on a coat hanger. It was a bit gimmicky I think, for my, in my opinion. This is a Barry Millard.

Gosh they're extraordinary.

Now you see that is a totally mechanically produced print, but it's with his twelve-tone technique that he developed, and I think he won prizes for it in Switzerland.

So these are simply the same idea as this curve, only they're a full circle?

That's right.

The same material.

That's right.

Right. Good heavens.

And they're trapped in a very, what do I call it, fragile way, I mean, these circles. So that a slight movement...well there maybe, if that one slipped out, the whole, the whole organisation would change. It was...

And that's only the force of each upon the other holding them in there, or are they fixed into...?

That's right, yes, it's generally, it's like a tray with sides that want to contract. But again, you see another problem with the elastic that I...well I still have when I use it, it has only a one-way stretch, I mean I can't... That rod will release and compress these discs, but these two won't.

Mhm.

So, it's limiting in that way.

And the circles, would you make them or you had them made for you, or what?

No they were...it's cubes of, what do you call it, well Plexiglass in America. Anyway, you can buy these tubes, and I just sawed it up to get the different sizes. But they're standard products, you know, from a shop.

Is Plexiglass the same as Perspex, or not?

Perspex, is the word I was thinking, you're quite right. Well that's right.

Mm, they're really [inaudible].

But you see, I mean in my opinion this could almost be a photograph. The reproductive...

And would you have been there doing the proofs and things, were you part of the process? Presumably yes.

Well yes, when Barry Millard was doing it, I tended to be there with him when he was doing it. When Jack was doing it, it's a different process really, I mean it's a longer and drawn-out, you know, putting it in the acid, and doing that. I just sort hand over the photograph or...to him. I had to make a photograph, you know, this size, which I

had to do in London, then I'd take these down on my teaching turn to Corsham and Jack would do it.

And what about the colours of the folders, is that you?

The colour in the...?

Of the folders, who chose that?

Well, that, neither of us could decide on the, on the colour in the folder, on the colour of the Perspex. We, some of them we made in plain transparent, some we made with this smokey colouring. It's a choice, half and half.

End of F5449 Side A

F5449 Side B

.....at that moment, I was meaning these folders.

Oh, the colour of the folders. I don't remember how we decided to do them. We decided to use different colours, folders, but how we distributed them within the colours... I mean, it's decoration.

Right. But it was all, the whole thing, it sounds as though it was a joint effort the whole time.

It really was, I would call it that.

Right.

Definitely.

This is very beautiful.

And I think we... Yes.

And these would have been pieces of work you'd done anyway, or you were doing them before the book?

Yes, basically. I don't think I did anything for the book, I mean except to make...well no, nothing. Yes, this book was probably, this I had to do more for the book.

Right. But these would have been done anyway.

But these, yes, these were not...these were not designed for the book in that sense.

So how do you feel about the fact that these particular images are isolated in the book, and given this sort of, historical life in a way?

That's one of my favourites.

I mean are there others of the drawings you wish were also in the book, or...?

I honestly hadn't thought about it. Yes, I did find the size restriction of the book difficult to work with. I mean that's a very cut-off image in fact. I think it's rather, I rather like it for its...the textures are rather beautiful in this one, I think.

Mm. It's an extraordinary quality that they've got isn't it.

Yes. And I like the contrast of the various lines in this. And I also did discover that chalk, you know, elastic will take chalk rather well, so it...I began to develop chalk. I have made better, I think I've made better prints since the book was made, with, using the elastic. And not necessarily better, but I meant, more inventive drawings.

But the actual piece itself is a piece in its own right, it's not just a piece on the way to a print, is it?

You mean, the working thing?

Mm.

Oh no, that is, that was made for the book, definitely.

But I mean, if...the piece from which this image is derived...

Came. Would have been on a much bigger board.

But it would be a piece of art in itself, it's not a piece made simply to derive an image from, is it?

Oh I see. No, I made editions of etchings, of photo etchings, which, some of which I've sold.

But the actual original one piece that began it, would you also sell?

Well the piece that began, it wouldn't have been anything...it was literally wavy lines.

No no no.

Well I've got, I've got a book somewhere, where six artists, G.A. Spencer produced it in 1976, which is why I know where this, where I began doing this.

But...

If I could find that book, it has the original story.

The original wavy lines. But, the piece...this actual piece, somewhere there is the wood and the elastic and the rod, but from which the image is taken.

Oh variously. Oh the actual pieces...

