

NATIONAL LIFE STORIES

ARTISTS' LIVES

Bernard Gay

Interviewed by Melanie Roberts

C466/57

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F5897 Side A

[Commencing the interview with Bernard Gay at his home in Petersfield on 2nd of September 1997.]

Now I wonder if you could tell me when you were born and perhaps what you remember of your earliest years.

Oh yes I can do that. I was born on the 11th of April in 1921. I was born I think into a situation that by contemporary standards was probably rather appalling. I never knew my own father, and I think between the age, well between my early years and the time I saw 16 I probably only saw my mother three times, that I can remember. And I was brought up in Exmouth by what was known in those days, a baby farmer, a woman who took on children whose families couldn't bring them up. And we were very poor, it was a terrible time, I mean 1921 was a terrible time anyway, most people I think were very poor, life was very hard in those days, and I can remember even now the people who lived next door to us sitting on their furniture in the street where they'd been thrown out of their home by bailiffs I guess, and I can still remember them sitting on their furniture weeping, because there was nowhere to go really except the workhouse, because in those days after all there was, you know, there was no dole, no social benefits, no support, and if you were thrown out of your house because you had no money, you were simply thrown out. Anyway I stayed in Devon until, well I can't even think what the age was, but I went from the baby farmer, who was a Miss Wellaway, to a waifs and strays home when I was, I guess nine or ten years of age. And I was brought up in that waifs and strays home until the age of 14. And that home was in Frome in Somerset. That was a horrendous experience too, really. I can remember walking into that home and seeing all these, what seemed to me pathetic kids, boys, all with snotty noses, wearing dark blue sweaters in a bare dining-room. And life there was pretty harsh I can tell you. It wasn't cruel and we weren't...we weren't abused and ill-treated very much, though there was some pretty harsh punishment handed out to kids I think, but it was hard. I mean, it would be hard for people to understand today, but breakfast there would be two slices of bread and dripping, and a cup of cocoa made almost entirely of water, and when there was no dripping it would be bread and lard. And tea would have been two slices of bread and jam, and no butter on the bread, or margarine. If ever there was anything put on the bread it would be margarine, ghastly taste, I hate it to this day. And I remember the bread and jam distinctly because I've never been able to eat jam on bread without butter from that day to this, I simply can't do it. What we had for our main meals I don't remember, I can't remember anything about it. It

was...it was a rather barren life. I only ever remember reading one book, or looking at one book, until I was 14 years of age, and that was a book about the First World War. So there was no reading, no literature, no music, no nothing really. I mean we played of course, hoops and tops and all those things, but there was nothing else, I mean the life was sort of barren. We made our own entertainment, I mean we...I mean one of the things that a lot of us spent a lot of time doing, and I certainly did, was making little theatres in boot boxes, in shoe boxes, with batteries and electric bulbs in them - I can't even think where we got the batteries from or the electric bulbs to light them up - and then showing them to each other and charging a fag card for doing it. And, I do remember there that I used to get a present from my mother at Christmas, often a box of tangerines wrapped in silver paper, and that I've never been able to forget either. Anyway I was there until I was 14.

I mean just out of interest, did you kind of understand why your parents weren't in your life, was that...?

No I didn't, it was never explained. I don't know what it was all about. I mean I think it was probably simply that my father wasn't there, whoever he was. My mother was obviously married, her original name was Allen, and the name on my birth certificate is Gay, she married, formerly Allen, then Gay, she married somebody by the name of Gay. I... I mean there are all kinds of things about that childhood which are strange. For example when I was 16 and I eventually went home, I went to London to find my mother; I then discovered I had two sisters which I had never known about. One was two years younger than myself and was quite nice, and one was two years older who wasn't very nice actually, though I mean I hardly knew them. I stayed there for about a year and a half and then I left, I went away and never went back. There was nothing to hold me there, there was no...no family feeling really.

I mean how did you feel about your mother after...did you sort of hold any resentment for her?

Well, I'm not sure that I resented her. I think I probably did, but then, the more I thought about it the more I thought the real situation was probably that she was a single mother in those very hard times with three children, including two girls, and that I was probably just one too many, she couldn't cope with three people, and the easiest thing to do was to get rid of the boy. I resented the fact that I saw so little of her and didn't know her, I thought that was sad really.

And how did Miss Wellaway feature in your life, did you have any warmth for her?

None at all, she was a very cruel woman. I mean, today I think she would have been prosecuted for child abuse, for the sheer brutality of the way she treated the children in her care, that was awful really. We had rotten lives in a way. I don't remember, I mean I don't really remember in detail very much about it, but then I think I...I put it out of my mind. The reason I went into, the reason I went into the home actually is, it's really quite funny, because what happened was that I stole sixpence out of her handbag. Now of course sixpence is nothing but in those days it was probably a meal for a day for the family, and I bought lots of sweets and chocolates; I'd never had sweets or chocolate in my life, and a lot of the other kids did. And leaving aside the fact that I got the beating of my life for doing it, I was also chucked out of the Cubs for doing it. And finally I was sent off as out of control I guess into a waifs and strays society home.

How sad.

Well, yes it is. I mean, well, I guess it is really. It was a rotten life I suppose. And yet I don't, I don't feel bitterly bad about it at all. I'm sad that I never knew my father. I did, and I don't know where the information came from, I did come to believe that my father was a musician, and that my mother must have told me but I don't really remember how or when, and I know nothing about him. The family, my mother's family owned one of those hotels on the cliffs in Torquay, and I think my mother was probably wayward, I suspect, though I really don't know, and I've no reason for saying that. Anyway when I was about, when I was 14 and left school, the home that I was in had a printing works attached to it, and all the more intelligent kids were taken on there to work in the printing works, but I was regarded as much too thick for that and I went off for a while to work as a gardener for a Church of England priest for five shillings a week I remember and my food. And I was there for some time and then I ran away from there and found my way to my mother. And I stayed with... I was accepted, and received, and I lived with my mother and two sisters for about eighteen months, and then the war broke, the war - no, that isn't so. I decided that I wanted to get out of the house and to get away; I couldn't find a job, I had no idea what I was going to do for my life at all, I mean I had no skills and no training, very little education, in fact none. And I remember in fact sitting for my 11-plus examination and, schooling in those days was pretty poor, at least the school that I went to was pretty poor, and I remember sitting down and opening the mathematics paper for the exam, the 11-plus, and realising that everything in that paper I had never been taught, and I remember closing the paper and simply sitting there until

the session was over. So, you know, one had little or no education. I left school at 14 as I say, I was regarded as far too thick to work in the printing works, so I went off to do a kind of, a labouring job for a Church of England priest, and of course I now realise that those homes supplied the priesthood in this country with, virtually with servants who were under-paid and not always terribly well looked after.

I mean it does sound as if you had very little sort of stimulus from adults in any sense of the word.

Oh none at all. I mean there were...I can't think of any adults in my childhood that featured at all. I mean there were one or two teachers who were encouraging. I had an art teacher who was quite...a teacher who taught art and crafts, things like beating copper and that sort of stuff, and he was quite encouraging, and I was quite good at it. But our education was really very poor when I think about it, in almost every regard. I remember for example that I found it extremely difficult to write tidily, without making a terrible mess, blotting my copybook all the time, and, it was because we were forced to write copperplate and I simply couldn't do it. And so eventually I said to the teacher, 'If you just let me write my own way, I know I could write better.' And in absolute desperation and exasperation he said, 'Well OK, go ahead then,' and from then on I wrote upright writing, and I was perfectly able to write well without making a mess, and I used to get really quite good marks, and I wrote quite well and wrote quite decent things as well. So you know, there were little moments in my education which were quite good, that was one, and as I say the art and craft teachers were encouraging and helpful, but by and large my education was nothing. And I left school at 14, and knowing nothing, went to my mother, who by that time had found herself another man, an American. And I remember for example that my mother bought me for some reason best known to herself the collected works of Dickens, and I avidly read the whole lot, I mean I sat down and read them. And I remember this man that she lived with, Clive, hated the fact that I sat around reading, couldn't bear it, and used to refer to me as a bloody poofter because I sat around reading. It was something that he couldn't come to terms with. And I think that and a number of other...I mean there were a number of other reasons but that, his attitude, and the fact that one didn't really feel that any kind of life was being created...

And can you remember what he did for a living?

No, I don't think he... He went to work... I knew very little about him but he was there. He was...in fact I suspect he wasn't working. You know, it's...I'm talking about things that happened, you know, sixty years ago really.

Do you know if your mother was working at that time?

Yes my mother worked. She ran a café somewhere, and, I think she worked quite hard. My mother was an extraordinary woman really; she was very tall and my recollections of her is that she was really rather a beautiful woman. My younger sister was very like her, and my elder sister was quite different. But I think my mother worked very hard, I had that feeling, that she was the breadwinner and the hard-working woman, at a time when, you know, it was...I think life for women like that was very tough. There weren't many jobs, and a lot of people didn't have work. I'm now talking about what, 1934, '35.

So during the Depression.

During the Depression. I mean I think there was...it was just as bad in the 1920s, but we're certainly talking about the years of the Depression, and I think my... I mean I don't really have deep feelings of bitterness or resentment towards my mother because I suspect that life had been very hard for her, I mean very hard.

Did she...have you managed to keep in touch with the sisters at all?

No. When I left, it was, you know, before the Second World War I left home, and I never kept in touch. I regret the fact that I don't know what happened to my younger sister because I, although I knew her not terribly well, I actually got to like her, I liked her, and I felt she was a nice and sympathetic girl really.

Did they work at the time?

Yes. I think, I mean my, the elder of my two sisters worked for Joe Lyons, you know, the tea shop people, I'm not quite sure what she did but she worked there. The younger one, I don't know what she did. She was 16, 15½, when I left, so she wouldn't have been long out of school. No I don't know what she did. I mean it's awful, my...all this early part of my life is so negative really isn't it, you know, one... And I think a lot of it, I probably put a lot of it out of my mind on purpose and it's beyond recall really. Anyway, I left my mother, I joined the

Merchant Navy just before the war broke out, and went abroad, and I came back and I do remember, and I must have at that time felt very badly about my mother, because I do remember coming back to London and walking down the street, a street near where my mother and sisters lived, and I saw my mother coming towards me, and I crossed the road so as not to meet her; I couldn't meet her again.

So you had really made a decision to move right out of...?

Move right away. And I think that was because I probably, deep down I did have a profound feeling of resentment. I mean I, however hard things were, I believe I found it very hard to understand why I only spent maybe three or four hours in my whole life with my mother. Of course she knew where I was, she had put me there, and yet I never saw her, she made no contact with me. And I did find that I think quite hard to come to terms with. Anyway, I...in a way, joining the Merchant Navy was the beginning of my life I guess. I mean all kinds of things happened there. First of all I had travelled around the world a good deal. I mean in a way one didn't see a great deal because you know when you're on a ship you're on a ship, but we did go to, you know, I went to Australia, and I went to India, and I went to the Middle East, and I went to America, and went to South America, and so I saw a good deal. What it did do for me was give me a lot of time to read, I did a huge amount of reading, and I had become, and I can't tell you quite why but I had become interested in the arts in one way or another. I mean I enjoyed music, I discovered music in a way, I discovered literature, I discovered the visual arts, and in a totally uneducated way began to find out about them, you know, simply by listening, reading and looking I guess. And I hadn't...I hadn't had much of an opportunity of course ever to go to galleries and museums and things of that kind, so the visual arts were a bit beyond me I suppose. But I did do a huge amount of reading, and by sheer luck I, having read, I mean I'd read Dickens, a lot of Dickens already, and I'd read a few other English writers, but I picked up a lot of American literature, and I don't quite know how I did that, but people like Damon Runyon and Steinbeck and Hemingway and people like that, and I read avidly all the things I could get hold of of theirs.

I mean did they have a library on the ship?

No they didn't, but I bought books. No there was no library.

I mean can you remember life sort of in the Merchant Navy, in quotes, separate from your art interests? I mean was it very tough?

No, that wasn't very tough. I mean it was... No, it was... I was a gunner, I was a steward and a gunner; sounds odd doesn't it, but they, all merchant ships in those days were equipped with, particularly the larger ones, with a four- or a six-inch gun on the after-deck, and some anti-aircraft guns, and so I got some training as a gunner, and I, I mean that's what I was. And...I was also a steward on the ships, on all kinds of ships, I was...

Did they have the guns on peacetime ships as well?

No no, no they were put on for the war.

Right.

I mean, it was sort of a farce in a way, I mean you couldn't really defend yourself against a submarine, but you could defend yourself a bit against anti-aircraft, I mean against aircraft with an anti-aircraft gun. We had [INAUDIBLE], and I suppose the idea of... I mean I never fired a gun, except in, you know, in practice and training.

So did you effectively become a soldier during that time, did they literally kind of take the whole crew of a ship and say, 'You're now in the armed forces,' or did you stay as civilians?

No. No you carried on doing... I mean I was on...my experience on ships was, I mean I was on everything from large troop carriers to a tiny ship which plied between Fleetwood and Reykjavik, carrying a thousand tons of depth charges to Iceland and bringing back a thousand tons of fish. I was on a tanker.

So who sort of commanded your career in effect?

Well, if you were in the Merchant Navy in those days there was a central pool, and if you were signed off one ship, and you could sign on or off a ship more or less as you wished, and you went back to the pool, and they would find you another ship. And if you were somebody as lowly as I was, a steward you see, you could always be found a ship somewhere, they'd find you something, so there were always ships. I mean I was on a tanker, a huge tanker going across to America. Of course the Merchant Navy was, I mean there were interesting things about the Merchant Navy. I happened to be in the convoy that saw the sinking of the first American ships before they even came into the war, I was on a tanker at the time, a big

Norwegian tanker, and we knew we were being followed by a U-boats, and America wasn't in the war then, and one morning we heard a huge explosion and then another explosion, and two ships went down, one was called the Ruben James, which was an oil tanker, and the other one was an American destroyer that was escorting the convoy. And you have to realise that America wasn't in the war at that time. Sorry, the destroyer was called the Ruben James, the tanker was called the Salinas. They were both sunk by the U-boats, and then the U-boats went away and left the convoy alone, and they did it I think simply to show the Americans that they couldn't escort British ships in the war without paying the price.

Very sad.

Yes. I also knew the first American airman to be killed in the last war, I met him in Iceland, and poor chap flew off and, well we don't know what happened to him but he died anyway, and he was the first young American flyer, and that was in Iceland, in Reykjavik.

So how close were you on your various travels to action?

Well, I was very lucky, I mean I...I got through it very well, with no trouble frankly personally. Though I did sign off one ship. No I didn't sign off, that was the point, I stayed in America, I was offered the opportunity to come home and I decided to stay in America and take another ship, and the greater part of the crew did sign off to come home and they were all torpedoed and died, I think only one survivor. But I, I mean I was lucky, I had signed on for another ship and stayed out in America and took another ship and everything was OK. But a huge number of the people I knew did die of course. But I...I mean although, you know, being in that convoy with the U-boats which sunk the Salinas and the Ruben James was being in the action as it were, I don't think I ever came near to anything immediate. I do remember standing on the deck of that tanker and seeing a phosphorous line coming towards the tanker and believing it might be a torpedo, but if I was it went straight under and nothing happened.

It sounds as if you were very lucky.

I think I was very lucky, yes, very lucky indeed. And, anyway I was in the Merchant Navy right through the war, and came out in what, 1946. And I enjoyed the war, and of course it gave me, as I've said, opportunities to read and to listen to music and all kinds of things that I might not otherwise have been able to do, and because of other circumstances I spent a long time in New York. I was signed off a ship in San Francisco with arthritis, and I went into the

French hospital in San Francisco and stayed there for a few weeks and then left the hospital and went across to New York where I was simply forgotten about, and I lived in a little hotel in New York on Washington Square West for five months, and then they remembered me and I was signed on to...now I can't remember what happened. I think I, yes, we picked up a ship in New York and I signed on to that and we went to North Africa and picked up a cargo of iron ore and came back to Britain. But I mean that five months in New York was incredibly important to me. When I think of it, I didn't pick the ship up in New York, I was sent down to the Gulf of Mexico to Mobile, Alabama, to pick up the ship. And that was an interesting experience too, because I remember I got on a bus in Mobile and I was standing up. It was my first experience of prejudice, I mean really serious prejudice. I was on this bus and I was standing up, and there was an elderly coloured woman sitting down, and the bus driver, who carried a gun I remember, ordered her to stand up, and I said, 'No that's all right,' and he said to me, 'You do what you're bloody well told here; when I tell you to sit down and I tell her to stand up, that's what you do,' and I had to sit down. There was nothing I could do about it.

End of F5897 Side A

F5897 Side B

[Side B of Tape 1 with Bernard Gay, 2nd of September 1997.]

Anyway as I say, I took the ship from there to collect this cargo of iron ore, but what I wanted to talk about a bit was what happened to me in New York, and there I was incredibly fortunate, I mean I had plenty of time to roam around and look at the things I wanted to look at, and I'd begun to look at art galleries and things of that kind simply because I had the time and the opportunity. And, not very far from the hotel where I lived in New York there was a servicemen's club on Fifth Avenue, and I went to visit the club, and all kinds of things came out of that, for example I was invited by families to go and spend weekends with them in the country, and I was offered blind dates with girls, and I was given tickets to go to concerts, and out of that I mean came the, in a way I think one of the most important events in my life. I went to a concert given by Horowitz, conducted by Horowitz, with Jascha Heifetz playing the violin, and the concert was introduced by a man who I met after the concert just walking along leaving the hall, and I happened to turn to him and say that I had enjoyed the concert, and he recognised me as being English and introduced me to his wife, and they invited me to go home and have a cup of coffee with them. And I accepted, I have to say, with alacrity, and I went to have a cup of coffee with them, and we chatted about things, and he asked me what I was interested in, and I told him about my interest in the visual arts, and he happened to know in New York a lady artist called Muriel Hannah, and he offered to introduce her to me. And when I met her she was a middle-aged lady who had a twisted back, she'd been born with spina bifida, and she had a studio with a roof garden, and she was very willing to show me the galleries in New York and the New York art scene, and from that moment we developed a relationship, a friendship, where she took me all over New York and showed me all the galleries, I mean she took me to the Museum of Modern Art and we sat under the Alexander Calder mobiles there, and had tea, as most people who visit it were likely to do, and I saw my first Picassos there, and all kinds of other pictures and sculptures which I'd never seen before.

And can you remember what impression they made on you at the time?

Oh I was deeply impressed. I remember being overawed by a huge Picasso painting there, which I probably wouldn't be overawed by today but I was then. I mean I'd still be overawed by some Picassos I must say, but I was, I mean I remember being overawed by this Picasso painting and realising how tremendous these things were. I couldn't put it more into words than that, I mean I was just flabbergasted by the quality of these things, and by their...I mean

I...it's interesting that I didn't question the nature of those paintings, they were just paintings, you know, which I greatly enjoyed. I mean I went to museums and saw the Masters and had exactly the same response, I mean I didn't...

So you didn't recognise the difference in effect.

Well I recognised it, I saw the difference, but I didn't question the difference. In their own way they were all incredibly beautiful or very exciting, or whatever they might be. I mean I was overawed by the Alexander Calder's, and when I first went to art school I mean some of the first things I did was make mobiles, not very good ones, in fact they were rather dreadful really, but I exhibited them nonetheless in sort of, you know, art school exhibitions, which amazes me that I had the nerve to do it but I did. I mean I was invited to do it, but I am astonished that I ever did show them because they were rather pathetic when you look at them, but there you are. So I mean I was overwhelmed by all that, and I found all that quite exciting I must say, very exciting. Anyway, Muriel Hannah was incredibly good to me, she was really quite a good artist in her own right, and she worked among the Eskimos a great deal, that was her great thing, her passion was the Eskimo people, and she did a lot of work among them, and used to go every year to work among these people. But, I mean we made an arrangement, she wasn't physically able to do a lot of things for herself in her studio and so on, so I used to decorate her studio and do all the practical jobs around her studio, and she in turn took me all over New York, so that was an enormously important and formative experience for me. And the ex-servicemen, or the servicemen's club in Fifth Avenue was very important to me, because I began to go to things like concerts and the theatre and so on for the first time, and I'd never had the opportunity to do that before, you know, I mean that was all a great new experience. So when I came back to England at the end of the war, and I'd had all these ad hoc sort of formative experiences, I knew what it was I really wanted to do, and I didn't do it right away because I was so ignorant of the systems and what was available that I didn't apply for a grant, I didn't know that grants were available to people like me. But eventually I did apply for a grant after two...I went to work in a drawing office as a filing clerk for two years, getting near to something was associated with art or design or something I suppose, but it was of course a dead end job really, the drawing office. And I then discovered that I could apply for a grant, and that was in 1947. And I applied to, and I don't quite know why really but I applied for, to study a course in textile design at Willesden School of Art, and I was accepted there. And I began to go to evening, I had begun to go to evening classes earlier that year, drawing, and, doing some textiles at Willesden, and I had

begun to draw at St. Martin's School of Art. So 1947, fifty years ago, is when I began my art career really.

I mean I'd be very interested if you could tell us about how different the two kind of art school environments were.

Well, Willesden of course was one of those little art schools on the top floor of the technical college, the local tech, and its resources really were very limited when I think about it. Now I didn't really get to know St. Martin's at all well, it was in the Charing Cross Road, and I went to a life class there, and it was very impersonal and, I mean one simply went in, did two hours' drawing and came out again. And it would be I think almost impossible for me to make any comparisons. They were... I mean it was clear that St. Martin's was entirely an art school, whereas Willesden was a technical college with a floor given over to art. All it was was a collection of rooms on the top floor of the technical college. I remember my first day there, the very first thing that happened to me was, I walked into a drawing class, a life drawing class, and the model was Quentin Crisp; it would be, wouldn't it really, but it was. I remember this tall extraordinary-looking man with mauve hair. And he was an extraordinary man you know. I got to chat to him and to know him a bit, and I can remember walking down the street in Willesden with him, and in those days he used to wear a felt fedora hat, he had mauve hair, he used to wear a velvet suit with flared trousers, and he walked with a black walking stick with a silver knob, and he wore a cravat, which I think he still does. And when you think that he was doing that in 1947, apart from anything else it was an act of great courage you know. And he was a very interesting man. He would tell the students off if they weren't working, remind them that he was working and that they should be working as well, and he was an extraordinarily good model, extraordinarily good, he could hold the most amazing poses for an amazing length of time. So he was an interesting model, and really quite an interesting man. I didn't realise how interesting he was of course, it's only recently that he's become the kind of figure that he has become in the sort of literary and chat show world, but he was an excellent model and really rather a nice man, and as I say, I think very courageous. And one didn't question that either, which I think is interesting isn't it really.

I mean, did the students talk about him amongst themselves, or was it just literally accepted?

Oh it was simply accepted, simply accepted. Nobody...I never ever remember anyone talking about him. I mean I guess that each of us probably thought he was a strange chap, and he dressed in this extraordinary way, and I suppose we all realised that he was a homosexual but

nobody ever talked about it or remarked upon it. Models were by and large strange anyway, you know, and the stranger they were the more interesting they were really. You know, occasionally you would have an incredibly beautiful young model who wouldn't be nearly as interesting, oddly enough, as the other less immediately attractive ones.

Can you remember when you went to Willesden whether your intention was to make art a profession, or were you just...?

Oh yes, I had committed myself absolutely to it. I knew what I wanted... I didn't know where it was going to lead me of course, but I knew that that's what I wanted to do, and, of course the interesting thing was that I went there to study textile design, and after I'd been there two or three months some of the teachers invited me to change my course of study, and to move from studying textiles into fine art, and the interesting thing about that is that when I did that my grant went up by fifty per cent, from £2 a week to £3 a week. Now I don't know quite why that was, it probably had to do with the fact that the materials were more expensive or whatever, but I think these days it would be the other way around: if you were studying fine art you might get less of a grant than if you were studying textile design, or design, you know, they might well give you more for studying design than doing fine art. But the grant went up by fifty per cent.

I mean were you conscious of the difference between design and fine art as an idea?

No, I don't think so, not really. Later yes. I mean I was conscious of the fact that probably that was really what I wanted to be rather than in textiles; I mean I, I think I was aware that...I mean I wouldn't have moved if I had thought that textiles was what I really wanted to do, I thought that painting and fine art was really likely to be more my thing than textiles. And I very much wanted to be a painter, but you know, one, thinking ahead one had, you know... And I remember my last day in art school, I can remember standing in the middle of, we had an antique room, and thinking, my God! I've no more grant, I can't pay my rent, I have no money, I've done five years in this art school and I still have no idea what I'm going to do with the rest of my life or how I'm going to make a living. And of course in those days there was no counselling or help or advice.

I was going to say actually, it would be interesting to hear, you know, what was on offer to a student at that time.