That is a piece in its own right isn't it, it's not just a piece that you made in order to make a print from?

Yes, I've got a couple upstairs of pract...yes, of ones that are not...I've not made prints from them.

And they would be pieces that people could buy?

Yes.

Right.

Yes. Yes. Sorry, I'm slow.

So, so the prints, do you see the prints as a...

By-product.

A by-product. That suggests they're not...you're...

Well yes, I do. I mean really, I did, originally, when I made...the first pieces of elastic that I made, were...I never thought of them as prints, at all.

Mm.

No no, it's true. And I think really it was Jack Sheriff[ph] who said they would make good prints, that turned me on to the idea of printing.

And so would you sometimes have shown the rods and the elastic alongside the prints, did you used to show them together, or not?

Well in this show I had at the Serpentine, I did have some practicals. There was one that I made which contained... No, I didn't use a print in that. I used... No, no sorry. Well at the Serpentine, there were a lot of these etchings, and there were one or two practicals, as I call them.

Practical? That's a good word.

Yes.

So that's a practical.

So that's a practical, that's right.

And these are the prints. Right.

That's right, that's right.

They're lovely.

Yes. So...

Can I see the last one?

Oh sorry. Yes. I don't, I really don't know, from... I ought to know from the colour of the...but it's really a long time since I've taken them out.

Oh [inaudible].

Oh yes. Well that's one of Barry Millard's. But it does...it does show the kind of, you know, the texture of the wood and everything.

So this is a quite different piece?

Well, I made, from the stretched square, I just...yes, I wanted to do a three-dimensional, or a relief version of it, hoping to make it more, stronger in some way I suppose. One which is, I think it's in the possession of the Arts Council, contains this as well as an elastic frame, and a kind of drawing in between, so there's a transformation into three-dimensions in the one piece. Because I suppose... I don't know. I got rather suspicious of painting at a certain stage, I felt it was too easy to hide what you didn't want to show in a painting, you know, just to present the Garden of Eden and not anything else. And I felt that once you went into three dimensions it was like looking behind the, behind the scenes. And so, more and more, in the Eighties I was making three-dimensional objects.

Mm. So this is again a real pointer to what happened next as well, as a record of what was happening.

I suppose it is, yes, I suppose it is.

Mm. And did you think right from the beginning of having a sort of box construction and a clear outer cover?

No, it took quite a long time to decide what form to use to give them. And it seemed, you know, it seemed a very expensive kind of book to... In fact I felt it was a bit too ambitious, you know, it was only really Ron King that encouraged us to go on.

So it began with the practical, and then the idea of prints came in, or they were always going to be the prints and the practical?

That's right.

Always, there were both?

Well, when I saw what Jack Sheriff[ph] did, then I thought, well the prints are quite interesting in their own right. And so then, yes I did, I was quite encouraged to go on and make more.

And whose...

But I never thought of the object then as being a necessary part of the print.

Right.

You know, the print was then an object, in a sense.

Yes. And at what point did the idea of putting these books come into it? Who suggested doing that? Because it doesn't sound as though it was you, because you felt quite private about it.

Well, I wouldn't have...I quite liked the notion of recording a year's work with the elastic. And I... No, I didn't object to the idea of the book, but, except when I found that I couldn't... I mean the book, this was already, the book was, you know, quite an old one by the time we were talking about making... I mean, that book was quite old. And I hadn't looked at it since, since I'd made it; I just happened to mention that I had this diary, and you know, maybe I could, or we could make some use of it. And then I started to read it and thought, crikey! [pause] But...yes, I should have...I mean, I might have been a bit more wary if I'd read it more recently, or re-read it after writing it.

And, have you gone on...did you ever make anything comparable to this?

No.

So it's really a...

It is unique in terms of my own experience.

Yes. And what do you feel about it now?

The book?

Mm.

Well I'm glad that I've done it I think. But I haven't...there hasn't been any kind of come-back on it, you know, it's just something that's rather got forgotten in...

I think it's partly because Ackermann took all of the books away, and nobody...

He did, he took them all to America.

And did you actually meet Ackermann?

Yes I did, in America.

What was he like?

Well, I visited him on 720 5th Avenue or wherever it was he had this apartment, and it was all a bit awe-inspiring, with the doorman at the door, and everything laid out. And... And I was embarrassed really by his collection of paintings. I didn't think he had a brilliant collection.

Do you remember what was in it?

I can't remember. Mostly people I'd never heard.

You mean they were really awful?