Not a lot really. I mean for example Willesden School, I mean Willesden School of Art was a marvellous school actually, and when I look back on it I realise how good it was. It was run by an autocratic old man, seemed like an old man to me then, probably a lot younger than I am now but, he seemed like, and he had a limp, and it was said that he had a wooden leg. His name was J.R. Lockie. And although we didn't see very much of him around the school, he was obviously a powerful man. His great talent was in spotting really brilliant teachers. I mean for example, we had teaching there when I joined the school a woman called Christine Smale. Now Christine Smale, became the senior art, HMI, for the whole of England later. We had Eric Taylor, who became the head of Leeds, the Principal of Leeds. We had Maurice de Sausmarez who became the Principal of York. We had Leonard Stoppani who became the Principal of West Surrey. We had Douglas May, who became the Principal of, now what was it called, Maidstone. And all the teachers there became leading figures in the art education world within a few years of my time at the art school. In fact, I mean they, I think it happened fairly rapidly. I think they were there for probably the first three years that I was there. I mean the thing about all that is that clearly Lockie had a talent for spotting really bright teachers. I've missed out one or I'm sure, but almost every teacher there went on to become a distinguished teacher, a head of a college somewhere, and most of them were practitioners. Maurice de Sausmarez for example was a very good painter, and Eric Taylor of course was a distinguished war artist, still living, I think the only one that is. Dudley Holland killed himself on a motorcycle, rammed it into a lorry; a lot of people think he did it on purpose. Maurice[??] de Sausmarez died of a heart problem, Eric Taylor is still around, he's well into his eighties now. And they were marvellous teachers in their several ways. Eric Taylor was the sort of hands-on teacher, you know, he did intensive drawing teaching, and he taught etching and engraving, and he was a real hands-on skills-based teacher who... Maurice[??] de Sausmarez wasn't like that at all, I mean he was the sort of teacher who would come in and say, 'Oh how are you getting on?' and when you said, 'Fine,' he'd turn around and go out again and say, 'That's good'. But he was a different kind of teacher. I mean I remember him for example giving a talk on drawing, and it was marvellous you see. His approach to teaching was quite different. He talked about Old Master drawings and illustrated his talk you see, and then in the middle of the talk he would...he would talk about things like line, form, interval, shape and so on, colour, and then he would go over to the piano, he would dash off a Bach toccata and a fugue you see, and say, 'You know, the same principles which underlie great drawing, underlie music as well; that's all about form and line and so on,' you see, and he would... And then he would say, 'By the way, there's an absolutely marvellous exhibition on at so-and -so, you ought to go and see that. Go to the British Museum and have a look at these drawings.' And then he'd say, 'And incidentally, of

course the Proms are on, you ought to go to some of those, and there's a wonderful Bach concert on tomorrow night,' you see, and all the kids would go dashing off, you see. So he was that kind of teacher, the kind of man who opened your mind to all kinds of possibilities. So, I mean Maurice was a wonderful teacher really, although he was not a hands-on teacher; I mean I can't think really that he ever taught me, although he was my painting teacher I can't think that he ever taught me anything directly in the studio if you see what I mean, but he was a wonderful inspiring teacher in that he opened your eyes and your mind to all kinds of relationships and possibilities and excitements and so on that you otherwise might not have discovered, you know, you wouldn't have discovered them for yourself. So he was a fine teacher I think. And we were very lucky to have the group of teachers we had, I mean I think they had, you know, there was a good spectrum of good teaching. Eric Taylor was an excellent teacher in his way, but a much more practical teacher, and a fine artist in his own right, and a man, I'm still in touch with him, and one kept in touch with one's teachers, you know. I met them later in life. Of course after three or four years that whole group of brilliant teachers disappeared, and they were replaced by really rather a pathetic lot, I'm afraid, and that's the nature of art education. I mean I think they were all there because J.R. Lockie was there; I think when J.R. Lockie went they went, and we got another Principal, another head of painting, and a group of teachers who were, who illustrated in a way how important it is to have really good teachers in art schools.

Yes, essential. I mean did you keep up your relationship with St. Martin's at the same time, or gave it up?

No no, I went, I only went to St. Martin's to do some drawing, and then when I went to Willesden I stopped the St. Martin's thing. Funnily enough later on when I left Willesden I went back to St. Martin's to do some more drawing and went to the Working Men's College to do lithography. You know that the Working Men's College is a college where the teachers aren't paid, they're all volunteers, and most of them were distinguished artists in their own right who went there because, you know, it was a kind of, a social duty, you know, it's the William Morris thing, you know. And that still went on in the Forties, I don't know if it still does.

So who were the students, just out of interest, were they really working men in the sense that Morris would have understood, or were they aspiring artists themselves?

Well I think probably they were aspiring artists, but I mean anybody could go, any working man could go. I'm trying to think, I was trying to think who the exceedingly good lithographer was who taught me, he's a man who's got a considerable reputation these days himself but I can't for the moment put my mind to his name, which is a pity. But I mean I was taught by extremely good artists there. All that Kitchen Sink Group, you know, they all taught there, Derrick Greaves and all those people, they were all teaching there, at that time. And they got their, I guess a lot of these people got their first teaching experience there, working for nothing. And so I was grateful to that bit I must say. I went there for about a year, a couple of years maybe. And I went back to St. Martin's and did some more drawing. I was never a very good draughtsman I'm afraid, but I did what I could, I did what I could. However, I'm getting ahead of myself really. Willesden. We were very under-resourced there, as I said we had no library there. You had to buy all your own materials of course, and one scabbled around to get bits of material to work on, you know, bits of canvas or board or whatever. And it was marvellous, we had, not only did we have that group of extremely good teachers, but we had a sketch club there, in which I got quite heavily involved, and I found the other day catalogues of exhibitions for which I had written the forewords, very badly, terrible, terrible prose, even worse than I do now. I mean very badly written forewords. But I became quite active in that, and the sketch club there was marvellous. I think all the art schools in those days used to have them, and what tended to happen was that you were very much encouraged to work at home, and I had a little, I had a room in Hampstead on the top floor of a house there, and I had a little group of students that worked with me in the painting school and we used to go over to my place and work, you know, in the evenings and weekends and so on, and we'd do still lifes and all kinds of things, and then we would exhibit in the sketch club. I mean the idea, the sketch club exhibitions were for work you had done on your own in your own right, and they were marvellous events really, because, you know, we had, at various times we had, Stanley Spencer came to do a criticism, and I remember him looking at an absolutely pathetically awful little painting and he turned to me and said you know, 'Oh I do wish I could do something like that'. It was just ghastly. And I remember saying to him, 'By the way, how do you do those huge paintings of yours?' And he told me that he painted in, you know, he had a little suburban house in Cookham, and he painted in the kitchen, and he said, 'What I do, you know,' he said, 'I have the roll of canvas and I square up my drawings and I start from the top left-hand corner and I work my way across the canvas, rolling it up as I go, and when I get to the other end I finish the painting'. And, it meant that he never ever saw, those huge Crucifixions and things, he never saw the paintings until they were stretched and framed. He just started from the top left-hand corner and worked his way across. And I remembered him saying to me, 'Of course, the real difficulty is

that I have an oil heater in the kitchen, and quite often the tops of my canvases get rather black with the smoke from the heater.' But I thought it was lovely that he worked in this strange way, from left to right, right across his canvas. But we, I mean Stanley Spencer came. William Coldstream came, Minton came, Colquhoun and MacBryde came, they all came to give crits of our little sketch club events, and they happened every month. And it was marvellous, you know, one met in that little art school on top of the technical college, one met all the leading figures, or many of the leading figures. Edward Bawden came I remember. All the leading figures in the art world of that time. So I mean that was a wonderful thing really, that that little school could do all that. And I'm not sure that the bigger and the more famous art schools could have done it, they might have done, but they probably didn't; I mean they may have had all these people working there anyway. But at least we had that opportunity, and that was great. So it was a wonderful place to...it was a good environment in which to become a painter.

When they had the crits, do you remember if it was a kind of public forum or did they approach people individually to discuss their work?

Oh all the students were there as a group, and they would go around, look at the pictures, and discuss them and talk about them. And then you could go and talk to them about them, you know, and they might talk about their own work as well, you know, they were... I mean they approached it differently, and some of them were good critics and some were not. But they, you know, they looked at the work seriously and talked about it, and it was a great encouragement of course to one to paint, to have all these people looking at your work and talking about it. I thought it was a wonderful thing really, in retrospect I think it's more... I probably didn't realise how important, how good it was at the time, one doesn't you know. It's always in retrospect that things take on their real perspective, I think. Anyway, I was at Willesden for five years, and I was a total failure as a student, I mean I...I failed my Intermediate and I failed my N.D.D., but in my second year at Willesden I was exhibiting, and I showed my first picture in 1948 at the Gimpel Fils Gallery in South Molton Street, and then went on to show fairly regularly from that time onwards. In fact the first picture I ever showed is that little painting of ivy on the wall over there, and I showed that at Gimpel Fils. God known why they took it but they did, and showed it, Charles Gimpel liked it and just took it and showed it. So, I was showing, exhibiting, from my second year in art school.

How did you get that opportunity?

I think I must...do you know I don't know. I must have taken some pictures in. I must have had the brass to go and say, 'Do you want to show this picture?' Anyway he did. And I mean I showed in a lot of galleries at that time.

I mean do you remember what kind of commercial arrangements, how things were priced, what sort of commission...?

Oh, prices were pathetic. I mean, it's hard these days to realise what prices were like. I mean for example, I remember going to the Leicester Galleries when I was a student, and there was a wonderful exhibition there of Henry Moore's Tube drawing, you know, the Underground drawings, and they were all priced at £30 each. Now Henry Moore was then a very famous artist, but his drawings fetched £30. My paintings were priced at £30 or less, £15. In my Wildenstein exhibitions, you know, where they were selling Old Masters for millions, my pictures were always priced at anywhere between £20 and £45.

Relatively speaking probably a more substantial amount of money than it might sound on tape.

Oh yes, I mean, you know, I mean, it's.....

End of F5897 Side B

F5898 Side A

[Continuing the tape with Bernard Gay on the 2nd of September 1997. Tape 2 Side A.]

Now you were just talking about the cost of living.

Oh yes. I was, I think I was going to say that I...people will probably find it difficult to understand that when I was at art school I was living on £2 a week, or £3 a week, and whatever I could earn from working in the Post Office over the Christmas holidays, and probably on a farm or something of that kind right through the summer holidays. And so one had really very small amounts of money, but they were enough to live by. I mean I did, I lived, and I don't quite know how. I ever took holidays from time to time. And I mean, of course, you couldn't buy anything then, there was very little to be had. I mean there was still rationing, you couldn't spend more than a few shillings on food in a week, it wasn't possible. You know, you had an ounce of butter or two ounces of cheese, four ounces of meat, you know, that kind of thing, and a few vegetables, and you know, and you lived and you were perfectly healthy, I don't know how but you were, at least I was and I think most people were. And it's difficult to for people to get a kind of perspective of what money was about, you know, how little money you needed to get by. I got through my five years at art school with no support from anywhere else except for my grant and the money I could earn in my spare time.

I mean how did you live at a practical level, did you have rented accommodation?

I rented...well yes that's the other thing, I rented two rooms on the top of a house in Haverstock Hill in Hampstead for £2 a week, and whatever else I had, the other pound is what I lived on. And I bought my materials and everything, or one scavenged for materials. But I always had enough paints and pencils and whatever else I needed to work with. I mean you'd get bits of board, anything. It was a pretty... When I think about it, I mean it was, you know, one really did scavenge for the materials to work with, and most of my early paintings were on bits of hardboard or bits of wood or occasionally on a canvas. It was years before I could afford to buy canvases, and I remember that I, most of the early canvases I had when I was a student were the thrown away canvases of a friend of mine called Gerald Marks, who is a painter, and he used to, he was fairly well off, you know, in my terms, and had masses of canvases, a lot of which he regarded as total failures and I used to paint over them, prime over them and use them again, and those were my, all my early canvases probably came out of his

studio and other people's studios like that that they were throwing away. Because one was really very poor, you know, there's no doubt about it. But I don't remember it as a time of great poverty, but then you see I didn't have a lot to...I mean if you think of my background it was pretty poor anyway, so it wasn't much of a difference.

Just in terms of suddenly arriving at this place of creativity, what was the intellectual culture there amongst the students, how did you discuss art or think about art?

Oh, there were a number of students who were... I mean there was a great general cultural ethos there. There was a lot of interest in music, in literature, in politics. There were boys and girls there who were aesthetically very aware. I remember being rather fond of a rather nice girl there called Pat O'Brien, and her in my studio one day, and our getting into what might have been a very intimate kind of a relationship, and I remember saying to her, 'You know I can't kiss you because I know that if I do you'll start quoting poetry at me'. And she was terribly upset. But I mean it was perfectly true, I mean it was that kind of, it was like that. I met her years later when I had been, in my terms I guess, had made my way a bit and was successful, and I met her coming out of a meeting at the Design Council, and I met her and she was working there as a typist, which was very sad because she was actually a very, a very attractive, very sensitive, very culturally aware girl who might have done good things. And that's the other interesting thing about art school you know. I would regard myself really as one of the less talented people there. I mean I think my talent if I have any is very modest. There were people there of really exceptional talent. I mean there were people there who were really brilliantly good. There was a chap called Donald Neil Davis who was a most wonderful painter, a marvellous painter, very poetic, romantic paintings, I mean who had more talent in his little finger than I had in my whole body, but he's never done anything since. There was another chap called R.H. McKnight. Now McKnight was a brilliantly dedicated artist of extraordinary talent. Nothing has ever come out of it, he just disappeared. Nobody has ever heard of him, he's never exhibited. I remember going to his studio some years, I met him some years after I'd been to art school, and his studio was stuffed with paintings, huge, the walls were lined with huge canvases, and he was a wonderfully talented painter, but nothing's happened to him. And there were a lot of people like that, and I've come to the conclusion really that it isn't enough just to be brilliantly talented; you have to have a kind of, a spectrum of abilities, you know, and like being able to cope with life, you know, and be willing to drag your work down to the galleries and persuade them to show it. Or you need to be gregarious enough, as I was, to get involved in things like the Artists International Association, which I was involved in when I was a student, and in fact Maurice

de Sausmarez got me to build the Lisle Street Gallery, they had a gallery in Lisle Street when I was at art school and I literally built that with my hands, put the gallery together and built the storage downstairs for all the pictures, and then I was on the committee, you know, on the central committee. And then I got involved in the Hampstead Artists Council because I lived there, and there was this very good art club there which was, which became very important to me later on because it was out of that that the Arts Centre was founded. And I was gregarious enough to get involved in those things, and I was exhibiting, and I suppose I am one of those people for whom the practice of painting and drawing becomes meaningful when you can actually take it to a gallery and show it. I am one of those people for whom actually, you know, if I've got to show a picture next week I can paint it this week, I need that kind of, I need that sort of drive, that impetus. Not everybody does, and I think real and dedicated artists probably don't need that but I do, you know, it's important to me to have the aim and the objective. And I think that's been true of all aspects of the work that I've done, I need to have an objective to work towards and I can do it. That's not to say that I...I mean in my early days as a painter I reckon there were what I would call honeymoon years where I just got up at the crack of dawn every day, I might go out drawing or go out for a walk and then paint all day from early morning till late at night every day, and love it, I loved doing it, you know. So I mean, but, I think that was the sort of honeymoon period when...and that passed a bit, I think. Although it went on for really quite a long time.

I mean, how did you approach subject matter and how did it evolve?

Well, in the early years I mean I was very much a landscapist I suppose, I mean I like the landscape, I used to go out and draw a lot, I drew from my windows. So landscape and still life were the sort of, the basis of the work I did. And I was interested in the material, in the nature of painting itself, and because I was interested in the history of painting I suppose I in a way tried to emulate people that I admired, whether it was Keith Vaughan or Graham Sutherland or Paul Nash, or Cézanne or whoever, you know, there were people who mattered to one, and whose work for one reason or another you admired, and so you...I think you develop a love for and an appreciation of the very best in art. I mean I think, in a way I think the practice of art is a very élitist activity you know, and it's élitist in the sense that the great artists were able to produce art of such amazing perfection that you just can't believe that it's possible, and you look to it and you attempt to emulate it, however poorly you do it, in a way you get to understand what great achievements there are, and how wonderfully people were able to put pictures together or put drawings together, you know, and there are people who draw like angels, who paint like angels you see. And that's a lifetime of discovery. It was

only, I mean, to give you an example of what I mean by that, I had never ever liked Rappel, I always found him very hard and cold and, you know, I mean I love people like, if we're talking about that kind of painter I love Titian and people of that kind, the Venetians, I love the warmth of their paintings. I found a man like Raphael a very cold, hard painter really. And then with Kate I went to the Vatican and saw that trio, that three Raphaels in the Vatican, and I was just, well, gobsmacked is the only word I can use, by the sheer ravishing beauty of those three paintings. Now I mean that was a kind of discovery that came to me in my sixties, you know, I was just overwhelmed by how wonderful those pictures were. And the same with Rembrandt, I mean I had never ever thought very much about Rembrandt when I was younger, and then I guess when I was about, in my late thirties, forties, I suddenly discovered what an incredible painter he was. And of course you go on making those discoveries all your life really with painting. And it's in that sense that I think it's...it's because their achievements are so great that I think art is inevitably an élitist activity because it's about, it's about the sheer levels of achievement that can be had, you know. And I mean that goes for people like Picasso too, you know. I'll never forget that amazing exhibition of the Cubists some years ago now at the Tate, which featured more than anybody else Picasso, Braque and Juan Gris, and you looked at all these pictures by Picasso and Braque and Juan Gris and others and thought how wonderful they all were, and then when you left the gallery there were two pictures side by side, one was a Picasso still life, a big one, and the other was a Braque, and you looked at those two and you looked at the Picasso in particular, and you realised how stunningly good and how much better it was than any other picture there, for some inexplicable reason that it's hard to explain, but there it was and you suddenly realise what a stupendous painting it was and what an achievement it was. And that's the sense in which I think art is an élitist activity, I mean only a few people could aspire to that kind of creative quality, you know. I suppose it's the same with great music and great literature, but you know...

I mean do you see the art that is being produced now still falling into that idea of art?

I do find it more difficult. I mean I think there...every now and then you see something which is remarkable, and it must be the case, it must be the case among all those people, you know, time will sift out some, and there must be people there who are tremendously good, I mean great masters. Jackson Pollock maybe, though my own feeling is that the nature of American art is so different to that of European art, and for European art I think it's been profoundly destructive. I mean I do find it extraordinary that when I was a student there was this great school of French painters, you know, all the greats were there, only beginning to be

appreciated in this country. You know when you think that '40,000 years of Modern Art' was put on in Oxford Street, in that basement in Oxford Street, in 1951. Very little of Picasso had been seen before, nobody here had seen 'Les Demoiselles d'Avignon' before, there it was in the entrance. I thought all that was wonderful by the way, in a kind of uncritical way, I mean I just thought it was wonderful to see it, or... But when you think that when I was a student that whole school of French, you know, Matisse and Braque and Picasso and Juan Gris and all the others were in place, and there was a great school of lesser painters. You know, I used to go to the Anglo-French Art Centre in St. John's Wood and look at all their exhibitions there of these French painters, all of whom were marvellous, I mean you know, time after time you saw stunning little paintings there you see, absolutely stunning, and all that's disappeared, it's gone. Now how can that happen, in a short time? And I actually think that the influence of American art on Europe has been profoundly destructive oddly enough. I mean it may be a view with which not many people would agree, but I think it's been terribly destructive, and I think, I mean European art has been... So I think European art is less because of American art, funnily enough, and its influence on Europe, and I think it's a different kind of art and a different kind of culture to ours, and I'm very sad that we've allowed ourselves to be overwhelmed by it, to, in every aspect of life. I mean I...you know, you can't buy your children a shirt these days without something about America written on it, and I find that awful really.

Well, it's the changing nature of the world isn't it, which came with the war as much as anything.

Yes. I mean we talk about a global village now don't we and all that rubbish but... Nonetheless I do think it's sad that we lose our culture and we lose our cultural identity quite in that way, and quite so dramatically. It seems incredibly dramatic to me that there's no fine French painting, at least that I'm aware of.

Yes, I think you'd have to ask a Frenchman.

That's right. I mean the French paintings that I've seen in France in recent years has been rather dreadful actually, you know.

Well there's no doubt that the war, not just America but the war had a terrible effect on...

Yes, I think...

...on the art market.

Yes. And yet the war, you see it was after the war that all that stuff in France became known in this country, it wasn't known before. When I went to Willesden School of Art we were still being taught in the context of the Renaissance; we weren't being taught in the context of 20th century art at all, not at all. You know, we did life paintings, we looked at Old Master drawings, we had an antique room, and all our painting was figurative.

In your mind, when you were aspiring to be an artist were you still perceiving yourself developing out of that Renaissance model or did you ever think you...could you see a way in to the European model in a sense?

Well, in the sense that, I mean I did...I did look at 20th century painting, and I admired it and I liked it, I enjoyed it, but there was also this very solid English tradition. You know, I mean the people, you know, Paul Nash was an important influence to me when I was a student, and there was this very English thing. So in a way one worked in that general context. I don't think I had a, I don't think I had an awareness of trying to break away from the English tradition into the European modern tradition at all. I found myself becoming more... I mean I wrote a series of articles about the nature of 20th century art in which I wrote about how difficult it was for painters in this country to come to terms with the sort of, the abstract nature of European painting, and I think all that was part of my own changing nature, because over a period of twenty odd years I mean I changed from that kind of still life and landscape painting to that kind of abstract painting, you know. And that coincided with my interest in design, and the coming to terms with the belief that, you know, if you were talking about form and colour and composition and shape and design and arrangement and all those things, that you didn't necessarily need subject matter to paint, you could paint without subject matter simply by using colour and form and shape and texture and line and all the qualities which underlie all kinds of painting. You know, you didn't have to have a subject. And in quite a lot of my still lifes and other paintings, I mean there is a very strong design sense in that they are arranged pictures, they're not taken straight from the landscape or whatever, you know, and they tend to be...I mean if you look at the composition of that big still life...

Would you mind describing it for the tape?

Oh, sorry.

It's slightly confusing otherwise.

Well I mean if I look at that still life of plants and a pot, and the table lines and the wall lines and so on, and the way the canvas is divided up into segments and angles, and then I look at that blue abstract over there with its angles and segments and shapes, there is an underlying similarity in the formal arrangement. The subject matter isn't there but the actual formal arrangement is very similar. And I think that's how my own development translated itself from subject matter to abstract painting. I mean I've come to believe that maybe it was a mistake on my part to do that, but I'm not really sure, I mean I'm not really sure. I think you just have to do what you want to do.

I mean could you put that in a sort of date context and explain the evolution of it?

Well, I was, I mean my landscapes, still lifes and the occasional portrait, that kind of objective painting, was all done in the Fifties and the Sixties. In the Seventies my interest in design was developing, and I was designing exhibitions and I was doing some work with the Design Council and all that, so I mean I was finding myself more and more involved in design matters. I was also doing a great deal of art history lecturing and found myself talking about the nature of art and the nature of 20th century art, so I think it was inevitable that my own development as a painter would change, because it would be so odd if it didn't if you see what I mean. And I think that there is between the Sixties and the mid-Seventies a sort of transitional period where I have a lot of pictures which are sort of, to a degree objective in that you can identify what might appear to be a landscape quality in them, or, even a floral, flowers and things sometimes. And then they became absolutely abstract in the Seventies, and that's the way it's remained since. But I think the change for me happened over a quarter of a century; it wasn't in any way a sudden thing. And I've never been sure... And incidentally, one of the reasons that I found myself changing was that in a curious way I did find myself when I was producing the landscapes and the still lifes, I found myself repeating my own clichés, and I found that very disturbing, and I would have, I think I would have stopped painting landscapes and things anyway; I would have stopped painting subject-based pictures because my own, I was repeating my own clichés, the way I painted hedgerows or trees or whatever, and I wasn't happy about that, I found that very disturbing. And so I would have stopped anyway. And I'm not absolutely certain about this as history, but I believe that before John Minton killed himself he had talked to people about his unhappiness with repeating his own clichés in his paintings, and I mean I think that's a profoundly serious

problem for an artist if he's at all serious about what he's doing, you know, it's a terrible moment of truth, and you...I mean I was, I would have given up painting altogether if I hadn't developed the other sort of interests and started producing pictures which were based entirely on form, shape, colour and whatever. I rather rambled on there. What I was really saying I think originally was that I found myself getting involved in all these societies, because I was rather gregarious and needed to have outlets for the interests I had, you know, exhibiting and so on. At the same time, of course after I left art school, I mean I had no idea how I was going to earn enough money to live, I just didn't know. I went to work in Pontings in South Kensington behind the linen counter for a while, just to make enough, I got them to give me a part-time job so I could work there for two or three days a week and then paint for the rest of the week. And I got myself involved with the Design Council as a lecturer on their sort of design lecturers' panel, because I was very interested in design anyway, and I...

And what time was that, was that in the Fifties?

Yes, yes, late Fifties, Sixties, through the Sixties. And it was then that I began lecturing in the art schools as well and in universities around the country. I became quite a, I mean I think I became quite knowledgeable in that general area. And I was probably one of the earlier people funnily enough, not many people were doing it at that time. So I was going all around the country lecturing on design and design history, and I was lecturing at universities and, you know, local authorities would organise conferences and courses and I found myself being invited to lecture on those, a lot of them through the Design Council, the Education Officer at the Design Council in those days was a woman called Sidney Foott, an Australian lady who, a formidable woman who ran the lecture panel, and I was on that, and she had me lecturing all over Britain in those days, and that's how I earned my living. And then I got involved with the Workers' Education Association and lectured on art history. And so, I mean I learned my art history on the hoof as it were, you know, I would, every week I'd probably give six or seven lectures on English painting, Dutch painting, Flemish painting, French painting, German painting; I lectured at the Tate Gallery and all kinds of places, you know. And I learned it myself, I mean I didn't...I mean I have no formal education for that kind of... But it interested me, you know, the whole business, I mean the whole...I suppose that's really the fascination of my career in art really, that the whole business fascinated me, and I don't quite know why really, I mean I couldn't give you an intelligent and logical explanation as to why it was like that, but I mean I, it was just, the whole thing fascinated me, and I loved to find out about it. So that the years after I left art school were devoted almost entirely to painting, and then I began exhibiting of course, and I exhibited at Rowland Browse & Delbanco, I exhibited

at the Leicester Galleries, the Redfern, Wildenstein, the Piccadilly Gallery, I had one-man shows in Wildenstein and the Piccadilly Gallery and places like that. And then I got invited, found myself being invited to exhibit in the provinces quite a lot. So I did a great deal of exhibiting, and sold a lot of paintings in those days. And while all that was going on I was lecturing and teaching and writing, and I began writing a lot. There again I had to teach myself to write reasonably well and with reasonably sensible prose, but I was lucky enough I think to have editors who were kind enough to edit and punctuate my prose and put it together for me, and I became more skilled at it, and all that of course helped, because when I joined the Inspectorate later in life, I mean one of the things that.....

End of 5898 Side A

F5898 Side B

[Continuing the tape with Bernard Gay on the 2nd of September 1997. Tape 2 Side B.]

One thing I would like to return to is your time as a lecturer, which I know you've done through a large part of your career, if you could describe, you know, how you sort of prepared and conveyed your enthusiasm and what sort of response you got from these very different audiences of, you know, the Workers' Education College at one end and art school or conference audiences at the other.

Yes. Well, I have to think about that one really a bit. I mean originally my... First of all I had an interest in art history. I was even doing it... I mean, I remember the Principal of Harrow School of Art invited me when I was a student to lecture at Harrow on the Luminists, because I had written a little essay, a little, I won't call it a thesis, an essay, on the Luminists and the way they worked, their use of light and so on, and, so I had this interest which was simply one of finding out and understanding really, I think that's all it was. And then, the whole business of writing lectures to give, to be paid for giving them, was really a matter of finding out enough to be able to do the series, or do the lectures and make some money, because I had to have money to live on. So it was really purely a practical business. But having said that, I mean I did really have a deep interest in finding out and understanding. I did come to realise that art history, perhaps more than any other history, could give you insights into the past. I mean for example, if you talk about, say, let's say Dutch painters and Dutch painting in the 17th century, it's a kind of art which gives you a wonderful insight into the way people actually lived then; it's not only about painting, it's about what their houses were like and what things they had. And that's equally true of English art, you know, you get to understand that people lived on bare boards and if there was a cloth on the table it was a rug or a carpet, and that only a few people had those things; that other people lived in different ways. You could find out a huge amount about history, particularly if you were like me, a non-historian. I mean I had no real knowledge of history at all, but I've learned a huge amount of history from looking at paintings, and you could relate the paintings to the music to the literature to, you know, to all kinds of things. And so I found that aspect of art history lectures very exciting in a way, and I enjoyed communicating that to people, and I think they enjoyed, because we always had marvellous discussions, and I was always asked back, which is quite nice. But I mean I think that a lot of my art history and design history was very much a business of simply wanting to know and being enthusiastic about and excited by the things that I was studying. And I mean my study was done in my own time for my own interest

really, and because I needed to earn a living. I mean I don't...I mean I'm not a...I wouldn't regard myself as a real historian at all; I mean there are people who dedicate their lives to the study of art to a depth to which I couldn't even begin to aspire frankly, you know. But that in turn, I mean that... And the other aspect of my lecturing career was the whole business of understanding and appreciating, I mean, and that went for painting and for design. I mean, when you're lecturing on design for example, you're looking at objects and the history of objects and the use of objects, and you're making judgements, or you're suggesting qualities and helping other people to make judgements, and I found all that side of it fascinating, you know, I mean, just as I find...I mean I do find it interesting to actually say to a student, 'The line you've just made, and its relationship to another line that you've made, is not a very happy one, it's an ugly one, and it doesn't have to be. If you did it in a different way it could be, you know, a very beautiful line and create a beautiful relationship'. And I remember Bernard Leech saying to me that line was everything, you know, and talking about the same thing. So I mean that aspect of it, you know, getting people to understand and appreciate and feel for things like that actually matters to me; don't ask me why it matters to me, it just does. So there's that side of it. And then, I just like the historical perspective that you get from studying art history, and I am fairly sure that an understanding of the history of art or the history of design helps you in a way to appreciate what's going on in your own time, and its relationship to the past. And I'm not entirely certain how that works really, it just...I suppose if you have a passion for and an interest in the arts, then the cumulative effect of your, the knowledge that you acquire helps you better to appreciate. I mean I...I'd find it...I find it very hard to put that into... I mean I chaired for example four or five of the Design Council's design selection panels for some years. Now I mean I wasn't trained as a designer, but I'm sure that my study of the history of design and my interest in design in general all helped me to be able to do that job with, you know, with reasonable, well for want of a better word, intelligence, and to be able to help make judgements about things, you know. And as Chairman occasionally to have to cast a vote, which meant the thing was selected for the Design Council's index or for their exhibitions or not. And I think that it was the study of the history and a knowledge of all that, you know, which helped make that possible.

I know that you don't have to read very many artists' biographies to know that over time there's been a terrific resistance amongst fine art students to too rigid programmes of contextual studies for example.

Yes.

I mean how do you feel about that in your educative role?

I think, I think the problem, the problem with that has been, a) that there weren't very many...there weren't very many good historians about who could actually relate the history to the work that the students were doing. And I mean it may well, I mean it may well be that they weren't able to give the history any life in the context of the kids' work. I mean I did just that job at Hornsey College of Art, I lectured on design history there for a few years.

I mean can you put a date on that and describe that experience?

That must have been in the late Sixties. Well it was at the time of the Hornsey troubles actually. I did, for two or three years there I did a series of twenty or thirty lectures on design history, and I used to do it, and it was one of those sessions where I might have had no students at all, because the students didn't have to come to the lecture, they came...but I usually had a couple of hundred students there every time I went, and staff, and I think I was one of the earlier design historians. The reception for what I did was incredibly good, I mean the students were incredibly attentive; they weren't always terribly responsive but they often were and they often asked questions, and they would ask questions after the lectures, and they were always there the next week to hear the next one. And they...I think they enjoyed what I was doing, and I think they probably enjoyed it because, I mean I am a great enthusiast I suppose as much as anything else. I mean I believed that it mattered, that you knew and understood, and I think probably that, a bit of that was conveyed to the students; they certainly always turned up, I mean I always had a huge audience. The main hall in Hornsey was always full.

Were you actually at the college when things really blew up, and did you stay around?

I was, and I took part in those debates which took place in places like the Roundhouse in, you know, in Camden when all that happened, but I never really, when I...I have a little archive on all that, and I never really quite understood what it was all about, and nobody there was ever able quite to explain. I don't know whether, I mean the students were disenchanted with what was going on; I guess it was all about the changing nature of art studies. I think it was partially politically. I think there was a lot of, there was a lot of Marxist politics involved in all that, and a number of Marxist teachers and historians and so on. And I suppose people were trying to re-formulate the nature of art education, I don't know. I never did really understand quite what it was all about.

Did you talk about it with other members of staff at the time?

I didn't very much, no, no. I didn't, no. I mean I was a visiting lecturer there. There was a coterie of people who led that whole sort of mess really, there was a group of teachers, and based in the, to a large degree in the art history, contextual studies, so on, department, so it was about all that I think really.

So you think it was as much the grown-ups as the youngsters by the sound of it.

Oh I think it was led by the grown-ups.

Really? Yes.

Oh yes, I mean there was a whole...there was a group of teachers who were...oh yes, I think it was led by them. Yes I'm sure.

You can't name names?

Well I can't but that's only because my memory is so bad, but I've got the documents, I've got the papers somewhere. I mean I can't remember those people frankly. But they were people in the art history, contextual studies area.

Now we are getting ahead of ourselves again, so I'm...

And to be honest, that whole business didn't really interest me very much to be honest. I mean I loved getting on with the job, you know.

I'm just going back in time to the Fifties when you started showing.

Yes.

I think it would be very interesting to hear about the galleries and some of the individuals involved there.

Oh yes, oh well... Well the galleries of course, I mean in those days it was all very simple. I mean I used to drag my work down in the back of a van, I'd borrow a van from somebody, put all my pictures in the back and drag them down to Bond Street and then hawk them around the galleries, I'd walk around with them under my arms. And that could be a good or a bad experience, I mean sometimes a gallery would say, 'Oh I like that, and I'll have that one,' other times they'd say, 'No we're not interested'. And I remember for example the first time I went in to the Piccadilly Gallery, which is run by a chap called Godfrey Pilkington, and I asked him, he was doing something, I don't know what, he was on the floor putting a screw in the back of a picture I think, and I said, you know, I have some pictures outside and could I bring them in and show them to him, and he was terribly rude and told me to bugger off or something you see. And I went, and a couple of minutes later as I was getting up towards the van, he caught me up and said, 'Look, I'm terribly sorry, I really shouldn't have done that; it was just that I was so busy doing what I was doing and I've had such a difficult morning that I didn't really want to see anybody, but,' he said, 'look, I do apologise, I shouldn't have done that. Will you please bring your pictures in and let me have a look at them.' Godfrey Pilkington. And that was the beginning of a life-long friendship really, I mean I've known him for years now. He gave me a one-man show, he looked at the pictures and said he liked them, and gave me a one-man show. And, so I mean that, that's one experience, you know. I remember going into the Leicester Galleries once with a group of pictures and dear old Brown, it was run by a man called Brown, the Leicester Galleries, who had a son who ran the Leicester Galleries when they moved elsewhere, but the son very sadly was an alcoholic, I think he was quite ill, and that all fell apart, I mean that was... But dear old Brown, old Mr Brown, was a marvellous character really. I mean I remember taking some pictures into him, and him looking at them and saying, 'Oh, oh I can't show that,' he said, 'Churches never sell.' It was a painting of a landscape with a church, and, 'Churches never sell.' Which I thought was wonderful really. And on another occasion I was in his gallery and he was walking around with Prunella Clough, who had just had a one-man show, a beautiful show, lovely paintings, very beautiful indeed, and she hadn't sold a single painting, not one. And old Brown was walking around, he was holding her by the elbow and they were walking around looking at this collection of, total collection of unsold paintings, and he was rather deaf and spoke very loud, and I suddenly heard him say to her, 'Well Prunella my dear, and where are you going to have your next exhibition?' It obviously wasn't going to be there. Well so you know, I mean they were characters, they were interesting. But the gallery system was a very straightforward one. You framed your pictures, you took them in, they hung them up, they took thirty per cent and you took the rest. And you thought sometimes that maybe thirty per cent was too much, and of course they, some galleries charged you for the publicity,

you know, printing the invitation cards and all that, some didn't. But I thought it was a perfectly straightforward system and I was perfectly happy to work within that; at least you knew where you stood. In the sort of mixed exhibitions in, you know, other galleries, you know, where you sent in your pictures for a big selection, which I did many, I've selected millions of pictures in my life for exhibitions, the system was I think less satisfactory in a way because, you know, you paid a submission fee, you dragged your pictures down, you paid the submission fee, you then were either rejected or selected or put in a doubtful category, and if you were hung you then had to pay a hanging fee, and then you had to pay a percentage; in the end you ended up paying more maybe than in the straight gallery system. I mean it was a perfectly reasonable system I think, you know, the galleries. I mean I don't see at the time where there is no direct patronage, I don't see how else you can run the business, you know, some... I mean these days I think the galleries, they take artists on and they take, I understand, vast amounts of money out of them, and then they, but they boost the prices so everybody gets richer. I mean in my days as an exhibitor there was no way of getting support or help or financial help of any kind, I mean you just exhibited and sold or not as the case might be. And that was the beginning and the end of it, you know, there were no Arts Council grants, nobody... I guess a few of the really famous artists were taken on by places like the Marlborough, you know, with contracts, and maybe Agnew's and so on, had contracts with artists; I don't know if Agnew's did, Marlborough certainly did, and then, but they took you on lock stock and barrel and you became their artist and you couldn't move a foot without asking them. But then they made your reputation, if you were lucky.

Did you get involved in any of the British Council shows that travelled abroad?

Well I did once or twice, yes, I did have some work travel, but I can't remember the details of that. I mean when I was looking through catalogues and things the other day I discovered all kinds of things I had completely forgotten, you know, where pictures had gone on show and had travelled, or had been bought by, you know. I mean there were all those funny things like the Art for Education, you know, Art for Schools, pictures for schools and all that stuff, I mean I got involved in all that, exhibiting I mean. And a lot of pictures, I mean a number of local authorities in this country have pictures of mine, had, because one doesn't know where they are any more, if they're still going around the galleries or not.

Can you remember how you felt about that as a sort of an idea at the time?

I thought it was absolutely marvellous.

So how did it work, did they kind of buy the paintings from you, or were you expected to kind of hand them over?

They either bought them from galleries or they bought them from special shows. You see there were shows, pictures in schools, exhibitions, at the Whitechapel Art Gallery for example, and I exhibited in a number of those. And then, in other cases, I mean, Leicestershire Education Authority, Derbyshire Education Authority, and other authorities, Hertfordshire was very good, bought them from my exhibitions, pictures were bought out of the exhibitions. And occasionally people would come, they would appoint people to buy for them. I mean Camden Council appointed me for a year to buy pictures for.

So who did you buy?

Oh I bought, now let me think, who did I buy? Gosh, isn't it awful, I mean here we are again you see names are difficult. I bought some...I bought some jolly nice pictures, I do know that, of artists who have since made quite good reputations for themselves, but I can't quite put my...oh dear. Oh I'm sorry, I can't think of their names but, you know, it's a long time ago, and I do tend to forget.

One thing I would be very interested in hearing more about is the AIA, Association.

Right, oh yes. Well I, I think I earlier said, I was involved in the AIA from about 1948 onwards, when I helped to build, and did in fact build the Lisle Street Gallery, and then I went on the central committee when Diana Uhlman was the Secretary, you know, Fred Uhlman's widow. And, on that committee of course I was, I sat on a lot of selection committees, helped to choose exhibitions, and I organised a lot of exhibitions for them as well. I mean I did one called 'The Coal Miners', which had all kinds of people including Henry Moore, and one could actually suggest painters to them. Alan Reynolds, I got him his first exhibition there, and Louis James, an Australian painter, I got him his first exhibition there. And, it was...the AIA was, I mean, theoretically it was politically dominated by the left wing. I wasn't very aware of that at all when I was there, I mean I...politics never entered into the business of... I mean I guess some of the exhibitions were politically skewed if you see what I mean, I mean if there was a left-wing cause or a peace cause, you know, I mean I was involved in the Peace Movement, so there would be exhibitions which reflected that general ethos, but there was no political, deliberately political selection or exclusion of artists or pictures or anything of that kind; it was always a straightforward business of selecting on merit pictures which came, and

I thought it was in its way a very good organisation. It had this, in the early days, a picture lending library which went on for years and years, where you could put pictures into the library, people could borrow them for a sum of money every month, and then if they wished at the end of a certain period they could buy the picture for the remaining value of it, or some such arrangement, and that was quite a nice thing for them to have initiated and done. And of course it was an association entirely run by artists or, I mean we had a secretary who wasn't an artist but her husband was, and it was run by its membership really. I thought it was a rather interesting body really to be associated with, I enjoyed my time there.

Can you remember who was on the selection committee at the time you were selecting work?

Oh, all kinds of people. Stephen Bone, the art critic was one, and people like Gerald Marks and myself. In fact I remember a marvellous... Gerald Marks was very much a member of the Communist Party, a very vocal member of the party, and of course Stephen Bone was at the opposite extreme of the political spectrum, I guess. But he was still, you know, on the selection committee. And he was on the central committee of the AIA. And I remember, they were selecting pictures, or, no it was at a meeting, and Stephen Bone lost his temper and shouted at Gerald Marks you see, who, in his rather ponderous, loud voice, responded to Stephen Bone by saying, 'Don't speak to me like that. I am not a dog Mr Bone,' which so reduced the entire room to laughter that the whole thing passed by. But you know, it was, I mean, it was an amusing place really. I mean there were, we called in artists you know, there was a chap called Brookes I remember, and Hilton, Roger Hilton was involved. Harry Mundy and his wife Gillian Ayers were involved, though they came a bit later. And there was a whole spectrum of contemporary painters who were involved with the AIA in those days. And I'm not aware that people were, as I say, necessarily very left-wing.

I'm sure that's right. I think its sort of politically was most active in the Thirties wasn't it.

Well it was, yes it was an anti-fascist organisation. I mean the Spanish Civil War and all that, you know, that's when it was really a very active, politically active place. Then in, you know, at the end of the Second World War it wasn't like that. I mean it was still political, I mean it was...it was regarded as, you know, a left-wing outfit, but I don't remember it being especially so. I mean certainly, you know, people like myself who were involved in the Peace Movement were there, and in a way I think that was the natural order of things in those days, you know, if you were involved in the Peace Movement you were left wing. Heaven knows why but you were.

I mean how do you see the question of politics in a relation to art?

[PAUSE FOR THOUGHT] Well, if politics gets involved in art you get...you get terrible distortions. I mean, I think politics has no place in art really. You will inevitably get, if you have politics you're going to have prejudices, and you're going to have selective attitudes to things, it's bound to happen, so it's best if politics stays away. I mean I know that that isn't entirely possible, and I suppose you could say that, you know, the fact that I'm not a very political animal myself influences my own views politically, you know, but it's probably better not to have active politics involved in art.

I mean this is a terribly broad question but I think it's quite an important one, with your involvement with education, you've been through some very political moments in the education sphere.

Yes.

I mean have you kept on neutral territory?

Absolutely. I mean, the great thing about, the great thing about the Inspectorate, and I mean that, I've always done that, I mean I've never...I've never allowed either politics or religion or any of those kind of philosophical, political things, to influence my attitude to the teaching process, to education. I think that people...I don't think anyone should preach a point of view, a point of view. Young people need to grow up perhaps with the knowledge of everything if possible, but without any pressure to adopt a particular point of view. I think people have to be able to arrive at their own attitudes in their own time, and I think a good education is about leaving people to make their own discoveries really, I don't believe that politics has, you know, active politics has a part to play in education. That's not to say that, you know, morals and philosophical attitudes and all the other things shouldn't be discussed, I mean they ought to be discussed, but no one should be there inculcating particular attitudes and approaches, and in that sense it's best to keep politics out of education. I've certainly always done that myself, I mean I've.....

End of F5898 Side B

F5899 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Bernard Gay on the 2nd of September 1997 at his home in Petersfield.]

Now I know that you wanted to start talking about what's been a very important aspect of your life, your work in education.

Yes. I mean the period we've talked about so far I guess takes us up to the late, mid-Sixties probably, and it was then that I became more involved... I mean I had taught in youth clubs, and I had lectured for the WEA and in adult education in other ways, and I'd given lectures in universities and places all over the country by that time, but I hadn't really taught in a college or a school or anything of that kind. And in the mid- to late-Sixties I saw an advertisement for a teaching post at a place called the London College of Furniture. The London College of Furniture was referred to in those days as an area college in the Inner London Education Authority; an area college was a college which covered particular areas of work, and the London College of Furniture covered furniture and furnishings and all that sort of thing, and was a very narrow based college really, and it had a small group of full-time students who were studying furniture design and furniture technology and so on, and it had a large body of part-time students who came from industry. And I saw an advertisement for a drawing teacher, and I applied for the job, and I went along to see the Principal who was a strange, elderly man called Jack Cape, who had an office I remember which I thought when I went in looked like a Middle Eastern brothel, it was so extraordinary. It was funny curtains and things everywhere. Anyway, the thing is that I went in and he had a chat with me and offered me the job, I suspect because they had found it very hard to get people and he was happy to take anybody. Anyway I duly reported to teach there a week or two later, and found that I was teaching day release students from industry who for the most part were semi-numerate, semi-literate, and they were trying to pass their City & Guilds examinations in all kinds of things, upholstery, cabinet making and so on, the skilled trades, at which they were probably quite good, but in order to advance their careers they were sent to the college one day a week, and they were expected to get through the City & Guilds exams. I soon realised that a great problem for these kids was that they really couldn't deal with the written exams at all, but it was possible if they could do simple drawings to get through, because they often had to illustrate a question in some way or another. So I devised a series of very simple exercises where they could draw simple perspectives with reasonable accuracy inside cube which made it possible for them to answer the questions. And it was possible to devise very simple

exercises to deal with most of the things that they would have to deal with in their exams. And I managed as far as my part of the curriculum was concerned to get a lot of them through their exams, and that was really my first teaching experience. Anyway after I'd been there for some time Jack Cape, the Principal of that college, invited me to join the full-time staff, and I turned it down first of all, but then he offered me a bit more money, and to be absolutely honest I was still hard up in those days and I really couldn't afford to say no, so I said yes, and I took on the job, and I became the first full-time art teacher in the school, in the college. In those days the college only had one department, which was the furniture department, there was a principal and a head of that department that ran the whole outfit. And anyway, I took on the job as the art teacher, and my job then was to deal with all the art teaching that was necessary to the school, including the basic art work for those students who were studying to be designers, which meant that I could deal with the sort of basic design work that really designers need to make it possible for them to make aesthetic judgements, so that was part of the job, and that was great, because you know, I was back in my own element really. Anyway I set up, I was given a large room which I set up as an art room, and we started to develop a decent syllabus for the whole school, and then I began to do things like put on public exhibitions, which the college had never had before, and they were a considerable success I'm glad to say. I was helped enormously of course by the technical people in the college who had all the resources at their disposal to make all the stuff. But it was, I mean planning and putting on public exhibitions was something that the college had simply never done before. And after a year or two of that I was asked if I would like to set up in the college a school of interior design and furnishing, which would be, well which became half the college eventually, and I ran that for, I set it up and I ran that for a while, and that became, I guess because the demand was there for it, a great success. We had a huge number of students, and we made a point of finding ways of always getting them jobs, so we not only trained them all but we got them employment as well.

Can I just ask quite what form interior design took at that time?

Well, I mean there were no, there were no, what would you call them? There were no role models really to go by, so I had to devise a programme, and I had, I mean I was able to take on designers and other people who were involved in that sort of business, and I devised a syllabus which included all the technical aspects of interior design, surveys, planning, technical drawing, British Standards technical drawing, and then of course the design aspects of the job, which, I mean the aesthetic, visual aspects. And by that time we had separated the art department off so we had an art department which could work to our design department

and provide that side of things. And so our programme would consist of a series of specialists who dealt with each aspect of interior design, as I say, planning, surveying, the technical drawing that was necessary, lighting, circulation: all the dimensions in interior design which made it possible to produce a scheme. And then of course we had people who did the visuals, including specialists who dealt with visual presentations as well as everything else, and we also had a considerable business of writing schedules and specifications and all the things that go with it. So our course was fairly disciplined, and tried to cover all aspects of interior design so that people should be able to go into a drawing office and practise professionally, that's what we were about. We wouldn't have regarded ourselves as interior decorators, we very much dealt with the disciplines which made it possible to practise. And I had a very, I produced a complete syllabus of study into which each specialist had to slot his specialist piece to make up the whole picture, and this was our sort of bible, which changed as the years went by but which everybody had to work to. And that of course was produced in collaboration and discussion with all the other tutors on the course. I suppose we had as many as 200 students there studying interior design, some of them still in professional practice, and some of them still very...well I mean a lot of them in professional practice, and some of them still in touch with me. Sotheby's have just appointed a chief designer who goes all over the world designing the backgrounds for all their big sales; if they have a big sale of Old Masters or if they do something like a great jewellery sale or a costume sale like the Onassis one, they call on this girl, Nicky Aubury, who was one of my students, and she goes all over the world and does the design work for them, and she's a very successful designer. And I mean, and there are a number of people around who, you know, are in professional practice like that. Anyway the school of interior design went on for, I suppose I was there about six years, six or seven years, and took over a large part of the college, and of course while all that was happening lots of other things were happening as well, I mean the...the regional diplomas were set up, so that students studied for a regional diploma in those days, there was the London Diploma. None of these courses attracted mandatory grants by the way, they were all discretionary grant courses. And while I was doing that of course I was doing a lot of other things as well, I mean I was still exhibiting pictures naturally, I was doing a huge amount of writing, I wrote for a lot of journals in those days; I did a series of design programmes for the BBC.