No, no no, some of them were quite nice. It was very eclectic in fact. But there were too many bad ones, so it was pretty hard to see the good ones.

Mm.

But this was, you know, I mean I didn't have time to really look at the collection, but he rather proudly showed me, and he had hundreds.

Mm.

I mean he was... I don't know what sort of man he was really.

And how did you find working with Ron?

Well very pleasant. You know, Ron is a nice character I think, I enjoy him. And, at the time he was living in Guildford, you know, he had this workshop in Guildford, and... Yes, and also, John, and what was his name, John...?

Christie.

Yes, John Christie, that's right, who I met just the other day. Recent...doesn't seem to be a year older than he was then, he's so young and enthusiastic. I think the workshop, or Ron's, you know, printing studio, had a very nice atmosphere, really.

You went there then obviously.

Yes, we went there, with Jack.

What do you remember of it, what do you remember?

What do I remember? Well, Ron was making a pop-up book about, oh I don't know, Sue and Ben[??] wasn't it, or one of...

It was probably Bluebeard's Castle was it?

Bluebeard's Castle, quite right. Quite right. A pop-up book. It seemed to me at the time that it was a very simple idea upon which to be making a book. But on the other hand, he was doing... His *Alphabet* I think is brilliant, and beautiful.

Why, why do you think it's brilliant?

Well, I think there's... Oh gosh. (laughs) Why do I think that's brilliant, and *Bluebeard's Castle* wasn't so impressive? I don't know. I think I'll have to think that one over. I suppose with *Bluebeard's Castle*, I think, you know, I'd seen it in the sort of theatre, the toy theatre. It was theatrical, and it was too much in...it seemed like it was too much for the market. That was my...I mean, Ron has to live, so he's got, you know, he's got to maintain that studio and so on. So... And he works very hard at it. But... There wasn't perhaps enough research in *Bluebeard*, whereas I thought he handled the *Alphabet*... You know, he's marvellous with letters and print formats, and that kind of thing.

But do you know what you like about the letters?

[pause] Well, if you talk about illustrated manuscripts, they're fantastic. Oh the design, letter design is a whole world in itself isn't it? And I think Ron, you know, is sensitive to that kind of area of work. And it takes a lot of study, it's very...you know, it's quite a finely honed art.

Mm. And do you feel part of the Circle Press because your book is represented there, or was it such a...?

No, I don't.

Yes.

Not at all. A visitor. I do. Because really I haven't... Well I keep in touch with Ron, because he's...he's...I like him, but not in terms of the press or what he's doing.

And, can you just tell me, I mean, do you know what you then went on to do from this? Did it feed into anything quite directly, doing the book?

I can't remember. Not honestly. I think... No, I...no, I don't. It was later, in the Eighties, that I started using fibreglass rods. Maybe a rather blank period, the early Eighties. I think what happens, for me anyway, is that, I don't possibly stick with an idea for long enough. I get stuck, I feel trapped by... I mean working with elastic and, working this way, began to, made me feel like I was trapped by the, by the process. And so, I've always been restless as soon as I, as it were, seemed to establish a method of working.

And do you know when you stopped working with elastic? How long did you sort of explore it?

Well I haven't really stopped working with elastic, or with the notion of mobility or flexibility. Whether I can find... I mean I've worked with metal springs for example. I would prefer to call it mobility than elasticity.

But do you ever any more literally work with elastic itself? You don't, do you?

No.

You've moved away from it.

It's a long time since I've actually drawn on the elastic.

Have you any idea how long, do you have any idea when you last did it?

Well actually, when I say that, it can't have been that long ago. I should think it's about four or five years.

Oh really? So recent.

Yes, but that was rather a revival. And what made...what...why I did them, I think I just had a sudden idea and that I thought... I don't know, I just wanted to do it again. Because I thought I could extend the, what I was doing with it.

*And therefore, did you still have some, or did you have to go and get more elastic?
Was it still around?*

No, I had a stock.

So it was always there.

I had a stock.

Right.

That I...I've still got a stock up there.

And were you able to extend the idea, did it...?

I think I made better prints, more interesting prints, a couple. But I didn't...I mean I didn't go on, it didn't become a very long process.

What was different about those prints that made you feel it was extended?

[pause] Actually, I'd have to show you because... It was a way of using the repeating process, within... Well... Yes. With the stretched square, it seemed...I mean that was...the new ones involved the whole surface, and it didn't involve just a single image in a sense. It was more like stripes in a way.

Right.