Can you describe some of those perhaps?

Oh yes, I mean, the way that happened was that I, I was involved with putting on at the Design Centre an exhibition of students' work from the college; we designed two rooms, one

for old people and one for children, which the Design Council decided to put on in the Design Centre, and I...the design work was done by the design department in the college in collaboration with my group of students, with myself heading that group up, and then I put, I set the whole thing up in the Design Centre. And the exhibitions were seen, and the BBC asked me if I would do a design programme about them and for the BBC. I did one and then they invited me to do a series of six, so I did a series of six, one on textiles, one on...I mean we did all kinds of odd things. I mean we did one on concrete for example, which showed the uses of concrete in everything including the building of ships, and, I mean I can't remember the others but there were seven or eight of these things I think altogether, one on textiles, one on concrete, two on interiors. I've forgotten now, but anyway, there were a number of these. At the same time that I was doing that and painting and writing, I wrote a book on Boticelli, you know, continuing my interest in art history, really largely because people would ask me to and I could never say no, I mean that's how it all came about. So I was doing a huge amount of different things. And at the same time of course I got involved in the Camden Arts Centre, because all, right through from the Fifties I'd been a member of the Hampstead Artists Council and on the executive, and at some time during this period we found ourselves without a home. We had one room in Fenton House in Hampstead and we were being thrown out of that because they wanted to use Fenton House for something else, and I proposed to the membership, as a member of the executive, that we should, if we couldn't find a home somewhere, rent a place, that we ought to try and raise the money to set up an arts centre of our own, and that really was the genesis of the Camden Arts Centre. I mean, we put on all kinds of events, you know, we put on sort of parades and fairs and open-air exhibitions, and, dozens of activities really. And we raised, and I wrote to thousands of people and set up a scheme for raising money, and organised a trust to handle the money. But at the end of the day we only raised a few thousand pounds. And at that point I was asked by a man called Councillor Centrovitch, Michael Centrovitch, if I would write a paper for him to present to Camden Council which was the new Council which had been set up by the amalgamation of Hampstead and St. Pancras into Camden. And so I wrote him a paper about what we would want for an arts centre. And then, the Arkwright Road Library closed, so I mean a whole, a series of circumstances made it possible really. The Arkwright Road Library closed, the building was lying empty; Michael Centrovitch presented the paper I wrote to the Council. The woman who was then I think chairing the Hampstead Arts Council was called Jeanette Jackson, she became involved and she was a canny political being really and knew how to operate in the system. And the Editor of the 'Hampstead & Highgate Express' got involved by writing about what we wanted and what might happen and so on and so forth, and a man called Councillor Richardson who ran the Arts & Amenities, or the Leisure Group committee

for Camden, they all became in their various ways involved in this, and the whole thing began to gather a kind of momentum. And Jeanette Jackson who was very shrewd said to me, 'Look, I will try and get hold of the plans of the old Arkwright Road Library; would you if I get hold of them draw up a scheme for running it as an arts centre?' Which is exactly what we did. And I drew up the scheme, converting part of the library into galleries and some of it into offices, and some of it into classrooms to run a little school, and then we sent this to the Council, and there were other proposals, and we sent a document with it to say what we'd do with the place if we got it. And we did other things, we organised a dinner, I organised a dinner, at which we invited the Minister for the Arts and the Director of the Arts Council, and everyone but God, and they all came along to this dinner and we talked about our ambitions for an arts centre, and lo and behold they gave us the place. They said, 'Look, if we give it to you, will you go in, do something about it?' So we had set up by that time the Camden Arts Trust, and the Camden Arts Trust, of which I became Chairman after a while, was a woman called Helen Bentwich, who was Chairman first of all, then I became Chairman, I mean I was Chairman for about a quarter of a century. So we set up the Camden Arts Trust to run the Arts Centre. And then we went, Jeanette and I went to see the Education Officer of the Inner London Education Authority and got them to agree that if we set up a non-vocational art school in the centre, that they would pay our teachers and that we would become part of one of their adult education centres. So we became part of the Marylebone Institute, the education part of it did, and we had a leisure art school there with 1,000 pupils in it, 1,000 students, and some of those, quite a lot of those we got onto foundation courses and into mainstream art and design. But of course the most important thing is that we had our galleries, and then we devised a programme of exhibitions. And the first exhibition was a thing called 'The Artist at Work', which, I can't...I could find out the date of that, I ought to know but I haven't got it handy. Anyway, 'The Artist at Work' was the first exhibition, Jeanette and I and one or two other people did the research to put it together and then I designed it, and we put together a catalogue. And that was opened as the main exhibitions for that year's Camden Festival, the Camden Festival of course is really quite famous, I mean internationally famous, they do them incredibly well, or they did them, I don't know if they still do. They were before we came on the scene largely musical and theatrical, and the exhibitions played a very small part, but once the Centre was there the exhibitions played a huge part, and some of the exhibitions were the most famous things that happened in those festivals.

Can you describe, you know, for example 'The Artist at Work' as an exhibition?

Well 'The Artist at Work' really was an exhibition which traced the history of artists from the Renaissance and before to the present day, the way they worked, the materials they worked with. I mean we had for example a list of all the techniques from encaustic to oil painting and beyond, you know, tempora and so on and so forth, and then we had pictures and photographs and materials which illustrated the way artists had worked through the centuries. I mean for example we had colours, colours being ground with photographs of colours being ground in Renaissance studios, and we had things which illustrated tempora and things which illustrated oil painting, and we had for example, we had things from the Royal Academy including Sir Joshua Reynolds' palette and his armchair, the one in which Admiral Keppel sat to be painted, things of that kind, and a portrait by Reynolds, and lots of other things which illustrated the rise of the Academies. And then we went on to the 19th century and we had, we illustrated photography, the way photography came into art. And then we ended the whole thing with a big exhibition of really very distinguished modern paintings, British paintings by the way, in this case, simply because they were accessible. You know, people like Joe Tilson and all that lot who were very famous at that time. We had a few, we had a few other things, I mean we had a Tinguely I remember, and, anyway it was a very distinguished collection of rather good modern pictures. So it was really a brief history of the development of painting, from the Renaissance to the present day, and that was very popular, and it was the first of a series of didactic exhibitions which I did for them. I mean we went on to do a De Stijl exhibition, and then 'Classics of Twentieth Century Design', and 'Childhood', 'Photography Into Art', and 'Maker Designers Today', and there were lots of others but those were the principal ones really, and some of those I did entirely myself, others I worked with other people who collaborated in putting them on. And those exhibitions made the Camden Arts Centre famous really, I mean it became very well-known, and it was those didactic shows which did it. And in those days when we first set out, we had a philosophy about the place, we wanted to do things that other people weren't doing. I mean my own, my idea was that we shouldn't show young, bright, up-and-coming, avant-garde artists, because there were plenty of other places where they could show, but that we should show those artists who were distinguished in their own right but neglected, and there were quite a lot of those around, there were chaps like Kenneth Martin for example, and Claude Rogers, you know, really very good artists who people didn't really quite want to know about. In fact we were going to do a Claude Rogers and I had got Claude Rogers to agree, and when the Whitechapel Art Gallery heard about it they said they'd like to do it there, so we gave that one up, because in a way, I mean I realised that the Whitechapel was really a better venue for Claude Rogers than we were. But I mean, you know, we had a philosophy which underlay everything we did there, and the didactic design exhibitions which other people weren't doing

were part of that. And we had all that going on, and the school, and of course we had a huge lecture programme, occasional lectures which, you know, were part of the exhibitions. So all that was really very exciting, and I suppose I was involved, well I was involved with that until just a few years ago, I think the best part of thirty years. And I have to say that, I mean I...that whole thing as far as I was concerned was a labour of love, I mean I never got paid for any of that, I just liked doing it; I mean I found it... It was valuable to me because oddly enough the Arts Centre led to my being appointed one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. When I...I mean going back to the, which I must do, go back to the London College of Furniture, I ran the Interior Design School, the Furniture and Interior Design School for some years, not many, I mean I was only there about ten or twelve years altogether, but then I was...I was asked to apply for the job of Principal, and in each, each of the jobs that I was offered there I always turned down, and then eventually decided to go ahead with it, because... Anyway I was offered the job, to apply for the job of Principal, and when it came to it I wasn't appointed. There was one lady on the committee who really didn't want me and that swung the...a very powerful lady councillor from the ILEA. However, and the Chairman of Governors was so angry he walked out I remember. But it didn't really matter because at that moment, although I became Acting Principal for a while, I was approached by the Department of Education and Science at least by Her Majesty's Inspector who was responsible for the Furniture College and design around the country as a whole, to know whether I would be interested in applying to join the Inspectorate. And I then discovered of course that when you joined the Inspectorate, in a way you didn't apply, you were invited to apply, if you see what I mean. I mean one of the things the HM Inspectorate did was that they, in visiting the colleges they tried to pinpoint the people they thought had talent and who might become Her Majesty's Inspectors responsible for really, I mean planning the education system of the country, and then they would invite them to apply for jobs. And that's what happened to me; I mean I'm not suggesting that I was talented but I was invited anyway, and I did, and much to my amazement I was appointed. And I remember sitting in the interview room with this group of top civil servants sitting around me being interviewed for the job, and I said to them, 'Look, you have to understand that I have absolutely no academic qualifications of any kind whatever. I don't have any 11-plus, I never did a GCSE or a GSE or whatever it was, GCE, and you know, I didn't get any kind of diploma when I went to art school, I don't have any qualifications at all.' And bless their hearts, they said, 'Well, that isn't really why we asked you to apply. We thought there were other things that, you know, you might want to bring to bear in the job,' one of which turned out to be my interest in and founding of the Camden Arts Centre, because they had become interested in the idea of art centres. Needless to say once I was in the Inspectorate I never ever heard a word about art centres again, they didn't

do anything about it. But I mean the Inspectorate was, I thought the Inspectorate was a fantastic job by the way, fantastic job.

And I think, you know, it's such a sort of hidden aspect of art education, it would be very interesting to hear a real sort of insider's version of how it was structured and how people, you know, worked together.

Yes. Well I can do a fair bit on that. I can do a fair bit on that. Do you want to do that today? Perhaps not. How are we doing on that tape?

Well I don't mind. Well it's about to run out. I'm watching it nervously.

Well I mean I don't know if I've covered the, I don't know if I've covered the London College of Furniture bit adequately, I probably have. I haven't really said very much about...have I said very much about exhibitions and things, and painting, and...? We've rather skimmed over the surface haven't we, I have rather, not you.

Well it might be interesting to discuss, you know, how you dovetailed your continuing practice with these other responsibilities.

Yes. Well of course I wasn't able to in the end, I mean I had to make a decision. Once I'd got into the Inspectorate I had to make a decision whether I was going to go on painting seriously or give it up and seriously dedicate myself to the inspectorial role. And I did that, I had a retrospective exhibition, a big retrospective at the Camden Arts Centre, and then I made a conscious decision to really give my time to the Inspectorate.

End of F5899 Side A

F5899 Side B

[Continuing the tape with Bernard Gay on the 2nd of September 1997. Tape 3 Side B.]

Before we talk about the Inspectorate it might be worth saying a little bit more about the Camden Arts Centre and the politics which came to dominate it in a way, eventually. When we first went in to the Arts Centre the Council, Camden Council, kept their distance from what was going on there; I mean they were involved but they kept their distance, and there was an Arts and Amenities Committee on which both Jeanette Jackson and I sat, with all kinds of other interesting people, I remember, people like Felix Aprahamian for example, the art critic, the music critic and historian. There were people representing various arts, and then of course a lot of councillors there as is always the case. But at that stage, in the early stage, we had set up the Camden Arts Trust to run a centre if we ever got one, and the Camden Arts Trust, with the ILEA supporting the school, ran the Centre almost independently. Jeanette Jackson became the paid director of the school, and I involved myself in the exhibition side of things rather than anything else, although I was in fact the Chairman of the Teaching Board as well as the Trust, so I had a role to play with the Teaching Board, with the school. And that situation went on for some little time. But as the Centre became well-known, and even famous, Camden Council, quite rightly I think, felt that they wanted a more hands-on position in it. It's beyond politicians to stay out of things and operate from a distance, they like to be right in the centre. So they decided that, for all kinds of reasons that they wanted more control, they wanted to run their own exhibitions, instead of having us run the exhibitions we wanted, though I mean we had organised it so that Camden could run whatever they wanted, and we had collectively allocated times for each of the organisations involved in the Arts Centre to use the resources, and the money. But they were paying for the place, it was their money. And so, public money, a council that wanted to be involved, and wanted its share of the fame and credit and all that, and I entirely understand all that. But what they did, and I think it was a great mistake, still, they set up another trust called the Arkwright Arts Trust, and they then appointed their own director, so that alongside our committee which ran it with Jeanette running the school and myself being responsible for exhibitions with the support of other people, we... I mean Jeanette was involved in the exhibitions as well, in fact she was terribly good at it, in a different sort of way. But they set up an entirely separate organisation, they put in their own director, so, Camden had a chap who was appointed as Director of Camden Arts Centre; we didn't have such a person before that, we had a committee which ran it. They then reorganised the time so that they had half the year which they could use for their exhibitions, we had half the year that we could use for ours, or part of it, and then the

school could have an exhibition from time to time and so on. So we had to re-allocate resources, but of course we had, we duplicated the administration. And the effect of that was really in the end I think quite destructive, because the, originally when, for example I wasn't paid, and although the director of the school was paid that came out of the fees that were paid for the school. It meant that all the money which came from the borough went on exhibitions, we could use it all for exhibitions; it didn't go into salaries or whatever. And anyone who knows anything about running things knows that the biggest bill is always salaries. So we found ourselves out of our budget, which it's true they increased to take account of it, paying a director, paying a deputy director, paying their secretaries, paying attendance to sit in the hall, paying other people to clean the place, paying a staff to put to the exhibitions up. I mean when I was doing the exhibitions, whenever I did exhibitions, I used my own people, most of whom were unpaid, some of whom were, and we paid them out of the budget for that exhibition. But of course once the councillors got in there we found that two-thirds of the budget went on paying staff, so there was very little money left for exhibitions. Now, we did occasionally get money from the Arts Council or the Craft Council; I usually managed to get a few thousand pounds out of the Arts Council or the Craft Council for any show that I put on, but that wasn't always the case. And of course it meant that our budgets were very limited. The effect of that in the long term was that we couldn't afford in the end to stage these marvellous didactic exhibitions which gave the Centre its reputation, because all the money was going to pay for staff, and we were buying in second-hand exhibitions from the Arts Council and from other people, and putting them on, they've been shown in Blackpool, you know, and Bradford and Cornwall and, you know, and then we put them on in the Camden Arts Centre. So that the whole quality of what we were doing and the whole philosophy of what we were doing in a way began to die.

I mean how long did that process take?

Well, I suppose... I remember talking to somebody who had... I guess it was over twenty years, you know. But I mean the process started fairly early on. You know, once you've got to use all your resources to pay staff, you really have a problem. Unless you can raise a lot of money elsewhere, and that didn't always happen that way, it meant that, you know, you really couldn't stage the really super exhibitions. I mean, the De Stijl exhibition, which is probably the most famous exhibition we ever did there, that's the one where we had, literally had people queuing around the block to get in, I mean rows, queues of people right around the block to get in through the doors just to see it, I mean that exhibition was done under the auspices of the, was it...I don't know whether it was the Camden Arts Trust or the Arkwright

Arts Trust; I think that might have been one of their exhibitions. I did it for them, it was a festival exhibition so it would have been, it would have been aided by the Borough. So, there was an overlap, there was a period when it all went OK, including that exhibition, although I did get some money from the Arts Council for that, and I managed to persuade the Ministry of Culture in Holland to fly all the stuff over for nothing and take it all back for nothing, and in fact they brought over a truck and then they flew over some of the stuff, so they did a huge, they made a huge contribution, and the Arts Council gave us some money, so that the Borough didn't really have to spend a great deal of money on that. But over a number of years the system inevitably broke down. I mean they've gone on quite happily, it's still going on, but I mean I don't think they do, they do a few things which are really worthwhile but I don't really think it's as good as it might be. And I remember after about twenty years, I was talking to whoever the man was who had just been made Director of the Arts Council, and he was at an exhibition at the Arts Centre and he asked me about the place and I said at that time, well you know, I really think this place has had it, because you know, there was a time when it had a dynamic, but things like art centres have their day, and whilst we were able to do highly creative, individual, personal things, it really did something special. We had this school with 1,000 people in it, and it had its own dynamic. But when it becomes just another venue for exhibiting second-hand Arts Council exhibitions and things of that kind, I don't think it has any real purpose any more, except that it's another venue, but there are plenty of those; you don't need a place like that. And I think in a way that's, and I regret saying it in a way, but I think that's what happens when local politics becomes too closely involved. They couldn't stand off and let it happen, they had to be right in there with their feet and hands dealing with the place. And you deal with it to destruction in the end. I mean it runs, they've got a girl running it now who was Director of the Whitechapel at one time, and she's very good, but they don't do...they don't do many exhibitions which are, you know, which create a sensation or which create a great public, you know, which create great public interest, and I think that's awfully sad. And that's really a typical example of what can happen when politicians just feel they've got to get in there, and they can't leave things alone and stand back and let things happen.

Yes I'm quite interested in that, because I mean I see the Camden Arts Centre as quite a kind of sophisticated, rather elite establishment at the moment, which, you know, is very much serving the art world, which in a sense doesn't kind of match involving the Council.

Have a look at their audiences, have a look at their audiences, and the numbers, and, I mean...

But you would think that the Council would want a more sort of populist appeal.

Well that Council I think originally probably did, but I mean it's now an Establishment place. It shows all the same people who can be shown in the West End galleries, or who are running their, who are having their touring exhibitions. There is no special niche, the place doesn't do anything particular, which is its. It performs a role. Look, I mean I wouldn't want the Arts Centre not to be there, and I think occasionally it puts on excellent exhibitions, I'm not saying that; what I'm really saying is that it's now part of the general scene and doesn't have a particular identity. I mean you're absolutely right, you can go there, you can see quite interesting exhibitions, but they're the exhibitions you could see anywhere, they're Arts Council exhibitions, or...

I mean this is a very unfair question, but if you, you know, you had a year and huge funding to mount an exhibition there next year, what would you like to see on, what would create a new energy?

Oh, no, I've really no idea. I haven't thought about it. I mean I've had, the Camden Arts Centre has been out of my mind for such a long time now, I mean I gave up my interest there. I mean I think if I...I still think that if I were involved, I would be looking for areas of art and design which had been neglected and which I thought were important one way or another, nationally or internationally, and I'd be looking for really fine artists who were neglected. And there are a lot of those, you know. I would be doing everything I could to avoid the business of being involved with the art establishment, I mean the, all those young bloods who are, you know, a few years out of art school who got contracts with galleries and who are having little touring exhibitions, and, I wouldn't want to be involved in any of that. I think there are so many places all over the country who can deal with that side of the art scene, that an art centre like that ought to be looking for its own identity, and I think it ought to be, it ought to be rooted a bit in its own... You know, that area, Hampstead, St. Pancras, Camden in general, has a great, leaving aside the national and international stuff, it has a great population of artists; it has a number of groups who were very important, you know, Camden Town Group, the Euston Road Group, a lot of distinguished artists who belong to the area, they're never shown there. I mean we did, way back in, I think 1960, I helped to put on a big exhibition of the Camden Town Group in the town hall before we had the Arts Centre. So you know, you could deal with that aspect of the arts, the local tradition, you know. Henry Moore and people like Mondrian lived there, you know, Ben Nicholson lived there I believe, all that, all those... I mean the whole, almost everybody who was anybody in the art world

today, and in the last twenty or thirty years, lived in Hampstead at some time, or in Camden or St. Pancras or, you know, and I would have thought there was a big job to do to look at all those people, and especially the neglected ones, and that would be great for the local, you know, the local scene. But then there are lots of international things that other people don't do which they could do. There are a lot of areas of art that other people don't bother about which, you know... And I mean, in general that's what I would want to be involved in. And I'd like to be looking at maybe discovering young people who weren't part of the scene. I mean when we were showing artists there, I mean I remember well that we first showed Barry Flanagan before anybody else showed him, we showed him there, and we've shown, we showed a lot people who have become quite distinguished since, you know. But not the people who are already on the scene, you know, who are already on the kind of gallery treadmill, I wouldn't want to show any of those people at all, simply because there are plenty of other places to do it.

So it sounds as if you didn't leave with too much regret in the end.

Oh, well no I wouldn't quite...yes, maybe that's right. I wouldn't quite say that though, I mean I think I left feeling that in a way, recognising that places do have their time and their role to play, and that you have to move on. I mean you could reasonably say to me that, all right, the Arts Centre is doing a fantastic job and I haven't moved with it, and you may be right, I don't know, but I don't really get that feeling; I mean I think that there's far too much time devoted to the safe people who have already got or are beginning to make a reputation for themselves who can show anywhere else, and we don't need... I mean it's good to show them there because the locals get a look at them, but you know, I'll bet the audiences are not very big. Go in there some time when it's open and see how many people you walk around with, you know. And I mean there are ways of attracting a lot of people to galleries like that, but you've got to do something special to get them there. People are, even people who are very interested are notoriously lazy, they'll go the recognised places, you know, and to get them to Camden you have to do something special.

You're right, it's a hell of a long journey from where I live.

That's right, yes.

So it would have to be really special.

And I mean I think you... Anyway, there you are, I mean that's my view of it all. I mean I think it was great to have done it, and I had a marvellous time, and I am incredibly grateful to Camden and the Arts Centre for what it did really. I mean it was incredibly far-sighted of Camden to have allowed the thing to happen, and they put a lot of money into it, you know, big money. They had a politically very aware Council, you know, they cared about the arts; at least they made it possible for people to care about the arts. I mean I don't know if they all did, but enough did to make it really work, you know, so they had their own festivals and they had the Arts Centre and so on, and it still goes on, and I mean it's great, they're obviously putting money into it still. I just wish it were...I mean I know that they're doing serious exhibitions and things, but as I say I think they're only doing the things that other people are doing by and large. They may be discovering a few people themselves.

Yes, I think the sort of funny tension between the establishment and the so-called avant-garde is quite an interesting one.

Yes, that's right.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Now the Camden Arts Centre took up a full twenty-year period, and, it might be good just to go back a little bit and just talk a bit more about your own exhibition experience as an artist.

Yes. Of course the Arts Centre gave me my last big exhibition, I had a big retrospective there, when I was in the Inspectorate, I'd been in the Inspectorate for about a year or two I think. But of course prior to that I'd had a lot of exhibitions in London and in the provinces. I think I had three at Wildenstein. A man called Jack Beddington was responsible for every year putting on, I mean in this great old gallery that dealt with Old Masters, they put on a show with one or two, or even three contemporary, in brackets, artists, and they were kind enough, Jack Beddington was kind enough to...he wrote a book called 'Young Artists, Artists of Fame and Promise', and he illustrated one of my paintings in that, and then gave me an exhibition, and the following year he gave me a second, and I think a third one after that. So those were...and they were very good because they sold almost everything I put in, but at very modest prices, I mean prices were very low. And then I had another one-man show in the Piccadilly Gallery, and then another one in John Whibley, and a number out of London, in the Austin Hayes Gallery in York and so on, so I suppose altogether I had... I had two exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Arts which is a sort of surprise in a way, but that

was dear old Roland Penrose, who I got to know somehow, I don't know how, but he invited me to show there, and it was great fun showing there, I had two little exhibitions there. And of course in those days you could drag your work around to any of the galleries, and most of them would put something up you know, they'd show one or two things. I mean the, I mean one took them always to the Leicester Galleries at Christmas because they had their Small Pictures exhibitions, and the same with Browse & Darby, or Roland, Browse & Delbanco as it then was. And I remember showing a rather large picture there. There was a wonderful wall in Roland, Browse & Delbanco on which you could just hang one large painting, and they very kindly took a large picture of mine and hung it there, and I remember that picture particularly because I was in my studio at Marble Arch where I lived in those days and there was a knock on the door and when I opened it there was a chap there that I'd known at art school, called Alfred Harris, and was quite a good painter in his own right, and, he's teaching at London University I think these days. Anyway he had walked all the way from Roland, Browse & Delbanco in Clifford Street - is it Clifford Street? yes - up to Marble Arch, to tell me that he'd seen my picture in Roland, Browse & Delbanco, and that he didn't like it. Which I thought was lovely really. So I have him a cup of tea. But you know, but I mean, exhibiting was marvellous. I loved exhibiting pictures, and I sold a hell of a lot of pictures. I don't have many left really. I don't know where they are, because one of the things about your pictures is you lose them all, they go to people you seldom know. I mean, I never found out from Wildenstein who had bought the pictures. I know one, I know of one or two people who have got them, and I know they went to things like local education authorities and places like that, and one or two sort of provincial galleries, but one loses track of most of them.

Can you remember who the art buying sort of public were at that time?

Not really. People with money I think, that's all, you know. But of course, I mean it was in a way quite a good time for exhibiting then, because there was this attempt by Councils like Camden to buy pictures to put in their collections. Pictures for hire was a great thing in those days, say a picture hire service, like the library, that was a lovely idea. I mean I think it's a very difficult one because it's so difficult to preserve and maintain the pictures, and I heard terrible stories of people in store rooms, somebody was telling me that they were in a store room of some Council or another somewhere and they realised they were walking on something and when they looked down they were walking on a little Ben Nicholson painting which was on the floor and it had come out of its frame and they were just walking over it and nobody cared. I mean there's a great curatorial problem if you build a collection of pictures; how do you maintain the pictures, how do you preserve the pictures, how do you maintain the

frames, how do you keep them looking decent, how do you re-varnish them. You've got to employ a curator, somebody who's knowledgeable about painting. And I mean all the collections of pictures for schools that were in different Council, different local authorities' collections all over the country, all the pictures for hire in local authority collections, all those, God knows what's happened to them. I mean what's happened to the ILEA collection of paintings? I had one or two in that. I've no idea where they are, nobody knows where they are as far as I know. Their collection of artefacts is at Camberwell College of Art, they've now got them and they've got, in their art history department they've got somebody who curates all them and looks after it, I know that very well because I am the lead governor there, the chairman of governors as it were. We don't call them chairmen any more in the London Institute by the way, you're a lead governor to a college, you lead a little team.

Oh I was mystified by that expression. I read it as lead [PRONOUNCED LED] , what is a lead governor?

Yes, yes, yes, yes a lead governor. Yes. But actually it's, you are, you lead a little team of governors, who have a responsibility for the college. And I'm still, at this moment, although I think probably my period of office has just run out because I'm giving it all up, for personal reasons I can't go on doing it any more. But...

Can you remember sort of what aura the ICA had at that period that you were showing?

Oh, I mean, as an artist you always went to the ICA to see what was going on. I mean, I think, the ICA was, I mean, a greatly respected institution really, and of course they had lots of interesting lectures and things there. It was there where, I mean there was this marvellous occasion when Yoko Ono went there and invited everyone to cut her clothes off, do you remember all that, in the Sixties? And she really did. And there were...I mean, there were lots of interesting and exciting and unusual things going on there. And I mean Roland Penrose was a great guy really, I mean he, you know, he ran that place, and he was creative. I think when he got bigger and went to The Mall, I don't know whether it's better or worse or what, but it changed of course. I mean, in wherever it was, Bond Street, I've forgotten where it was now even.

It was Dover Street wasn't it?

Dover Street. In Dover Street it was, you know, it was a small gallery, and then there was the Library Gallery, and there was the Library and you know, the club room and you could meet and talk, and it was... I mean I suppose that was very English really, the way it was run, and the way it was done was modest, and very English, not a lot of money. There was a bar I seem to remember, a bar and, you know, all that. And it was very pleasant. And then of course it went to The Mall and became big, and big isn't necessarily better, but of course it might be better for all I know. They did lots of exciting things, and I often went there, but you always felt they were living beyond their means.

They probably were.

They probably were, yes, that's right.

Yes, in terms of the whole kind of excitement of the Sixties, you were a sort of more mature generation than the young bloods at that time weren't you?

Oh yes. I mean you have to realise, I mean even when I went to art school, I mean I was 27 when I went to art school, and I was at art school with 16-year-olds, 17-year-olds, and there were even younger people there. There were a number of us ex-servicemen, and we went in late, and, it was a strange experience but a good one, and I mean no difficulty at all in being with younger people, or them being with us. One didn't experience any, you know, any bad feeling or difficulties of getting, and we all got on incredibly well. The thing I've realised about the art school is that the population was really a very nice one you know. Art students are incredibly nice people, and they really are. I, because I was in my later twenties I used to worry about the younger students, who seemed to me in some cases incredibly free and easy and even promiscuous, it appeared. I was probably terribly jealous, you know, and I'd missed a lot of that. Later in life when I re-met a lot of those people, they were really smashing people, I can't tell you. We had a couple of reunions, and the people I was at art school with were still lovely people, I was amazed at how nice they were. And they were all recognisable from when they were young students, and that was sort of, you know, thirty years on, a lot of them had married, had children, been divorced, married again, you know, were grandmothers, one or two; it was astonishing really, but they were absolutely super, lovely people. The art education does something very good for people, and it's hard to put your finger on quite what that is, but I mean my experience, and Kate, my wife, my late wife, who went to art school much later than myself, often said what lovely people they were at her art school. And her view of them was that they were actually incredibly moral people; despite what people think

about art students, she felt that wasn't really the case, that they were extraordinarily moral people, very good people by and large.

End of F5899 Side B

F5900 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Bernard Gay on the 11th of September, at his home in Petersfield, with Melanie Roberts.]

Now Bernard, I know you wanted to return to your teaching time in terms of having to be an administrator out of the blue as it were.

Yes. Yes I would like to...I would like to talk a little about that. We've been talking about a period which, of about a decade, it's really the 1960s, and I went into the Inspectorate in 1971, and that period of course coincided with lots of other things. I mean it was the first five years of the Arts Centre for example, and during that time I'd done some of the major exhibitions that I was concerned with; and it was a very creative time for me I think, because I was doing a lot of writing, I was lecturing all over the country, and I suppose it was one of the busiest periods of my life. The whole process was a curious one for me, because you realise that I had had no training to be a teacher at all, and one learned on the job as it were. I mean one had to consult, each time you were thrown in with another group of students you had to invent for yourself a syllabus that would be appropriate. And equally true is the fact that when you became a head of department or a principal of an institution, as I was for a short time, I mean I was head of department for some six or seven years, the first thing I came to realise was that I had had absolutely no training at all to be a manager and an administrator, and the only training I got, I talked to one of the ILEA's inspectors about this, a chap called Bill Lee who was actually a very good chap, a very good, helpful man; he was an engineer, but very sympathetic to the arts and to design, and enormously supportive, as the best people in the ILEA were by the way. I'd like to talk a little bit about the ILEA later and my experience of them. Having talked to Bill Lee I managed to get a one-day training session in a staff college somewhere in the south of England, I can't remember where it is now, but I went down there for a day and learned how to deal with office procedures and so on, but it was a day, and one learned how to administer a fairly large staff, and a large body of students, and to interact with the local education authority literally on the job, you just had to find out for yourself. And that did create difficulties, and a lot of insecurity. I felt insecure teaching, because you always felt that you were learning on the job and you were only one step ahead of the students, if you were the sort of teacher that I was.

Did you have any mechanisms at the time for monitoring students' response to different teaching styles?

Not officially, though in fact we did it. I mean we had, we discussed students' responses to staff with staff, and we had regular staff meetings, and I made it part of my job to keep myself fairly well informed about what was going on anyway. But in those days the idea of student-centred learning was fairly new. Though I think we were beginning to introduce it; I mean I certainly talked to my students individually, let them see their reports, and any student who wanted to know how we felt about them could come and find out. We also set up individual tutor systems, which again I think was fairly new in the system in those days. But...no, I don't think we did have any official, any...there was no national system and no local authority system. Though we were beginning of course to have to think about those things because we were setting up courses which were regionally run, which eventually led to nationally run courses, and I'll talk about that a bit later. [PAUSE] Sorry, I'm not quite with it at the minute.

We were talking about the administrative training for people that have to take on responsibilities.

Well I mean there wasn't any, I mean it's as simple as that really, you had to learn on the job. And I mean I did learn on the job, I guess as everybody did. The problem really in the system was that, although there was an academic progression, you know, you could become a junior lecturer, a senior lecturer and a principal lecturer and a head of section or a head of department or whatever, and principal; although there was an academic road to the top there was no administrative road to the top, and so, academics, so-called, like myself, in a way were promoted out of the thing that they were doing perhaps quite well into unknown territory that they'd had no experience in, I mean that was certainly my experience, and I think the experience of most people. And we were then beginning to talk about that problem among ourselves, realising that as education, further and higher education grew and developed, as diplomas were being awarded regionally, and later nationally, and as degrees came into the system, that one needed much more control of the system to make it work rationally. But we, as I say we were learning on the job. I carried on at the College of Furniture until I was, until 1971, and I was only Principal there for a term. I was invited to apply for my job in the Inspectorate in 1971; I discovered later that in fact we, part of our job was to identify people in the system in the various colleges who were achieving, and to, if we thought they were possible, suitable applicants, to make a note of the fact and when an appropriate time came, to invite them, suggest to them that they might consider applying. I mean you couldn't give anybody a job, it wasn't that sort of system at all; it was simply that, I mean part of the

inspectors' job was to identify good practice, and if you discovered good practitioners you could encourage them to apply for positions in the Inspectorate, and that's how I came into the Inspectorate. The HMI responsible for my college, and curiously enough I found the report on myself in a file later on, actually suggested to me that I apply, and obviously talked to the people who were involved in my area of work about me when I did apply, and that was one of the ways that I found myself in the job. It was a strange experience going into the Inspectorate; it seems to me that all things I did were strange as experiences when I think about it. I had had no experience of the Civil Service before. I'd had a little experience of the ILEA as an education authority, and I guess that, I mean the administration of the ILEA was rather like the Civil Service. It was a very large authority of course, and I was involved in it in the Ken Livingstone days, and when I first became involved with ILEA I had great respect for the authority really. There were remarkably able people working in it as administrators; it had a wonderful global view of what education ought to be, which I think was really rather splendid. I mean the youth side of it, the non-vocational adult education side of it was tremendously good, and in its way very creative. It encouraged the arts, it encouraged...it encouraged everything really, and it was inexpensive, people could afford to go, and I think one of the really awful things about the last few years is that that wonderful system of adult education has been almost destroyed. And the fact that the ILEA was a large authority meant that it could embrace things that small authorities simply couldn't. It had, I mean for example the non-vocational education side of things had its own inspectorate, had people monitoring it all the time. It cared about standards, it had centres of excellence. It recognised that none of that work led to academic qualifications, it was education for its own sake, to enrich the lives of the people who participated in it, and that was a wonderful moral attitude to education really. And it was very sad to see that destroyed, but it was destroyed, in fact I can remember when I was in the Inspectorate, having a meeting with our senior chief inspector and various other people about what we thought about ILEA and whether it ought to survive. I'm glad to say that my colleagues and I all felt it should; our view was not that it should be done away with, but that it should survive and it should continue. Mrs Thatcher of course had different views and it eventually went, and I think to the detriment of the citizens of London really. As years went by I have to say, under Ken Livingstone, and with all the developments in political correctness which the authority began to embrace, it had always embraced them really but they were a different set of criteria and a different kind of political correctness came into being, and there was a time, it all began to look a little mad really. The majority views were always subservient to the minority views. Now that might or might not have been good, in fact I think in many cases it probably was rather good, but the thing that I came to realise in the ILEA towards the end of its time was that...well I'm inclined to say there was a sort of

madness there, political madness. And the people... I don't know how to express this really, but the people who were propagating the views that the authority then held, which were theoretically highly moral views, were not actually very nice people; they tended to be so politically prejudiced that they couldn't think rationally. I mean I believe the old authority, less politically prejudiced, less one-sided, had a much more balanced view about...it did huge amounts of good.

So what happened to those initial people, they just sort of moved out of the system naturally or...?

I think that the system became politicised much more... I mean I'm a socialist, I've been a life-long socialist, but I found the kind of socialist views of that authority in the last few years that it was there almost impossible to equate with what I thought were socialist views. They were stuffed with political prejudices, they couldn't...they couldn't look at people and see their worth unless they were of their own political persuasion. I mean I had an experience when I was involved in the Arts Centre, sitting on the Arkwright Arts Trust, which was the local authority trust in Camden, and I might just tell you that story because it's characteristic of the period in a way. We were at a meeting where there had been some political problem created by the then Government, and there was to be a protest in London, and the Chairman of the Arkwright Arts Trust at that time said in the course of the meeting that it was expected of us that we would support this protest, it was expected of us. And she went on to say that if we were to expect to continue the authority to fund the Arts Centre we had better be sure that we participated. I was so incensed by that that I resigned from the trust there and then; I was the only one to do so, and perhaps I over-reacted, but I was so incensed. I mean it happened that I believed in the protest that was taking place, I thought it was right; I can't even remember what the protest was now, but I thought it was right. But I couldn't be part of political thinking which told me that if I didn't do what I was told I would be penalised. And that in a way I think was characteristic of what happened to ILEA as well, it was the political climate of the times, it was an intolerant political climate. I mean I hate the fascism of the Right, but I think in a funny way the fascism of the Left is even worse.

Is this sort of mid-Seventies we're talking about here?

Yes it is, yes. And I, I mean I was living in the East End of London at that time, I had a house in Hackney, and of course the Hackney authority, as you know, was more than left-wing, and we bought this house, Kate bought the house actually before we were married and we were

doing it up, or trying to do it up, and we were legally entitled to ask for a grant to do it. And after eighteen months the grant hadn't come through, although we knew we were entitled to it, and I wrote to the Council and said that it seemed to me that this was wrong if not illegal, and that I hoped they could do something about it and that I was sending a copy of the letter that I had sent to them to the ombudsman. Within the week, before the weekend, an official from the authority called at the house and gave us the money, literally, just like that. It was...I mean that was symptomatic of the time. It's hard for people to realise how curiously thinking the very left-wing politicians of that time were. I remember that a local councillor who was applying, who was hoping to be re-elected called at the house one day, and told me how wonderful the Council was, and asked me if I would vote for them. And my response was to take her outside into the street and ask her to look around. And the point really was that I wanted her, I wanted to say to her, 'Look at the street, look at the mess, and the squalor. Look at the way the dustbins are not emptied, look at the filth of the street. Look down the road to the Council flats with their graffiti and their filth and their general squalor. And tell me how that equates with your professed belief that you're doing wonderful things for the working classes. I don't understand it. The two things simply have no relation to each other. Here we are, living in appalling conditions really, because the Council is neglecting to do its job, and you are telling me that everything you do, you're doing for us. I can't see the connection myself. Now, when you can demonstrate that you can deal with the problems then I'm prepared for you, but right now I'm not.' And I mean, all that was, you know... And I say that, as I say, as a socialist. All that was part of the extraordinary climate of the time. I remember we had an MP in Hackney who actually broadcast one day, Kate and I were at home sitting in our kitchen having supper, and we heard this man saying that there were people coming to live in that constituency who had things like Venetian blinds and plants in their houses and ate yoghurt, and had cars outside their front doors. It was no longer working class. You suddenly realise that all those things applied precisely to us, that there we were with our car outside the door, our indoor plants, having yoghurts, and all the things that he talked about were us. Now I mean, you know, I found all that very strange and odd.

It sounds as if they wanted to retain the working class as a kind of rare breed.

Oh, well they did, I mean... God! What was that man's name, that MP? Anyway, he was a, he became quite famous as a kind of left-wing, well more than left wing. But I mean I regarded all that as the fascism of the Left really, which I think is even more dangerous in a way than the fascism of the Right because they professed truly to be doing things for you, and they're not.

Did this impinge on your job in the Inspectorate?

No I don't think so, no I don't think it did. Politics was absent I think. I mean the great thing about being in the Inspectorate, and I must try and talk logically about that in a moment, the great thing about being in the Inspectorate was that you were an honest broker, and the reason Her Majesty's Inspectorate was so respected when I joined it in 1971 and had been respected for years before, was that everyone knew that Her Majesty's Inspectors were honest and objective to the best of their ability; they were honest brokers. Everybody could call them in and ask for a review, and whatever else happened, it may in the end be a view with which you disagreed, but you knew that it would be an honest unprejudiced view so far as is possible, and I thought that was one of the wonderful things about the Inspectorate really, that it did have this honest broker image, and I think it's very sad that it's been done away with, and I am told now that they're rethinking and trying to bring it back. I hope they do. Anyway, let's talk about the Inspectorate. As I say I joined it in 1971. I was still of course heavily involved with the Arts Centre and putting on exhibitions there, and in 1973 or 4 I had a big retrospective exhibition of my own at the Camden Arts Centre, and that was the last major exhibition I had. At that point I had really to decide whether I could carry on painting and carry on a lot of the activities that I was doing at the same time, or seriously devote my time and energies to the Inspectorate, and I concluded in the end that I really had to give my time to the Inspectorate. But to start at the beginning, I went in as I say in 1971. The first year in the Inspectorate was very difficult for me. First of all I had so little knowledge of the national scene, and of the way the Inspectorate operated and the way the Department of Education and Science operated, how the system was structured, how the administrators planned it, how, what the relationship was between the local authorities, the regional advisory councils, the Department of Education and Science, and the Inspectorate's role in all that, I had no knowledge of any of that at all, and all that had to be learned. And the first year was in fact very much a steep learning curve, and it was also a time of course when I was mentored; all HMIs spend a year being mentored, I mean you literally, you follow another colleague around who has more experience than you, and although you are given some institutions to visit as a specialist and so on, by and large you spend your time with a colleague visiting, observing the way they operate, and very often writing up the notes of your visits. The Inspectorate had... The day-to-day running of the Inspectorate, I mean your own day-to-day running of your job, your home was your office, although we had offices all around the country, and it was a very good system. You could phone an office, if I was on my way to York I could phone the office in York, dictate a note over the telephone and arrive there and find that the secretary

had written it up and I could sign it and send it off; if I was coming from York back to my base office in London I could do the same thing, and I had secretarial support there. But you ran your inspectorial job from your home, your home was your office; you spent a lot of time at home writing up your notes and your papers. You spent the rest of your time visiting one way or another, you might visit a college, you might visit a local authority, you might go for a meeting at one of the offices, you might go to a meeting at the Department of Education and Science, you might go somewhere to meet a colleague: there were a whole range of different aspects to the Inspectorate. And there was a lot of networking. For example, each inspector, once you had gone through your first year, would be allocated an area of responsibility. You had a number of institutions in an area somewhere which you were general inspector of; you had a number of other institutions that you were specialist in, and in my case I had a national responsibility as well, I was nationally responsible for industrial design education. That grew out of the fact that I was originally responsible for furniture education, which sounds odd, but of course furniture education, its examinations from City & Guilds level to degree level is done in a number of colleges all over the country, and furniture education included all the courses in furniture design and so on, as well as the City & Guilds courses for day release students at the bottom, so there's a whole spectrum of work, and I had national responsibility for that, and that grew into a general national responsibility for design education. I was much involved with the Design Council of course at that time and had been for some years; in fact it was Lord Reilly who invited me to become a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts, I was working with him at the Design Council, I was on their lecture panel, then I was on their design selection panel, so I think, one time I'd chaired I think five different design selection panels. They were panels of people responsible for selecting different sorts of products, and which went into either the Design Council on exhibition and into Design Index, or simply went into Design Index, which was an index people could go to at the Design Council to look at in order to choose products which were well designed. And it was the Design Council's way of supporting industry and bringing industry, the best industrial products to the knowledge of almost anybody who was interested, but it meant the designers could go and see a whole, if you were an architect or a designer you could go and see a whole range of products which had been chosen by a committee who regarded these as well designed.

Who were your other sort of committee members at the time you were sitting?

Well, they would be all kinds of people. I mean we had buyers from major stores for example, designers, industrialists, people who were producing and whose work was generally regarded as rather good, and we had all kinds of people, including for example on one of my

committees I had the Duke of Gloucester, who is an architect as you know, and he was very good by the way. He was often out of step with other members of the committee, but for a very good reason, he had a sort of belief in absolutes, things were either good or they were not good, and that's all there was to it. Others of us... I don't think that's the way he always thought but he often thought that way, and was quite prepared to say so. I think others among us came to realise that life is the art of the possible, and you can't live by absolutes, and in the end you selected things that you might even have some slight doubt about, but you selected it because you believed that of its kind it was the best that was available. The fact that it wasn't the absolutely perfect solution to a particular problem was perhaps not as relevant as some people thought it might be.

End of F5900 Side A

F5900 Side B

[Continuing the tape with Bernard Gay on the 11th of September 1997. Tape 4 Side B.]

Yes. While we're talking about the Design Council and so on, a number of things while I was in the Inspectorate came out of my involvement in the Design Council. For example the Crafts Council when it was set up originally was set up under Sir Paul Reilly, later Lord Reilly, and he and I had one or two conversations about that, and one of the roles that one played in the Inspectorate was to act as an advisor to all kinds of people, and I remember that at one stage I had a note from our Chief Inspector, a man called Richardson, asking for views on the crafts in Britain, and I wrote a paper for him, which I sent off, and it was a year or two later that the Crafts Council was set up. And prior to that happening Richardson got in touch with me and invited me to lunch with him one day, and he brought along with him a document which he had sent off to the Minister responsible, which contained a large part of the paper that I had written for him. And he said to me, 'Look, the reason I've invited you to lunch is that I have sent this document off and naturally I've had to sign it, because that's my job, but I wanted you to know that a large part of the content of that document is the paper you wrote for me, which is why we're having lunch.' And of course that was one of the moments in the end that led to the founding of the Crafts Council. So that kind of general involvement was part of the work that one did as an HMI. I was, as an HMI I was an assessor to the Design Council so I sat with the Design Council's main committee, the Council itself, I joined their meetings to observe and report to the Department of Education and Science. I was an assessor to the Society of Industrial Artists and Designers, and in that context I wrote a paper which led to the SIAD as it was known becoming the Chartered Society of Designers with a royal charter. And I wrote a paper for the Privy Council as an HMI setting out my views of the SIAD and how it worked and so on, and that along obviously many other things eventually led to the SIAD becoming the Chartered Society. So one had that sort of general influence. In another context I chaired a joint committee for the Design Council and the Department of Education and Science which looked at the design requirements of British industry, the design requirements of British industry, and we published a report. So that was another way that HMI in general terms it tried to influence the course of events. But I'm ahead of myself a bit, I mean I...I'd like to if I can explain reasonably logically what HM Inspectorate did. I have to say that my own view of the role of the Inspectorate was that we were enablers, we did all we could to encourage worthwhile things to happen, and I took that as my basic view of what we ought to be about. I mean it was my view when I was teaching and running an institution that you really, you did all you could to make it really exciting and

worthwhile, and I was able to, I carried that over into the Inspectorate. The Inspectorate had a large number of roles, for example, as well as having our allocated colleges, I mean my colleges were for the most part the London area, but I also had the Eastern Division of England and as a specialist activity the Home Counties, so I had a fairly big area to cover, and then as a specialist I had the whole country to cover, the whole of England to cover, visiting colleges. Now the great virtue in HM Inspectorate visiting colleges was that you saw every kind of practice that was going on; you saw teaching everywhere, you saw the good and the bad and the mediocre, and you gained a knowledge of best practice, and you could use that knowledge of best practice to encourage all kinds of things to happen. For example, one of the things we did was to run conferences where we brought teachers in various disciplines together. I ran a number of industrial design conferences, I ran a number of furniture design conferences, and what you could do would be to bring the best practitioners from the colleges all over the country together with teachers from all the other colleges from all over the county, and you could in some way illustrate best practice through exhibitions, through talks, through illustrated lectures; you could bring not only best practice from the colleges, but you could bring in industrialists and manufacturers and so on to add to the conference and you could also stage exhibitions of best practice around the country. And you could thereby disseminate the knowledge of best practice to a much wider group of people. So that was one aspect of it. Of course that wasn't the, that wasn't the main job you did in the colleges as an HMI. You visited the colleges to see the work that was going on, and your role would be, I mean you were inspecting the work, and your role would, part of your role would be to discuss with members of staff what you saw going on, to occasionally suggest that there were other ways of doing the job they were doing. You could encourage where you saw really good practice by saying that you thought what was happening was good and exciting and so on. So you could encourage people to do excellent work; you could advise people that they might look at other ways of doing their job. And if you saw things which weren't perhaps as good as they ought to be, you could mention it to the person concerned and then mention it to their head of department and mention it to the principal. And if for example in looking at a college you saw that the college was under-resourced you could tell the principal that, and then of course, because you had a role in the local authority as well you could meet the local education officer and say, 'Look, I've been to such-and-such college, and frankly you're asking the staff there to do an impossible job, and you're not serving the students very well, because you're not putting the resources into the college that ought to be there, and what can we do about it?' You could...and, I mean in East Anglia in Suffolk on one occasion I realised that the colleges in the region were isolated from each other, partly because of its geographical nature, they're just wide apart, they're spread apart, and that they weren't in

touch with each other, they weren't able to make use of things like bulk purchasing to actually use their resources as well as they might, and we managed to encourage the local authority to actually appoint an art adviser who could co-ordinate the work of all the colleges in the county. And so, your relationship with the local authority was really rather an important one, and one had meetings with the local authorities all the time. Another aspect of our, of the college visits, would be in agreeing to development plans. If a college wanted to develop in some way they would usually call Her Majesty's Inspector in, simply to tell them what it was they wanted to do, and of course in some cases to ask if it was possible to do it. Because at a certain level the Inspectorate worked with the regional advisory councils, the Department of Education and Science, and the local authorities, in the planning of the regional provision of courses and education in general. For example if a college wanted to set up a new degree course, the first stage in that would be to call Her Majesty's Inspector in, possibly with a local education officer present, to talk about the possibility of doing it. HMI should know that there were, if a college was proposing a particular course, there were or there were not similar courses in the region, and how well they were supported by students, and whether there was a regional need for another development. And it would be HMI's job to advise the local authority that perhaps in some cases there was already an over-provision, and that this particular course wouldn't really be very welcome, and then it would be our job to advise the regional staff inspector, Her Majesty's Regional Staff Inspector, that we wouldn't really want to support such an initiative. The local authority could still go ahead and try to set it up if they really wanted to, but HMI's advice was important in that context, in the whole business of regional and national planning. But of course we not only supported initiatives which came to us, you could also propose initiatives. For example, the art history degree at a college like Camberwell, where I'm still the lead governor as it happens, the art history course there was the first public sector art history degree in Britain. There weren't any in the public sector, art history was always a university subject, not an art school subject. We saw in Camberwell, where they had a conservation course which had a very important historical base, and where they had a good art history department anyway, that an art history course which specialised in works on paper would not only relate well to their conservation work, which is now internationally famous by the way, but would also provide a degree in art history which was different to any other of the degrees being taught anywhere in the country. There wasn't another art history course which specialised in works on paper.