But, the spacing became rather, rather beautiful actually, I thought. Because they had a sort of, I don't know, had a nice quality.

Right. And do you still keep any kind of diary, records? Do you still do that?

No. Well sometimes I write as a sort of way of trying to clarify my own head. But very, very irregularly. And I don't have a book, you know, I just write on whatever's to hand.

And did you have other books like this at the time, or is this really a one-off?

Well now yes, I have got some...well, a great variety of half-filled books, or... Yes, something like that.

And would all your writing relate to the art practice? I mean do you ever for example write any fiction?

No. No. I'm incapable of fiction, I think.

And do you write about the emotions ever?

[pause] No. Years ago, in the Sixties, I would have said that the way you wear your shoelace is as expressive as... What I'm really saying is, it seemed to me that emotion, to express emotion, self-consciously, or to seek emotion in the work, was incredibly artificial, and that, I really wanted to find a way around thinking about emotion, but not...not meaning denying emotion, but just allowing it its head. And really my work practice is very much... I mean I would say that was a pretty basic contract with myself, that I made at the time. When...at that time of course it was all abstract expression. I mean I spent a couple of years with, actually with John Copelands, when he was in London, and we were experimenting with sort of gestural printmaking and so on, and it was really, it was a very exciting year for me, but it led to nowhere.

Can I just ask you, because I've just been writing about him, what do you feel about Marc Vaux's paintings, the lines going round the edges?

Oh, well they're very beautiful. But the middle is... They're very well-tailored products. I think I could live with one on a wall. It's not demanding of the spectator, but it's contemplative really.

Mm.

I think...I think they're rather good, I think. He's been a long time finding, finding it, you know, but... No I like them.

Mm. And, sorry, I'm just wondering. I was remembering the tapes Penelope made with you, and, you talked with her about the fact that your father died, but I think it must have happened off tape, her asking you what you felt and what impact that had on you, because that's a missing part.

Well I found my father quite remote. He... We got up eight o'clock, had breakfast, he went off, and we all went off. When we came back, when we came back, we had our tea, and he came back about two hours later and had his tea. And we went to bed about the time he was having his tea, so... But not only that. I was a bit frightened of him, he was a very... [pause] I didn't make very much contact with him, at all, I mean, except through my mother, and didn't really make a lot of contact with her. I had an incredible governess from the age of about two who, I was the apple of her eye, and she was the apple of my eye. So I only really got to know my mother when I was about ten or eleven.

But when your father had died, that cut off the possibility of ever getting closer to him.

Yes it did.

Did you ever have a response to that, the foreverness of it, or was he just someone who was vaguely in your life and then wasn't in it?

Well I sometimes wonder if I ever met myself, or, I mean if I could ever... If I'd been able to meet him, then I might have in a sense met myself and become more realistic or something of that sort. Because my mother was a total romantic, and very impractical in terms of any worldly sort of affair. And, I think I was too.

Mm. What actually happened to your father?

Well he was killed in a road accident. He used to ride a motorcycle to his works, it was an iron smelting business, and, I mean it was very dramatic, he used to take us there on a Sunday, and we'd see these furnaces smelting red hot iron, they would, you know, tap the furnace and it would roll out in a river into beds of sand. But... Sorry, I've lost the thread, thinking about that.

I was asking what happened to him.

Oh, that's right, yes. He was coming back from, from work, and ran into a milk cart. Apparently, I mean nobody, you know, he must have been deep in thought. In those days there was very little traffic, and there was certainly no reason for him to have run into it. But he... I think he was just thinking about something else.

And did you cry when you were told, do you remember?

I don't remember.

And do you remember your mother being upset?

A hollow feeling. Oh yes. Well she called the whole family, because I have, you know, quite a big family, she called us all together, and, I think took us to Norfolk, to Blakeney or somewhere like that, and we spent a weekend there. And it seemed to...everything was for the best. (laughs)

Mm.

I mean that was the sort of feeling that one got. And I was quite uncritical of it.

Mm.

I mean I thought that was just marvellous in a sense. But, I did write an incredibly sentimental bit about my memories of my father, which were not... You know, any kind of achievement that I made was always this governess or my mother; I never felt that my father had much, either interest or necessarily approval.

Mm.

I mean, if it was, it was all second-hand.

Mm. And did you miss it?

Did I...?

Did you miss it, or did it just not occur to you, you might have had his approval?

[pause] I don't...I mean it would have occurred to me much later; I didn't at the time think about it very much.

Right. Sorry, I just.....

End of F5449 Side B

End of Interview