What time was that, what period was that set up in?

This must be 1974 or 5, something like that. It was in the middle of my inspectorial career anyway. And in that case incidentally I sat in the college as an adviser to the principal, to the local authority, and to the staff, putting in my pennyworth insofar as I was able, in setting that up. And indeed in setting the possible parameters for the development of the conservation work they did there, and later in setting up the Camberwell Press, which still runs, you know, it's a press which produces books of excellence, still using traditional methods and beautiful print and beautiful paper, hand-made paper and so on. Well we set all that up, and I sat on that, as an HMI I sat on that committee as well with the principal and his advisers, simply to help in whatever way I could. And so one could, you know, one could support colleges in their initiatives, even propose them. I mean for example, to take it, to give you another example, quite a distance from that sort of work, when I was a specialist in furniture, and general inspector for the furniture college, which is sort of odd in itself because normally one was separated from places that one had been associated with before as a matter of policy, but I wasn't for some reason, I stayed involved with the London colleges and with my own college, I discovered in going around the country that, although we had organ building companies in Britain, we had no course to teach people how to construct, maintain and so on, pipe organs, of which there are thousands in the country of course, and we had manufacturers in the country producing them, but all the people who were specialists were being trained in Germany; there was nowhere in Britain where there was a pipe organ course. Now I was able to encourage the College of Furniture to set up a pipe organ course, because they had a department of musical instrument technology there, and they made musical instruments and repaired musical instruments, and it seemed a logical extension of that that they should have a course in pipe organ building. So we set up a course there. So that was, you know, that was another little initiative. And that was encouraged by HMI, I mean that came from us because we saw a need and suggested they do something about meeting it. I mean I didn't set the course up, I merely helped them to put it together, and quite... I discovered for example that there were very few courses in the country that dealt with the craft side of furniture, the business of producing beautiful furniture by hand, so I was able to encourage one or two courses around the country, one at Brighton Polytechnic for example, to actually develop in that direction. And that was another aspect of the whole business of approving courses in art, that one approved courses quite often that opened up, that explored new avenues. If a course, I mean if you take something like graphic design, well graphic design is graphic design, but if you take a college like Camberwell, Camberwell's great strength was in the quality of its teaching of drawing, drawing was excellent there, that was an area of excellence. Well their graphic design was quite distinct therefore from a place like the Central School which was an excellent graphics course but had a different orientation, to a large degree embodying their

great interest in typography, because they have a large reference library, historical reference library of typography. So their course was different, so you could encourage the same course, graphic design, but with a totally different approach to the subject. And I mean that was the strength of the individual colleges, and one could encourage that. You saw the need for something different, you could actually propose it and encourage it. Now, our job then in the colleges was really to inspect the quality of the work, do all we could to promote excellence, encourage developments, and work with all the organisations that made the system work effectively; whether it worked effectively or not is another matter. The system is now totally different, the colleges have been taken away from the local authorities, and they're run as higher education corporations. The Inspectorate allowed one to, because one was operating from home you could more or less plan your own time and plan your own activities. I mean you were, you had to fill in a daily diary to say what you had been doing and submit that to the centre, and one did that, I mean so many days of office work and so many visits and so on, but I mean we sat on all the examination committees, you would sit on the, I sat on the specialist committees of the City & Guilds, I sat on the education committee of the Chartered Society of the SIAD, I sat on all kinds of bodies, the Regional Advisory Councils, I sat with them to discuss the courses and so on that were going to be set up or not set up, I mean, to approve them or not as the case may be. So one had a lot of committee work to do. And all that was part of this rather complex planning process. But you were fairly free to organise your time, with the exception of course of planned meetings which you had to attend, and because you were free to plan your time you could take all kinds of personal initiatives. If you decided that you wanted to run a conference on something, you could do it, you could plan it, plan it probably, I used to plan mine with the London Regional Advisory Council because I had a young man there who was marvellously helpful, and we found it a very effective way of running national conferences. But there were lots of other things you could do. For example, after I'd been in the Inspectorate for a year or two we found ourselves at the time that the Barbican Centre was coming on the scene, and one of the, I can't really say who first proposed it or how it came about, but I was very involved in it anyway, and we proposed that we have a national exhibition of the best work being done in the colleges of art all over the country, all over England, and I went along to the Barbican, which wasn't then open, and secured the use of the Barbican galleries to stage an exhibition which became known as 'Young Blood'. And it was the first national student exhibition, and probably the only one of its kind I think that's ever been done, I don't know if it's happened since, but I was very much involved in that. And I negotiated the use of the Barbican Centre, and helped to plan the selection of the work from the different colleges, and get it together. So I mean that was something else. Later on I was able to get involved in the international student exhibitions,

'Germinations', which were run from Europe; France, Germany, Italy, Spain, a number of other countries, put together an international student exhibition which toured all the countries, and I got involved in that. And in fact, after I had, I think it must be after I had left the Inspectorate, I was able to persuade the then Minister of Education to give us £30,000 to stage an English exhibition which I organised with Leonard Stoppani who was the Principal of West Surrey College of Art and Design, and hung it at the Royal College of Art, and I not only helped to organise that but I actually did the hanging of it, so that we, you know, again were involved with getting students' work around the place. So, and I very much enjoyed that side of things. What else did I do as an inspector? Of course full inspections were a major part of our job. One of the things that we were required to do from time to time was to set up, to propose that we take a serious look at an individual college; there would usually be a reason for doing it, either we thought it was excellent, or we thought it was perhaps in some part failing and needed some help and advice and guidance, or perhaps that the local authority wanted to develop the institution in some way, and so we'd have a look at it. And that meant really putting together a team of specialists and bringing them all in to the college and perhaps spending ten days there, a week or ten days, depending on the size of the place, and looking at everything, everything from, every subject that was taught. We would probably try and meet every teacher and observe every teacher at work; we'd talk to the students; we'd look at catering; we'd look at the resources and facilities; we'd look at probably student hotels; we'd look at everything really. And then we would write a full inspection report on that institution. And I conducted a number of these exercises as the reporting inspector, including Camberwell, Great Yarmouth, all over the country we did these. And sometimes of course we'd just look at an area of work, occasionally you'd look at an area of work rather than the whole college, but usually it was a full inspection. So that was another. And there of course we were reporting to the Secretary of State, we wrote the report for the Secretary of State, and then these were, once written they would be sent to the local authority and to the college, and the recommendations made in those were expected to be acted upon, if there were recommendations, and there always were of course really. But that was a very interesting, that was a very interesting function of the Inspectorate I think; it meant that you took an in-depth look at a college, and in that context you might have to criticise the local authority as well as the college. On the other hand you could be, and one often was, very complimentary about the work that one had seen. But again, I mean it was the business of making an objective assessment of everything you saw.

Did you have any formal mechanism for cross-reading different levels of institution?

Sorry, I don't quite know what you mean.

Well, as individuals you were going into these different establishments.

Yes.

And you networked, but presumably that was a fairly informal form of communication. Did you have any formal mechanisms for evaluating different aspects of the colleges?

Well, yes, I mean, yes I suppose, yes. We met as a team of inspectors in the region, where we would talk about full inspection reports, and all the things that had happened in the region over a period of time, and in that sense I guess there was an overall view of what was going on, taken, if that's what you mean is it?

Mm.

Yes. Yes, there was. A team of inspectors who went into a college would be drawn from the specialists all over the country. When the report had been published and you had your regional HMI meetings with the Regional Staff Inspector, then a report of that kind would become part of the discussions there. But we also, when you had conducted a full inspection of a college, you...there was a procedure where you never said anything to anyone in authority until you had said it to the people concerned below, that you made absolutely sure that everyone knew all the way to the top what was actually going on. When you had completed your report, that report would go to the local authority and to the governors, and there would be a series of meetings. I mean for example, I can think of occasions when I went along to meet the whole staff of a college, and talk about what we had said in the report, so that one had to write rather carefully because you had to justify everything you said. And one needed... And I do remember one or two hairy situations where one or two of our colleagues might be more forthright than perhaps they might be, more energetic in their comments than perhaps was appropriate, and where you would have to defend that situation, or agree that perhaps we had been over-critical, if it was a criticism, but you know... So you'd meet the staff of the college. You'd also meet representatives of the local authority; you'd certainly discuss the report with the principal of the college, probably in great detail over quite a long period of time. And in your general visits to an institution the principal of the college would probably want to say to you, 'By the way, you know, in the report you

suggested that we do certain things. Well you might be interested to know that we have in fact done those.'

End of F5900 Side B

F5901 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Bernard Gay on the 11th of September 1997. Tape 5 Side A.]

There were a lot of other aspects to HMI's work which I haven't touched upon yet. I realise I'm being a bit rambling about it, but it's a very sort of rambling discursive sort of job really. For example, it may not be known that no college in the days when I was in the Inspectorate could buy an item of major equipment without referring it to Her Majesty's Inspectorate first. Anything above £3,000 we had to agree to. And there are reasons for that really. It isn't unknown for colleges to buy incredibly expensive items of equipment simply for the prestige of having them. And sometimes, and I can remember a particular instance of a very expensive piece of equipment being installed in a college which required special rooms, special lighting, specially made, sealed electrical circuitry so there were no sparks and that sort of thing.

What was it?

Well it was a thing called, now what was it called? It was actually for spraying furniture on a conveyor belt, and this huge item of equipment was installed costing 30, 40, 50, £60,000 maybe, by the time you looked at what had been done to the architecture, as well as the equipment itself. And it only really demonstrated a simply process of putting a piece of wood in at one end and taking it out and the other end sprayed. Now, if you really think about it, it's absurd to spend that kind of money on that kind of equipment which could be perfectly well demonstrated in any factory of any size anywhere in the country, but nonetheless for the prestige of having it, this was installed, and seldom if ever used. And so HMI's job was to look at situations like that and to prevent them from happening. So we were responsible... I mean I'm not sure that it was perhaps the right role for us to have, but nonetheless we had it and I think it did have its uses, I mean it was a sensible thing to do from time to time. As well as equipment of course we were to some degree responsible for buildings as well. I mean there are HMI who will actually tell you they built colleges, and I could almost say it myself because, for example I was called in to visit St. Martin's School of Art in the Charing Cross Road, and one of the things which was evident from visiting was that the building was profoundly overcrowded, they were desperately short of accommodation. Now, the principal and I talked about this, and it came to the business of how we might proceed to do something about it, and I was able to propose that we call in the Architects and Building branch specialists from the DES, who have to sanction all new buildings anyway, to actually have a

look at the situation and agree that they were or they were not overcrowded and that something serious ought to be done about it. Now, because I was able to go to A & B Branch and brief them, and visit with them, and discuss the thing, we were actually able to find another building in Covent Garden which the college now occupies; in other words we actually got the building for them, we built another bit to their college. And I had the same situation with Middlesex Polytechnic, Hornsey, and other places. You could help, you could enable things to happen, you could encourage things to happen, you could enable things to happen, you could use the system to make things occur. So that was another side of our work. There were a number of major tasks that I undertook in the Inspectorate, perhaps the most major one I undertook was to plan the setting up of the DATEC system. A committee had looked at regional diplomas and local authority diplomas for courses all over the country, a committee called the Gann committee was set up to do this, and they reported on vocational education below degree level to the Department of Education and Science, and it was then agreed that some national system might be set up. And it fell to me particularly as HMI to help set the criteria on which the diplomas would be based; to look at the work in all the colleges all over the country that was being done; and then to actually set up the first round of approval of courses. The DATEC Committee had been set up and they did the inspectorial kind of validating role, but it was my job initially to look at all the courses to see if they met the appropriate criteria to become part of the national system, and then to agree that those courses should go forward into the system and be looked at by the DATEC Committee. And the final outcome of that was that my colleague, senior colleague, Ralph Jeffery and I went to the DES and agreed, negotiated with them the setting up of the first series of grants, mandatory grants for work done below degree level. I mean until that time all courses below degree level were local authority funded as far as grants were concerned, and the great change which came about through this was that the local authority diplomas and the little regional diplomas, which were all over the country with varying standards in all of them, were, some basic criteria was set. Students had to have basic academic requirements before they could go into them, they could then go into the first two years; if they achieved in the first two years they could go on to the second two years, and when they got to the second two years they were given mandatory grants, just as degree course students had grants. So that was a great change and I mean a tremendous benefit to students really, because until then all sub-degree work had been local authority grant aided, and of course local authorities varied in whether they would offer grants or not. Some local authorities were more generous than others. I mean some were very ungenerous indeed. But it did mean that people operating in vocational courses had grants. And of course DATEC later became BTEC, and BTEC is now the validating body which looks at all those courses. But I mean my, one of the jobs I did which I

think I would regard as one of the more important jobs was to set up that whole system in the first instance for the whole country. Another, I mean... The other way in which one influenced affairs is that for example the British School at Rome, which as you know is a post-graduate school for scholars from this country who were chosen to go to Rome to study painting, printmaking, sculpture, archaeology and music. Well, the British School at Rome was funded by the Commissioners of the 1851 Exhibition, they're the body which administer the funds which remain from that exhibition, and they have offices in Kensington Gore. Well, they got in touch with me one day saying that, asking me if I could meet them. And I went along to see them and it transpired that at a meeting of the 1851 Commissioners the Duke of Edinburgh, who was President, had pointed out that in his opinion the Commissioners were misusing their funds by supporting the Rome Scholars in art, that the money should be being used for things which were more concerned with industry. And it meant literally that the Rome Scholarships would die, and it had to be agreed that, he was right. Well, when I was told this story, coincided with an occasion when I visited the Buckinghamshire Institute of Higher Education, and the then Permanent Secretary at the DES was awarding the prizes. And I was invited to join him with the Principal of the college for lunch, and in the course of talking I mentioned the Rome Scholarships to him, the fact they were going to be done away with. And I explained the situation and said how sorry I was to hear that that was going to happen and I wondered if there was anything we might be able to do about it. And it happened that one of the other people with us at lunch was a local industrialist who said, 'And a bloody good thing too,' he said, 'there's far too much money spent on these bloody artists.' And the Permanent Secretary said to me, 'Well look Bernard, you will be pleased I am sure to hear that that's a view with which I don't agree. Could you write me a little paper about what has happened, and then we'll see what can be done.' And, I did that, and sent him the paper, and a week or two later I had a note from his secretary inviting me to meet him at his office with my senior colleague Ralph Jeffery. And we went along and he said, 'Well look, I've looked at your paper and we've had a look at the situation and you're quite right, there will be no scholarships for Rome Scholars unless we do something about it. And, perhaps I should tell you that Permanent Secretaries do have funds of their own, and so for this year I will see to it that the Rome Scholarships are funded, and we will then transfer the Rome Scholarships from the, the funding of them from the 1851 Commissioners to the British Academy, so that in future they will be funded from the Academy, and we will provide a budget for that purpose.' Now I mean, that was a perfect example of really in a way how the Inspectorate could work effectively. I mean, when I mentioned the Rome Scholarships to the Permanent Secretary, I did it consciously, hoping for some kind of response or some kind of advice, and you know, the DES was very responsive, I

mean we got our advice and we were able to save the Rome Scholarships; they would be dead had the Permanent Secretary not done something about it, and had I not had that very fortuitous conversation with him. And so you know, the Inspectorate could do lots of things, that being an example.

And it sounds like a very subtle form of power.

Well I don't think we had any power. I mean the Inspectorate really didn't have. The Inspectorate couldn't tell anybody to do anything.

Oh well I meant in the most useful sense of the word, I meant sort of influential.

Influence I think. I think we could influence events. I mean the nice thing about the Inspectorate in a way was that the way it was set up made it possible for you to influence events. A lot of things happened in my time in the Inspectorate which might not have happened if the Inspectorate hadn't been there, and hadn't worked in the way it did. I mean you know, we... And I think, I mean it depended a lot on individual inspectors, I mean, some of us were more energetic than others. I mean I was a fairly energetic, hardworking guy, you know, I was quite prepared to rush around the country and try and do things, partly, I mean largely because I really enjoyed it, exactly the same with my teaching, I mean I loved my teaching time, and I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the Inspectorate, I mean I had ten marvellous years there really, doing things, making a lot of friends. I mean, oddly enough I met only yesterday by accident I met the principal of a college in the street, Kilburn Polytechnic, I didn't even recognise him, but he recognised me and chatted to me and talked to me about other people that we both knew, and you know, that was simply because I'd been in the Inspectorate really, and he remembered that, you know, one had been helpful a bit, you know. And I liked the business of being able to be helpful and constructive and to get things done, I mean I just enjoyed that side of it all, I loved all that really. There were a lot of other stories I could tell you about the Inspectorate but I've probably said enough about it. I probably haven't given a very good picture of it, but I think the thing that I would most want to say about the Inspectorate was that certainly in the team of people that I worked with in the visual arts, that, we all saw our job as enabling our system to work effectively and well. Now we might not have done it very well, I mean the whole system has changed, the Inspectorate has gone, the colleges are no longer tied to the local authorities, they're now all higher education corporations. Whereas when I first went into the Inspectorate there was no degree system in operation, by the time I left all the courses were degrees and post-graduate courses.

I mean the whole system has changed totally, and they're now of course looked at by the further education or higher education funding councils and they're all involved in self-assessment, and then there are bodies which are set up to look after the quality control of the courses that are being offered. It's a totally different system, and although I'm still involved in it I mean, some of it is a mystery to me, really.

Now why has that change come about?

Well that was Government policy. Margaret Thatcher did away with the, took the colleges out of the hands of the local authorities. They felt the system was not working properly, they felt that it was absorbing too much money, that it wasn't cost-effective, and they've been set up as independent bodies with carefully controlled funding, and they are required to run effectively as businesses. It's all part of the new ethos, the new political ethos.

Which you clearly don't approve of by the sound of it.

Well, I'm not sure really. I mean in a way that brings me on to the London Institute a bit I suppose. Because I was invited by Kenneth Baker, who was Secretary of State at that time, to chair the Formation Committee of the London Institute, which is the committee that actually set it up. There had been a formation committee set up by the ILEA before that with Neil Fletcher, talking about and trying to plan the future of the colleges of art in London.

Before you go any further, could you just explain to the tape what the London Institute is?

Yes. Well the London Institute is a higher education corporation which incorporates Camberwell College of Art, Chelsea College of Art, the Central School of Art and Design, St. Martin's School of Art and Design, the London College of Printing, the London College of Fashion, and the College for the Distributive Trades. Now, those, some of those colleges have now been amalgamated, Central and St. Martin's is now one institution, and the College of Printing and the Distributive Trades College are now the London College of Printing and Distributive Trades; they've all been put together. There would have been the London College of Furniture, but they opted to go into a polytechnic and they've more or less disappeared without trace, which is a great pity, because they would have been protected and looked after if they'd come into the institution. We were going to have a drama school but that didn't come about, they decided they wanted to be independent, and I think we are going to have a music institution coming into the Institute now. The idea was that it would be, I

mean the idea, once the thing had been set up, was that it would be an all-embracing arts institution and not too narrowly based. But the London Institute incorporates all those colleges as a higher education corporation with a central management team managing the whole thing as one institution, called the London Institute. It's huge, I mean, twenty-odd thousand students; I think at one time nearly two thousand staff, rather less now; it's leaner and tougher as a body, I think something like fifteen or sixteen hundred academic staff; and then of course all the technicians and administrators and so on. A budget of what, fifty, sixty millions a year. A property portfolio of well over a hundred millions.

So how were the colleges selected, who selected the initial group that were asked to become part of it, or were they asked?

Well they were a group of specialist colleges, they were all the art and design colleges, you know, fashion, printing, they all ran courses in art and design.

So not fine art?

No no, it's a broad spectrum of courses. But they were all the visual arts courses really, and the design courses. They're all the visual arts and the visual, and the design courses, design and technology. So they were cohesively... I mean they were a logical organisation of courses which, yes, they were very...well it was a logical group of courses really. I mean there was a certain amount of rationalisation took place once it had all happened, because there were duplications of courses which were regarded by the funding councils as not the best way to organise things. I mean, initially the institution was pushed around a bit to rationalise its provision more effectively than previously. But I'm ahead of myself a bit, because the London Institute was set up about what, eleven years ago I guess it started, but it must have been 1985/86. It was in the Eighties that we our ILEA Formation Committee talking about the way the art schools would in future be organised. I think it was recognised that the political climate was changing, that the ILEA was going to be done away with, that there was a strong likelihood that one of the art schools would disappear altogether, that there would have to be a large degree of rationalisation, and when the then Government under Margaret Thatcher took the colleges away from the local authorities, she set up the various councils to fund them and look after them, and set up the higher education corporations. And each one is a business in its own right, each of the polytechnics. I mean huge changes have taken place in the system. I mean, for example at that time there was a separate funding council for the universities and for the colleges, and now of course there's only one funding

council. So the binary divide in education disappeared, and that was a good thing, I think. And I'm...in the way the London Institute has run itself, I am a supporter of what has happened I think. When I looked at colleges as an HMI, I was conscious I think from time to time that there were an awful lot of people in those colleges who weren't really making much of a contribution to the overall teaching pattern for example. I mean I saw some disgraceful evidences of non-teaching, of waste of money, of people who need not be there because they weren't making a real contribution. And I think in the sense that the system is tougher now than it was, and that people are expected to seriously contribute, I think the higher education corporations have probably done quite a good job.

I mean one thing I know from another interview I've done is that, the person that I was talking to did suggest that on occasion he employed people, artists, practising artists as teachers, even though he knew that they may not necessarily be the most brilliant teachers, but as a way of allowing them to continue to exist as an artist, which in this sort of business ethos presumably would be a much less tenable situation.

Yes it would, yes.

And you know, the risk there would be, if you were to read it logically, is that you might well lose some very important artists or designers as a result.

Well, if that person really meant exactly what you said, then I have to say I profoundly disagree with the approach. I never employed anybody as a member of my academic staff if I didn't think they could make a serious contribution, and if there wasn't really a place for them to teach and to be effective. I mean I wouldn't have taken somebody on for their own, you know, I wouldn't have... I mean the idea of paying somebody to support them if they weren't making a real contribution to the institution is simply to my mind inconceivable.

But in a funny...yes, I...

I mean I don't...I think the part-time teacher who comes in, or part-time...the artist who comes in to a college as a part-time teacher, if they're going to make a contribution to the teaching process, and if there's a contribution for them to make, I think that's fine, I think that's absolutely right. I think the more good artists exercise an influence in colleges and who bring their skills and knowledge to bear on the teaching, the better, I mean the more of those sorts of people that come in the better; but the idea of bringing somebody in for their benefit and

not the students' benefit is not an approach that I would ever have had. If I didn't feel that the artist could make a contribution to the student body I wouldn't have them there.

That sort of raises that very subtle divide between, you know, inspiring almost through their existence if you see what I mean, as a kind of icon of an artistic moment, and active teaching.

That's fine, yes, I would bring them in to talk, to lecture, to give a crit, to...you know, and if there was a place for them to teach on a teaching programme, I would want them, welcome them, really want them, you know. I think that's terribly important. But the idea of bringing somebody in for their own support is not one I could go along with. The whole point about, I mean, the whole point about... Of course it would be lovely in an ideal world I suppose to have everybody who could exercise an influence by simply being there, it would be great to do it, but the world isn't like that. You know, the taxpayer has to pay for these privileges really, the privileges which we are getting, you know. No I think academic staff have to be willing to play a real, to have a real teaching role in the system.

I just wanted to ask you before we go much further, the school that you thought in the original kind of rationalisation that might disappear, which art school would that have been?

Oh well it was never said, but there was, it was thought one of them would have to go.

Oh right.

Yes.

You can't speculate?

No I can't, no I wouldn't want to.

Just out of curiosity.

I wouldn't want to anyway. No I can't imagine, I can't imagine. I mean I, you know, I think the colleges, all the art schools in London are, you know, are colleges of considerable distinction, and I would have been deeply saddened if one went, frankly.

End of 5901 Side A

F5901 Side B

[Continuing the tape with Bernard Gay on the 11th of September. Tape 5 Side B.]

Yes, it's interesting reflecting on my role in the London Institute, because I can't recall, I mean it must have to do with my age that I can't recall exactly how or why things happened. I mean for example, as a member of that Formation Committee set up by the ILEA to look at the colleges of art, and as a former HMI, I found myself involved in all kinds of things, for example the ILEA called me in to conduct a full inspection after I'd left the Inspectorate of the London College of Printing, which I did with a small team of people drawn from their own London Inspectorate, and my job was to write the report and have a look at the full-time courses in design in that college, and were very critical of some of those I have to tell you, I mean profoundly critical, so critical they never published the report. I mean there were things going on there which were... I mean, principally of course the College of Printing, as you can probably understand, was profoundly dominated by the print unions, I mean there were hoards of technicians who seemed to have little to do, and I remember in the course of conducting that exercise going into a huge room filled with dead printing presses, nothing happening, with chaps in white coats going around dusting them, and the rooms totally empty, you see. And then finding a group of full-time DATEC students sitting in a little room huddled together trying to cut lino-cuts on the arms of chairs. This vast acres of space unoccupied, no one doing anything in it. And when I asked why it was so, it transpired that all these young full-time students weren't allowed to go into any of these rooms where all this machinery was, although there was plenty of space for people to sit down and do things, I mean there were teaching spaces as well, that they weren't allowed in there, they had to sit in this little room working rather in appalling circumstances, and I may say in their so-called drawing offices and so on, profoundly under-equipped, ill-equipped with the kinds of things they needed to pursue their course, and it was the technicians, print union technicians, who made it impossible for them to use the resources that were in the college. And I made note of all this of course in my report and said how appalling I thought it was. And I was appalled that nobody seemed able to do anything about it. Well eventually of course we lost a lot of those technicians, but it took a very long time, and the London Institute had been in operation for some years before they could be got rid of. And, it's hard for people to realise how much power these chaps had to really control... And I remember saying to some of them, 'You don't seem to realise that you're going to be out of business in a year or two, because technology is changing so quickly, and that these guys are your future, and if you don't look after them you will have nowhere to go.' I remember having exactly that conversation with

them in the room when I saw all this going on. Anyway, there were things like that in the report and not written in that way but the general gist of that would have been in the report, I think which meant they never published it. They made use of the report, and I think improved the situation. I mean you know, having said that, I mean don't...I mean I do think the management of the place was not good and it was a very hard institution to manage anyway, but having said that, I mean don't think that I think that everything that was going on there was bad, it wasn't, there was a lot of work going on, and there were some exceptionally good people teaching there, so it wasn't all, it wasn't by any means all bad, but there were things of that kind going on. I'm not entirely sure why I got on to that really at this stage. I was talking about when I left the Inspectorate wasn't I really. Oh the London Institute and leaving the Inspectorate. Yes, I was talking about the ILEA Formation Committee and that, I can't really recall the procedures which led me to be so involved, but for example I was involved in the appointment of the first Rector of the London Institute, I was on the appointments committee. It was the old ILEA appointments committee set-up where you had twenty-odd people sitting around a table to appoint a man. I'm ashamed to say that I voted against the appointment of the first Rector; entirely my own lack of understanding and foresight. There was a chap called John McKenzie who became the first Rector who proved to be an excellent Rector I have to say, I think he saved the institution and made the London Institute into a very effective group of colleges under his management. I was all for a man called David Maronei, who was the...when we conducted the interviews we saw I think five or six people, and there were two people we really couldn't make up our mind about, one was John McKenzie who became the first Rector and the other was David Maronei, David Maronei was the British Director of Olivetti, and a very able, highly intelligent art and design orientated man. He was an art man. John McKenzie came over, he was I think at that time the Director of Liverpool Polytechnic, and he came over as a very hard-nosed business specialist. It's much to my shame that I didn't recognise at the time that that was just the sort of man that the Institute needed to effectively take it through its first very difficult phase, and so I voted against him. Anyway he was appointed Rector, and thank God he was really, and in fact he and I are now very good friends, and it was he who was I guess who got me to be the Chairman of the Formation Committee when the Institute was set up, and of course it was then that we had to do a lot of very serious work, we had to appoint our central management team, we had to appoint a lot of senior staff, I was involved in that, and we had to plan the way the Institute would in future be run.

I mean how did you select that management team, what sources did you draw on?

Well we had...well needs must when the Devil drives, I mean, say first of all, as the needs arose we looked for the people we needed. And we had of course very effective people in the Institute already, and we had to appoint an Institute Secretary, and we appointed the man who had been the Registrar at Camberwell College, really because he was without question the most able administrator of that kind in the system at that time. We had to appoint, we had to restructure the Institute in that, I think when we first started there was something like, I don't know, 150 heads of departments or something, and we reorganised the Institute so that it had fourteen deans and then, deans are heads of subject areas really, and then a number of course leaders, so we had a different kind of structure, and heads of colleges. Principals were renamed Heads of College, and then we had Heads of College, Deans, and Course Leaders, Section Leaders and so on. So we restructured the whole institution. And we had the whole business of, if we were an institution, how did you preserve the integrity of the individual colleges and the things that each of those colleges did best, while at the same time creating an academic network where students could in some way or another make use of the best of resources that the Institute provided in its individual colleges, and how did you rationalise the provisions so there wasn't a lot of duplicated provision? I mean there were a lot of complicated structural changes that were necessary. They haven't all yet been made, I mean I think the academic networking integration of courses hasn't altogether succeeded as we in our vision hoped it might at the time.

How much influence did the Heads of College have in the strategic changes that took place?

Oh well they were on the central management team, each head of college was on the central management team. There was a central management team, there was also an academic board, and then each of the colleges had its own academic board as well, or academic committee, and there was a structural committee set up which had an input into everything through to the central management team. Again you know, how effective it all was it's hard to say, but it seemed to work, and it was a very tricky time, because you can imagine how the prima-donna-ish arts academics in the London Institute reacted to a hard-nosed businessman coming in to run them. It wasn't a very pretty scene in the early days, and it's greatly to John McKenzie's credit that by the time he retired a year or so ago - he's now their overseas consultant by the way, because we do a huge amount of business overseas - by the time he retired last year or the year before, yes, no last year, he was very highly regarded, I mean I think the majority of people would realise that he was the right man doing the right job at the right time. I mean for example we inherited considerable debts. I mean one of the things that

you took over, if you became a higher education corporation you didn't only take over the resources, you took over all the debts as well, and we had millions of pounds of debt.

So does that mean you took on local authority debt in effect?

Yes.

Yes, gosh.

Yes. I mean millions, millions of pounds, many millions of pounds. And of course there was, one of the great difficulties was that you could never get your hands on the information you needed from the authority about how it was all run and done in the old days, it wasn't possible to get your hands on it. You just got the assets and the debts. And one of the great problems in the early days was that we were, and I remember as a member of the Court of Governors raising the issue over and over again, was that we were paying off, you know, half a million a year in interest charges to cover our debts, and this seemed to me to be an appalling waste of public money.

There was no way the Government could simply cancel them?

Well they couldn't cancel them but they could have funded them, they could have funded the debts, removed the debts and thereby remove the need to pay huge interest charges. I mean I think the Government were...I mean you know, I'm not an expert but I mean we must have paid the debt twice you see, and there was no need for that. I mean, you know, it's all public money, and I don't really see that it matters which hand it comes from, it's public money, it's all the same, it comes out of the same till.

I think part of Thatcher's brief was that you had to be totally accountable always, and I suppose in that sense...

But it seemed to me so unutterably stupid that we not only paid the debt, but that we had to pay all the interest charges that we carried because of the debt, and it took years to work that debt out of the system.

I mean what was John McKenzie's personal managerial style?

Well, he was obviously a very able administrator and manager, and he obviously had a very good knowledge of the financial issues. As a matter of fact with the new Rector we've appointed a financial director who wasn't there when John was there; John, he and the Pro-Rector and the management team between them seemed to deal with all that and deal with it very effectively. And of course they had all the systems to set up, you know, pensions and, you know, you can imagine, you know, it's a sort of 60 or 70 million pound business, you know, annual turnover, so it's a big business with a lot of people, but John managed that very well. He was a very tough...I mean people did find him pretty tough and a slightly wild man really, but I grew to admire and like him immensely over the years. I mean he could flare up and lose his temper and get exceedingly angry, but I found that, I mean I had a lot to do with him really, and particularly on appointments committees and things of that kind, appointing deans and senior staff, heads of colleges, I sat on a lot of those panels with him, and often found myself profoundly disagreeing with him, and proposing that because we disagreed, that we re-examine the situation and maybe invite perhaps two people that we were arguing about, maybe, you know, some of us thought that one person would be the right person to have, and John and one or two other people thought that somebody else would be the right person to have, which is fair enough in that sort of situation. But what I found with John McKenzie was that, he was always willing to re-examine a situation, and to change his mind, and to agree in the end that he was wrong and that you were right. And so though he was a very tough, and I think probably fairly ruthless man, I found him to be in the end an extraordinarily able manager, and that in fact he was far more soft-centred than anybody ever believed he was, and I think a lot of his huff and puff was actually bluff. I mean there was a great deal of, you know, flying off the handle, I mean he could be, he could behave appallingly to people, but you know, it was all right, in the end people grew to like the man for what he was, and he was an able administrator. He actually, by the time he left I mean the debts were paid off, the institution had a balance, a healthy balance, it was running itself effectively, the colleges had settled down, they were extremely well managed, governance was very good. That was another thing that John McKenzie did, he was very good I think in...I mean I've served on a number of governing bodies, at Norwich School of Art, Colchester Institute, and a number of other institutions of that kind, and I mean I was a governor of Camberwell for years and years, and I've been a governor on a number of schools, I mean over the last thirty years I can't tell you how many schools and colleges I have actually worked with. The best governing body without any doubt at all that I've ever worked with is the one of the London Institute, and I put a lot of that down to John McKenzie. The system of course of governing, the governing body there is that, there are a group of governors who are independent governors, whose appointment had to be approved by the Secretary of State, so to a degree

you could say it was all political appointments, though I mean they appointed me and I am not of their political persuasion at all, and I don't think it was that kind of political appointment, but they were approved by the Secretary of State. There were thirteen members of the Court who were independently appointed. Then there was a group of co-opted governors, and then there were the sort of academic governors, the members of the college staff and the students had representatives on the Court. The governing body then, with John McKenzie, appointed a number of standing committees, property personnel, and there was an audit committee and so on, because they are handling big sums of money, you need that kind of...and their job was to have an overview of all this you see. I think one of the things that John McKenzie did extraordinarily well, because on all the governing bodies I served, on many of them I often felt that we didn't have a real role, you hardly knew why you were there, except to rubber-stamp decisions that had already been taken, and to actually identify your role was extraordinarily difficult. John McKenzie had the wit and the intelligence to use his governors really effectively, and make them feel that they had a role. I mean he did consult them, I mean I can't tell you how often my phone would ring at 8 in the morning and it would be John McKenzie on the phone saying, 'Look, I just wanted to sound you out on this or that or the other, I just wanted your view before we went ahead with it. How do you feel about this happening, or that happening?' I mean he actually made his governors feel that they had a real role to play, and the consequence of that is that the Court of Governors at the Institute - I'm just leaving them now, I've finished my final term of office, in line with Lord whatever-his-name-is, who has written the papers on, you know, quangos and all that, Lord...who is it? I ought to know, I'll remember in a minute. You know, he's saying that, although he gave the education quangos a pretty good clean bill of health, he felt that some of us were a bit too old for the job, and as I'm 76 I guess I thought I ought to be one of those that ought to give up, so I've given up this year. But anyway, what John McKenzie was able to do was to make the Court feel, the members of the Court feel that they had a real function. He consulted them, he took their advice, he would argue with them, but he was always willing to respond, and consequently you had a Court of Governors, I mean I think the standing committee chairmen have been absolutely marvellous. They devote a huge amount of time and energy, and they work better and more effectively than any Court of Governors that I've ever met, and I put that all down to John McKenzie and the fact that he knew how to make use of his governors and gave them the sense that they actually were making a real contribution to the institution. And consequently he got their commitment, I mean they put in a lot of time, a lot of energy, you know, he would bring them in to meetings, if people were visiting he'd bring individual governors in to meet people and to talk to them; I mean I've spent, when I was really, before Kate died and I was really active on the Court, I mean I

spent, I was there every week, sometimes twice a week, you know, and very happy to do it. And of course you do realise that governors aren't paid, I mean no governors are ever paid, well unlike a lot of other quangos, governors of institutions don't get paid, it's purely voluntary, and I mean it was easy for me because I had more or less retired, although I was still working, teaching at the Royal College and so on, I had retired from the Inspectorate, so I had spare time. But a lot of the people, you know, we have, on that Court we have barristers, property developers, designers, not enough practitioners incidentally, I'd like to see or two. I mean I represented the fine art fraternity and Brian Tattersfield, who was an excellent international designer of considerable international fame and stature, represented design, and there was, there were people who were representing fashion, buyers in the fashion world and people like that. But I mean the people on that Court were all highly professional people, they ran businesses or they...we had the vice-chancellor of another university, we had...I mean there were excellent people, I mean men of real stature for the most part, men and, I beg your pardon, men and women of real stature, because we had some excellent women on that Court as well. And they were willing to give a huge amount of time. And then, and John devised a system for having teams of governors attached to the colleges, just three or four of us would be attached to an individual college, and we worked out a policy of how we could keep the centre informed of what was going on in the individual colleges, and he set up a little committee, in fact I was its chairman for a while, of the lead governors so that we could actually have a carefully formulated policy and an understanding that our job was not an executive one but an advisory one, that you know, that people understood the nature of the role they were performing. He was very good at all that I think. As I say, I grew to admire him greatly. Can we leave it there for a minute, I need to go out there.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

Just before we break I wanted to ask you, your work on the Formation Committee and the other sort of members, was that a paid role, or...?

Oh no, no. No, none of those jobs in education are ever paid.

So, in the kind of choice process, presumably they have to pick people that they think are going to be prepared to take that sort of responsibility. I mean do they get a lot of people saying, 'No I can't possibly take on that much'?

Oh I'm sure they do, yes. Actually, you know, raising that question is for me a very, is interesting, because, I mean I suppose for the last...I mean alongside my paid professional work I've always done, and without really thinking about it, a huge volume of voluntary work. I mean I don't know whether I mentioned for example that setting up the Arts Centre in Camden and designing the exhibitions and all that, I mean, I chose that none of that should ever be paid. I did it for the pleasure of doing it really, it never occurred to me that it should be paid. And the same with governing bodies, I mean I suppose I must have been on governing bodies for the last thirty or forty years, and lots of other committees in the academic world; none of them are paid. The British School at Rome wasn't paid; I mean I was on their central committee and their executive for a number of years, well of course none of that is paid. I mean I went out to Rome on two or three occasions to help plan things and to have a look at the school and so on, and one never even expected it to be paid, you know, it never occurred to me. And I've always enjoyed doing it. I mean I think I like...I think one is so flattered to be asked, that you just do it.

So the sense of public duty is very important to you?

Oh yes, yes. Although I'm not really sure that I ever consciously at the time thought about it in that way. In retrospect I realise it was very important to me. I mean I think the truth is that my own career in art design gave me so much that I might never have expected to have, that I was very happy to put something back into it. I mean the work I did with the AIA was unpaid of course, all those kind of committees and, selection committees, and, you know, all, like the Young Contemporaries, I mean those, all those sort of things are all unpaid, you just do them because they're there, and it's all part of the business, you know, you're involved in the world of the arts and you get on with it and make the contribution that you best can. And I was always one of those people who could never say no anyway, so if somebody said, would you do something, I did it. And the British School at Rome and all those other things all come into that general category.

We'll stop there.

Yes.

End of F5901 Side B

F5902 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Bernard Gay on the 11th of September 1997. Tape 6 side A.]

Yes. I find it difficult to be logical and have a sort of continuum of activities with all the things that I've talked about, and that's equally true of the London Institute I guess. Having been on the original Formation Committee and then Chairman of the Formation Committee that set it up, the time came when we established the Court, and there had to be a vote for who would chair the Court of Governors, and although I was asked by John McKenzie if I'd do it, when it really came to it the boys got together, the more politically conscious of them, and decided that they'd rather have somebody else as chairman, which was fine by me because the chairman that was eventually appointed was actually, and has been actually rather a good chairman, given a lot of time. He's a property tycoon, and probably the right sort of man. He's been a very good chairman in many ways in that he's been heavily involved. But he makes terribly public speeches unfortunately, but other than that he has been I think a very good chairman. And of course the Institute has now been in operation for eleven years and it's settled down to being a financially secure organisation with a fairly good reputation for what it does. It's had a number of things like quality assessments, and inspections of various kinds, and by and large it's come out of these very well, and parts of its work, like the fashion course at St. Martin's, are really of world stature, I mean there's nobody else who does it better probably, and we're getting a lot of really brilliantly talented designers onto the world scene, Paris and Milan and elsewhere. John McKenzie is now retired as Rector, he's become our overseas adviser, consultant and organiser, and...

I'm interested in hearing some more about that international side.

Yes, well, we of course... It's a difficult problem this one in a way. The overseas students bring a lot of money into the institution; I mean I think John McKenzie is probably bringing in ten, twelve, fourteen million pounds a year from overseas students. I actually see a danger in all this. It seems to me that you could have a situation, and I have raised this issue in the Court of Governors on more than one occasion, where you become so enamoured of the idea of bringing in money from overseas that you deprive home-based students of places in the colleges, because they are full of people from Malaysia and, you know, China and Thailand and Hong Kong and anywhere else you care to think of. But on the other hand we have to have the money, and we are able to run joint degrees with these companies where they do part of the course in their own country and part of the course over here, and we exchange staff,

and I think it runs, as with most of the things that John does, it runs very effectively. And we not only have degrees with, joint degrees with universities in places like Malaysia, but we have joint degrees with European countries now as well, Holland in particular, we have a number of things running with colleges in Europe. So you know, I think it's all a very good thing. But I do hope that they can ensure that home-based students have places available to them, and courses don't become full of overseas students to the detriment of our own people, because we do need to educate our own people as well.

And do you know if the individual colleges have found ways of monitoring the possibilities and problems of having students who perhaps may not have English as their first language for example?

Well, we...I mean the Institute of course has a system for ensuring that people have a reasonable grasp of the English language. We run orientation courses for them, language courses. Well we have our own language laboratories to ensure that people... There's very little point in having people come over if they can't take advantage of what is going on because they don't have a grasp of the language. And I think the Institute is doing a fair bit to ensure that all that works quite well. I wouldn't worry about that. I'd only worry about the business of depriving home-based students of actual places on courses, I think that's a serious problem. Now, I don't think it's happened yet but there are areas in which it might happen, particularly in the fashion areas, and I mean we are assured that, you know, that home-based students won't be deprived. Incidentally one of the things that I had rather hoped, when John McKenzie retired we were talking about the sort of gift that he ought to be given, and I proposed and it's supposed to be being looked at but I don't think anything will come of it, that we set up... John McKenzie has earned so much money from overseas for the Institute, I reckon we ought to take a million of that and set it aside in a fund to provide scholarships for home-based students who couldn't otherwise afford to go to further and higher education, and that they'd set this money aside to earn an income which would provide a number of annual scholarships for students, it would be known as the John McKenzie Scholarships. Now whether it will ever come about I don't know. It hasn't come about yet and he's already retired, and I'm very sad about that because I think it's one of the things that we could... A lot of students are dropping out of courses these days because they can no longer afford to continue, and I...

Is that at the B.A. level or the post-graduate?

Oh at every level, every level. B.A. level, at the DATEC level, every level. The grants aren't there, and if families can't afford to have their kids come along and, you know, be educated for three or four years, there are a lot of students who can't afford to come and there are others who drop out. And it is a serious problem, and I mean, I know the loan system is supposed to address it, and I actually think the loan system in the long term may be one which is workable, but right now I wish there were ways of making places available, and I rather hoped that the John McKenzie Scholarships will have done that. However, whether that will come about I don't know; it was certainly one of the things I proposed that they ought to do. And as I say, the Institute runs very well really and it's got itself out of debt, it's recruiting well for most of its courses. It depends of course a lot on the reputation of the individual colleges how well it does, and I think that's something that they'd be very anxious to ensure continues, because people don't apply to come to the London Institute really, they apply to come to Camberwell College of Art or the fashion at Central St. Martin's or fine art at Chelsea, that's why they really come, because the colleges have reputations that have been built up over a hundred years. This year is the centenary year of Camberwell College itself, so you know, there is that history, and that's why people come. Anyway, while I've been involved in the London Institute I've been involved in a lot of other things as well of course. I mean I continued with the work for some years with the Design Council, I continued to do exhibitions for the Camden Arts Centre. The last major exhibition I did was one called 'Maker Designers Today', which was an exhibition of young furniture makers, textile designers, working in the furnishing area, and that was an interesting thing. I got most of the best young makers together and we put on a cracking show really at the Arts Centre. And of course, I was involved in an enormous number of committees of various kinds. I mean underlying the education system there are lots of organisations like the Society for Education Through Art, and I found myself becoming either chairman of or secretary to a lot of these organisations, and I was the Secretary to the Association of Deans and Principals of Degree-Awarding Institutions; I became a council member of the Confederation of Art and Design Associations; a member of the council on the executive of the British School at Rome; Treasurer to the Higher Education in Art and Design Foundation; and chairman of several other committees. And that's all part of the business, I mean all that, there's a sort of structure which supports the system, and has as part of its function I guess the dissemination of knowledge about the system, and that was a useful thing to be in. But when I retired from the Inspectorate of course I was not only involved in the London Institute but I was invited by the Royal College of Art to take up a teaching role there, and I was very flattered to be asked anyway, and I found myself doing a foundation course of a sort for young men and women who already had a first degree in engineering but who all aspired to be industrial designers.

And Frank Height, Professor Frank Height at the Royal College of Art who ran the Industrial Design School there, and who I knew from lecture courses I'd done for the Design Council, had tried to get a number of people to fulfil this role and hadn't been very lucky, and he then asked me if I would take it on. And I worked there for I think six or seven years. I gave it up after six or seven years, not because I wanted to but simply because I was living so far away from London that I couldn't get there to do the job. I was living in Herefordshire. And that was a marvellous job, I loved that. What I really did there was to design a course for young engineers who wanted to be industrial designers but who had had very little experience of the visual arts and visualising how to put form and shape and colour and all those things together and who had a kind of analytical approach to the way you design things, the business of... Engineers tend to look for solutions which to a large degree are probably already predetermined, there are rules and regulations which govern the way things are done, and they tend to work for the most part inside those prescribed parameters. Designers don't work that way; they look at as many possibilities as they possibly can, many solutions to a problem as they can possibly arrive at, and eventually decide to pursue the solution which seems most appropriate. They work differently, there are no rules. There are rules in engineering, there aren't rules in design really. There are once you've decided upon the road through which you intend to go, but there aren't until you get there. And so it was a business of helping these young people not only to formulate their ideas visually and three-dimensionally, two- and three-dimensionally, but it was the business of actually getting them to explore possibilities, and eventually arrive at a solution to a particular problem. And, so I devised a course which did that, and they seemed to like it sufficiently to ask me back year after year, and eventually I had to give it up as I say because I moved too far away to do it. But I loved teaching, I loved the students, they were bright, they were all young people who had either firsts or upper seconds in engineering who had decided they wanted to be designers, and to use their engineering knowledge in another way, and they were very creative young people, very bright. Some of them, although in theory they had no visual knowledge or understanding, in fact did have of course, just because they were that kind of bright young person. And they were wonderful to work with I must say. I think I only had one student who wouldn't, who couldn't deal with the problems that we set them, and that was a Canadian girl, and she was just ineducable really, I mean she didn't want to be...she was a kind of anarchist, in the end she had to leave the course because there was nothing we could do to help her, and she didn't want to know. I mean she may be a genius I don't know, I don't think she was, but she was just bloody Bolshie really and didn't want to...she didn't want to do anything she was asked to do. I mean we never ever told people to do things, we simply asked them to investigate and explore and experiment. And we set them a series of projects. I mean my approach to

teaching these students was to set them a series of projects which dealt with particular aspects of the design process and then leave them to get on with it, and then we would have a period where we looked at all the work that was done and talked about it. One of the difficulties at the Royal College of course was that everybody had their little work stations, and I had to persuade the college to give me spaces where students could work as a group, and the old business of group dynamics became so important where people work together as a group, could talk to each other, see what they were each doing, and learn from each other as well as from anything that might be said by other people, by tutors and so on. And it was curious to me that, to go into the Industrial Design School and find that, you know, we had to actually engineer spaces where kids could actually - well they weren't kids - where these young people could actually work as a group and to have ideas sort of come from each other. But that's the way it was. Anyway as I say, it was a very creative and rewarding experience to teach there, partially because the students were so good. The period I was there of course was the period when Jocelyn Stevens was there, who was to say the least controversial as a Rector of the Royal College of Art. But of course what can never be taken away from Jocelyn Stevens is that he built the new parts of the Royal College, it's wonderful galleries they now have. I liked the man, I thought he was...he was great. He was extraordinarily good to me. At that time I was involved in a number of committees including CHEAD, the Conference of Heads of Art and Design Institutions, and the Royal College had always stood aloof from organisations of this kind. Jocelyn Stevens decided that he would want to be part of it, and he...you always knew if he was really interested in something because he used to, for anything he was really interested in he created a notebook which he kept on the shelf with his own notes of meetings and so on, and if he wasn't interested there was no notebook. If he was interested there was. And so when CHEAD went there he actually, in fact when he visited CHEAD he started a notebook, which meant that he was really interested in what was going on. And, he was enormously helpful. It was he who... Well first of all he became interested in CHEAD and he invited those of us who were trying to run CHEAD, myself as Secretary, the Chairman, the members of the executive, to a meeting at the Royal College of Art, to a dinner, he organised a dinner one evening where he and his, the pro-rector and one or two other people, and our committee, talked about what CHEAD was trying to do and how it saw its role, and in which way the Royal College of Art could be involved with CHEAD. And he then committed himself to be involved in the sort of, the decision-taking process. I mean CHEAD would... I eventually retired from CHEAD because the then chairman was the sort of person who had no respect for the way the education system was organised. A chap called David Sherlock, who was formerly the Principal of Winchester and the Central School of Art and Design. But he had no respect for the way the education system was organised, and

people like myself who were HMI, had no respect for us either. And he... There were major policy issues being discussed, and about which White Papers were being produced at that time, and he, it always seemed to me that if CHEAD represented the system at principal and dean level in colleges, mostly principal level, that the principals ought to be responding to papers which Government produced, and having their input. He couldn't be bothered with that, thought it was a waste of time. So I found myself as the Secretary to CHEAD writing papers on behalf of the executive and sending them to the Department of Education and Science, and it seemed to me that that was the wrong way for it to be happening; it ought to have been a joint decision of the executive and the secretary, agreed by us all that this was the view that we all would want to express in any given situation. So in the end I gave up on CHEAD, I retired from CHEAD, and for that reason, because I thought it was wrong to be doing the sort of job I was doing. But at the Royal College of Art, one of the things for example that Jocelyn Stevens did was to, we decided that we wanted to set up a sort of, a trust, a charitable trust, to raise money to pursue areas of interest in the art and design field which were research areas, and which the normal system simply didn't deal with. And Jocelyn Stevens immediately set about dealing with the legal aspects of setting the trust up, providing the money for that purpose and doing it through his own solicitors, and then going to Vivien Duffield and actually getting the money to make the thing a reality. So the money that came into the trust came through Jocelyn Stevens and Vivien Duffield. So I found him very positive and very supportive, and I really liked him, and I must say that in all my experience in the Royal College, I mean if I went in there one, on any occasion to lunch, he would always come across the room and say hello. [Is that all right? Yes.] Yes, I mean he would always take the trouble to come across the room and say hello and have a chat about things that were going on, and while I was there he in fact offered me a job, which I declined to accept because I thought I was really too old for it. He wanted a new director of his sort of extra-mural overseas studies department, which was a professorial job at that time. I declined it because I thought that they ought to have a young man who had a career ahead of him rather than somebody like myself who was then sort of just turning 70, and I was ill, I'd just open-heart surgery, I really didn't feel that it was something I wanted to do. I mean I was very flattered to be asked, but I really felt that it was a job that ought to have gone to a bright young man with a future rather than to somebody like myself. But at least he offered it to me, and I'm very flattered by that. I found the college, the Royal College was a very good experience. I worked with people like Nicholas Frayling, who I think is an admirable chap, now Rector of the Royal College of Art, highly intelligent, very clever.

Do you mean Christopher?

Christopher Frayling. Why did I say Nicholas? Oh well it doesn't matter. Christopher Frayling. Who is a highly intelligent, highly intelligent man. In the days when I was there he and I chatted quite a lot about himself and his professorial role at the Royal College, and at that time he was wondering whether he ought to go on being a professor at the Royal College or divert his interests into the other thing he was terribly good at, which was media and television in particular. This was at the time when he was presenting programmes like Tutankhamun and all that, you know, and he was brilliantly good at it, and he also had this great interest in film, in Hollywood in America, and, at that time he really didn't know where he ought to go. And I remember we had one conversation where I actually said to him, 'Well why don't you persuade Jocelyn to make you a visiting professor and go into the media?' which is obviously where, at that time, he seemed to want to direct his energies. However in the event he became the Rector of the Royal College of Art and I'm sure he'll be terribly good at the job, simply because he is so able and intelligent, and a very likeable man, to boot.

Just out of interest, why didn't someone like the Royal College get swept into the London Institute?

Oh well the Royal College is a totally separate organisation. It's funded directly by the DES, or was, and it has special funding through the DES, and through a special fund. It was the only all-post-graduate institution in the whole of the art and design system, and as such it was funded separately, I guess almost as a university. I mean the Inspectorate for example didn't have a role at the Royal College, we never inspected it or looked at it, it was a totally independent body.

And did it have anyone to inspect it?

I guess not, no. I actually think it's an admirable outfit really, I mean I... It was wonderful to have a place where the brightest and the best could go, having completed their first degree, highly selected, and very talented, and there were a lot of very talented people there, in the student body I mean, a lot of very talented people. And a lot of good teachers. I mean I have to say when I was teaching there, although at that time the college was, you know, famous, and had a glitzy sort of image, the business of actually teaching at the, you know, in the studios, wasn't easy, and there were people there who didn't seem to get on with their jobs very well. I mean if I tell you that I, on one occasion, after Frank Height had retired, I was going back to do my series of courses, and I wrote in to the college as I normally did to say

that, you know, I'd be coming in on a certain day at their request and I would need a lecture theatre or lecture room with projection facilities, so that I could do the introduction to my course, and that the following weeks I would need various things, and when I arrived on the first day, having really quite carefully planned the day, I was met by, first of all there were no full-time staff there, and I was met by a part-time teacher that I'd never met before, who said to me, 'Oh are you Bernard Gay?' And I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Well I've been asked to tell you that you haven't got a room to do your lecture in.' And that was that. And there I was with twenty new, bright, eager, young post-graduate students with no lecture room, no facilities, nobody to do anything about it. And I rushed around, and in fact I rushed to Christopher Frayling and told him the problem, and he organised that I was able to use one of his lecture rooms.

End of F5902 Side A

F5902 Side B

[Continuing the tape with Bernard Gay on the 11th of September 1997. Tape 6 Side B.]

Well the irony of that little story is that in next year's Royal College of Art prospectus there was a photograph of me and the group of students I was teaching in that lecture room, but there you are. It wasn't always easy I must say at the classroom, at the studio level, to get the resources you needed to do your job properly. But on the other hand, I mean we...I think overall we managed quite well, I guess we managed quite well. What else do I need to say about that?

I'm going to stop you there Bernard.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

[Recommencing the interview with Bernard Gay at his home in Petersfield on the 22nd of October 1997. Tape 6 Side B.]

One thing I would like to return to on the professional front is your unique insight through being on both formation committees of the London Institute in terms of the sort of tensions that kind of amalgamation may have caused at the committee level, and how things kind of evolved during the committee.

Yes, well tension is the right word of course, there were terrible tensions. I'm not entirely clear about the political game at that, in the early period of the formation committees of the London Institute. There were two committees; the first one was set up by the ILEA and was very large and met in the Council Chamber at County Hall under the chairmanship of Neil Fletcher who was then the Chair of the Inner London Education Authority. And the purpose of that formation committee was to try to determine the future of the London art schools, and it was a huge committee, I mean there were representatives of everybody but God really, I mean it was...they filled the Council Chamber. And how I came on it I'm not absolutely certain. I was invited to be on it, and I don't know from what capacity I came. That's simply because I can't remember. The political situation was volatile then as far as education was concerned. Margaret Thatcher's mob were talking about doing away with the ILEA; I don't know how aware or conscious of all that ILEA was, because I'm not really very much into the politics of the situation. There was uncertainty I guess about funding, and I think the ILEA

were aware that they could lose one of their colleges at least, and all those colleges were good, they had national and international reputations, and it would have been a tragedy to lose one. So it was really very much about looking to the future. And then of course the Government decided to take the colleges of higher education, and I think the F.E. colleges as the same time, I'm not sure, but anyway, they decided to take the colleges out of the hands of the local authorities, and we then appointed a rector, and it turned out to be John McKenzie as I've said already. It was then necessary to have a chairman of the committee which was then set up to actually form and found the London Institute, and that's how I came to be the first chairman of, in fact the only chairman of that formation committee, because when that had done its work there was a court of governors and it had its own chairman which wasn't me. And I'm quite glad about that actually, and the bloke who became chairman did an excellent job. The tensions of course were tremendous, and the art school scene is fairly political really, and, in fact very political, and there were a lot of people who, quite rightly I think, were determined to protect the art schools from being done away with or in any way their importance being diminished. And they played a very political game on the Court of Governors and on the Formation Committee, and people like Neil Fletcher, who became a member, we invited Neil Fletcher to be a member of the Formation Committee of the Institute once it was set up, because after he had a massive amount of experience of running the Authority, and a great deal of knowledge and expertise. But he was at that time I felt, and I mean it's the only word I can use really, obstructive and difficult, and he fought John McKenzie at every level, and on every move, about what he might want to do to the art schools to create a situation where they could survive. I think that, I think that probably for perfectly honourable reasons really, as far as, you know, if one thinks of the, if one thinks of Neil Fletcher as a left-wing politician, who was desperately anxious to defend the status quo, you can understand the difficulties that there were. And he was supported by the trades union representatives who came onto the Court of Governors, and by some of the academics who were there, who fought tooth and nail to stop changes taking place, all of which they saw as bad really, as inappropriate and bad, and changes that would diminish the importance of the individual colleges and so on.

I mean how and who set agendas, and you know, was all the work done through committees, or did outside initiative sort of feed back into the actual sort of forming of the London Institute in terms of how it did emerge?

How do you mean outside initiatives, sorry?

Well, did anyone make any kind of separate evaluations, independent of that committee, in terms of what may or may not fruitful?

Oh, once the Formation Committee had been set up and the Court had been set up and its constitution had been settled, it was part of the national pattern. I mean what in fact happened was that each of the higher education corporations which were set up took over the assets and the debts, if they existed, and there were considerable debts with the London Institute and ILEA, we took over the assets and the debts of the colleges and the halls of residence and everything else, as a sort of, as a total concern, and it was then up to this independent Court of Governors and the appointed rector and his management staff to run the colleges as effectively as they could. I mean they were then an independent corporation, they had been taken out of the hands of the local authority and it was... I mean the Court of Governors was interesting incidentally, there were 13 of us were appointed by the Secretary of State initially, and another, there were 25 of us altogether so another what, 12, were appointed by the Court, and included a number of co-optees who were people in the professions, but also student governors, union representatives, academic representatives, representatives of the academic board and so on. And on the critical decisions only the independent governors had the right to vote.

Oh that's interesting.

Yes. And the governors were set up so that the non-appointed, the governors who were not appointed by the Secretary of State could never out-vote the appointed governors. And in the political scene of that time, that seems in retrospect reasonably logical, because I don't really believe you could have done anything otherwise. Now whether the London Institute as it is now is better than it might have been under ILEA is open to debate. There's a much better staff-student ratio now than there was, I mean better in the sense that there isn't, there aren't as many people wandering around doing nothing as there used to be; I mean it's a much slimmer, leaner, and more disciplined scene than it was. Now there are those who would argue that the level of teaching in the Institute, that is to say the amount of part-time staff and the amount of teachers available to teach the students, isn't nearly as good as it was. Now that may be true. Whether it's less effective than it was I think is another question. And whether the IT situations which are coming into place, the centralised libraries and all the other, you know, teaching processes, make up for the fewer staff, I don't know, I don't know. I do occasionally have, because I know the parents of students, I mean for example I'm the lead governor at Camberwell, and I have friends who are parents of students who happen to

be there. Occasionally they visit me, and I talk to the students who are friends, and they tell me that there is a lack of teaching at, for example at foundation level, there is less teaching than they feel there ought to be. Now, I'm not in a position to assess that, I'd need to look around and check. Whether that's really the case or not I don't know.

I mean do you feel that the overall educational values have been retained in the new system?

I think the...yes, I think probably by and large they have. I mean the desire in the art schools for example for an input from practitioners who come in part-time and lend their professional experience to the academic situation, that is, that is still in place, goes on, and there are people who will say, well you know, there is much less of it, but it is in place. There is a fairly large proportion of the teaching is done by that sort of teacher. And I think it's OK. I mean, one of the reasons that it's awfully difficult to make judgements about all this is that when you visit the colleges, as I do, you do see that at present the state of the buildings, the level of resources, the condition in which all these students work is so much better than it was. I mean they really are better, I mean you know, the physical resources are better, there's no question about that at all; you can go to any of the colleges and look around and you'll suddenly realise that they have a much better feel about them, they're, you know, cleaner, brighter, fresher, better equipped. Now whether that matters to the students or not I don't know; I would have thought it does. I mean I always felt that the public sector in further and higher education was profoundly deprived when you looked at the resources that the universities had, and that always used to worry me. And I remember Patrick Nuttgens in particular, who was, you know, the Director of Leeds Polytechnic, talking about how important it was to rid ourselves of the binary divide between public sector education and the universities, and although when he was talking about it not very much seemed to happen, in fact it has happened, you know, the funding councils are the same, institutions are now on a level playing field as the cliché has it these days. The difference of course is that the universities are heavily endowed with funds from, historically, and the public sector isn't, but I think that could change do you see, and maybe the public sector will catch up, and if...so that if the physical well-being of the colleges has anything to do with it, I think the public sector is already benefiting considerably. The resources are so much better than they were, I mean, and if I think back to my own time at art school, for example if I wanted a book to study for some reason, for a thesis, an essay or just for my own interest, I had to go to the local public library, the college didn't even have a library. Well now of course colleges have vast libraries, wonderful, fantastic resources. They're all on the Internet, you know, the world is available to them. So I mean, you know, I don't know of course how well colleges are able to

equip their students to take advantage of all that knowledge which is lying about. I mean that seems to me to be one of the problems of course that we're going to have, but I'm sure that will work itself out as well.

I mean I think the anxiety is in a sense that that, well that sort of resource clearly has improved enormously, that the kind of real kind of one-to-one contact, human resource level, is actually changing, and I think you know, with the new payment structures in higher education for example, a lot of people will choose not to be teachers who in another time would have done.

Yes.

That you know, more pressure is put on them in terms of performing and short-term contracts, all those things, so that there's a lot less security and, you know, they may need to look elsewhere to feel secure themselves. I think there is a changing relationship between students and teachers, that possibly might be a loss.

Yes. I think that... When you talk about short-term contracts, do you mean part-time tutors or...?

I mean often paid by the hour now, so that there's no job security, no sickness benefit, no pension scheme. Absolutely nothing.

Well that isn't really so is it. I mean...

It is.

Well I'm thinking of my experience in the Institute do you see.

Yes.

I mean the fact is that European legislation has led us to the point where a lot of part-time teachers now have the same rights as full-time teachers had in the old days. There never was any security of jobs for part-time staff. In the old days you had a one-term contract, which could be ended. If the head of the department in which you were teaching didn't write to you before the beginning of the next term to say you had another term's teaching, you didn't have

one, it was as simple as that. You were taken on and laid off at will. And that went right through the system, I mean that was...it was the same in non-vocational education, youth education, in the colleges. I mean I had, when I was running a department, running a college, I had masses of part-time teachers, and you kept the ones that you wanted and who performed well and you lost the others. I have to say that one often felt one could do the same with full-time staff, because you know, though there were wonderful people, there were also people who, you know, one had to carry, and the biggest job I had running a department was carrying staff who had become maybe in the changing academic situation ineffective teachers, so you had to move them sideways and find them jobs, and in a way the system was clogged up with people that could never be removed. I mean I...it used to worry me that by the way, it used to worry me in two ways; one was that, you know, one really had an allocation of staff, there was a maximum number of staff you could have, and it was related to the student numbers and student hours, and so if you had too many ineffective staff you had a poor academic situation, you couldn't run your job effectively. On the other hand, it used to worry me, I remember a young, a bright, very bright young art teacher who in fact took over my original art department and ran it very well, a painter and photographer called Jerry Whybrow. I remember him coming to see me and saying he wanted to get rid of somebody, they were no good, he didn't regard them as any good. I had known this member of staff for a very long time, and I remember saying to him, 'Look, it's all very well just saying you want to get shot of somebody, they're no good, but you know, this guy has been here for twenty or thirty years, he's rendered extremely good service over that period of time; you can't just assume that because he doesn't suit your, or you can't find a way of using him, that we're just going to try and find a way of getting shot of him, you know, we owe him a duty and a responsibility as well as the students.' So you know, there was always this terrible balancing act about, you know, how you kept people and whether, you know, whether you should keep them or whether you should try and find a way of losing them. It was very hard to lose people of course incidentally, it was almost impossible to get rid of a full-time member of staff. And so they were very well protected. Part-timers were never protected, they never had pension rights. They have better rights now than they had when I was teaching, is all I can say. I mean when I was a part-time teacher, I mean the very first teaching job I had I was taken on, the end of one term I was dropped and that was the end of it. I protested actually and they took me back, I mean I really needed that job at that time, and I protested, I thought they'd behaved badly, and to be fair to the head of that college he took me back, and I had a job. I never quite understood...I mean it was really a matter of restructuring the pattern of studies, it was nothing to do with me, of being ineffective or an effective teacher, it was...that was just a clerical, you know, a decision about restructuring the part-time teaching staff. And

of course that's pretty rotten when that happens and I do realise how tough that can be for part-time teachers, but in those days you had nothing, you know, they didn't give you the contract, that was it. I do think things are rather better these days. I mean we have, I mean at the moment at the London Institute we have twenty or thirty part-time staff who have either been laid off or who have had their teaching time reduced, who are in fact taking legal action to secure their rights, which include pension rights. So I think things are better, I mean there are ways in which the European legislation among other things is helping part-time staff.

Mm, I'm glad to hear it.

Well, yes, I mean that seems to be the situation as far as I can see it. And as a member of the Personnel Committee of the London Institute, which I am or was until a few days ago because I've really officially now retired I guess, I mean we spent a great deal of time worrying about, I mean I wouldn't want anyone to think that we were not concerned about the problems of part-time staff.

Oh no I wasn't suggesting that, I was thinking more in terms of the whole direction of education towards a kind of market situation where one feels the balance between education and market might have become unbalanced in that sense, and that kind of wrong values are in place.

Well I think it may vary from one higher education corporation to another. I mean I think ours has been very good on this, I mean we have a no-redundancy policy in place, we have a very good equal opportunities situation in place, we have considerable discussions about part-time staff and their conditions, we work with the unions. I mean I believe we've tried to run, and I think in the art schools where people are very political it's probably necessary to do it, a fairly, you know, a fairly liberal, in inverted commas, policy. I don't think we've been, I don't think we could be seen as over-difficult in that regard.

I mean just before we leave the London Institute, the one question I would like to ask you is, going back to that time when it was being set up, you know, is there something that you would have liked to have happened that didn't happen, is there some missing element, or do you feel it actually was the correct move in the moment?

I think in the long term it was the right move to make. I mean the Government were going to take the colleges out of the hands of the local authorities anyway, they had made the decision;

I think at that time ILEA was seriously considering using one of its art schools, and we've saved them all. We have of course amalgamated some, Central and St. Martin's have gone together; the College of Distributive Trades and the London College of Printing have gone together, making up, you know, two larger colleges. That's probably sensible, it meant that we could rationalise the provision a bit and make it a bit more sensible. The things that I regret I think is that early on we very much had the view that we needed to round this particular institution out by having a wider range of art disciplines in it. The London College of Furniture, which was my old college, chose not to come in with us, which I think was a great mistake, and it's more or less disappeared, it's now a department in a polytechnic somewhere and it's hardly known about, I mean you know, it's gone, and I think the Institute oddly enough would have preserved it, as it has preserved all the other colleges. And we also negotiated, and I chaired a little committee which negotiated with the Central School of Speech and Drama, because they wanted to join us, but in the end they chose to remain independent. I think they were concerned about losing their identity. We early on realised how important it was to...we wanted a cohesive institution which was centrally managed, and economically managed, and a lot of the early fights by the way were about the worries that there would be a massive administrative structure which would use up a lot of resources. Actually the London Institute has a very minimal central management team, frankly, and has had under John McKenzie, and he was very good at controlling that, and it hasn't used up, it's very cheap to run. It might have been very expensive to run but it isn't. So a lot, there were a lot of arguments about that. So, I regret the fact that we didn't get the Central School of Speech and Drama in; I am very sorry we lost the London College of furniture; and I understand now that one of the music schools is going to come in, and I hope that will happen soon, because I think the more rounded the institution is the better it will be, the wider its range of disciplines the better it will be. I mean if you're going to have an arts institution it might as well be the arts, you know, plural. And so, I regret the fact that we lost the colleges, and I'm delighted to think that there are other colleges now coming in. I'm also very pleased that we have been able to strike this balance between retaining the individual colleges and their particular integrities, and running them as a cohesive institution, because I think the Institute protects the colleges really, makes it possible for them to continue.

Well that's good.

[BREAK IN RECORDING]

In terms of the sort of peripheral art schools in London, like Wimbledon and Kingston, how were they affected by the existence of the London Institute?

Well Kingston of course was part of Kingston Polytechnic, so they, I guess they're a university now in their own right. Colleges like Wimbledon, independent colleges, I think they're very different. I mean first of all the thing to be said about all the higher education corporations is that they have been set up and they are in competition with each other, I mean they are all fighting for students, and they live or die by how well they succeed in getting their student numbers, because the student numbers and the funding are intimately related, so that if you don't succeed with your numbers you don't get the funding I guess. And I would have thought that, Kingston Polytechnic of course I think would be, it's big, it's like a university, it is a university I suppose, I would think they are fairly well protected by their size, as long as they are effectively administered and the resources are intelligently used I would have thought they were, in the fairly long term that they were secure. Though that isn't necessarily the case, I mean there are rumours around that some of the new universities, one-time polytechnics, and the HECs, are in serious financial trouble. I would have thought that art schools like Wimbledon...

I'm just going to stop you there.

End of F5902 Side B

F5903 Side A

[Continuing the interview with Bernard Gay on the 22nd of October 1997. Tape 7 Side A.]

Now you were just talking about Wimbledon Art School.

Yes. I would have thought that schools like Wimbledon and small schools like the Central School of Speech and Drama, and there are a lot of other colleges like this, who are separate HECs, I would have thought they were more vulnerable than the larger bodies. Though some of them of course are very successful, like Farnham, Norman Taylor runs Farnham and he's been I think very successful in, you know, he's built himself sort of new halls of residence, he's expanded the college; I think that probably a place like Farnham will continue to be very successful, I see no reason why it shouldn't. But I do think the smaller schools are vulnerable. It isn't that I think that big is beautiful, it's just that I think, you know, financially they're vulnerable. The Institute can, you know, we have, John McKenzie now acts as our overseas director, and he brings in millions from overseas in money for the Institute, bringing students from overseas to the Institute, running joint degrees with other countries and so on, and you know, we can do that really because of our scale. Whether the smaller institutions can do that or not I don't know, but you know, these days funding is everything. So I think they will...you know, I mean I think they have to be intelligently administered. And of course that's a great cultural change, because you know, one didn't administer the system in the old days, the system was administered by the local authorities, not always very well. I mean I think ILEA is a wonderful example, I think that its provision for its schools, for its specialist schools, for its, you know, its remedial teaching, its colleges, its non-vocational education at every level, I mean I think it was a fantastic authority, but alongside that went, it seems, now that we can look at it historically, a terrible, terrible maladministration. I mean our colleges, the Institute's colleges, were in an appallingly run-down state when we took them over. There were no up-to-date financial records, they were years out of date, and we were lumbered with millions of pounds of debt, which to be fair to John McKenzie and his administration we've been able to eliminate. So you know, it's swings and roundabouts really. I think probably at the end of the day it will be seen that taking further and higher education into higher education corporations and getting intelligent administrations in to run them is probably the right move, you know, I don't know, I'm not a political animal, I can't tell. I can see benefits and disadvantages, but I suspect that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages. I worry about...I think the only real worry I have about the whole system is that a lot of young people, able young people I have to say, at the lower end of the financial

spectrum, may simply not be able to afford to go to college, and that really does worry me, I mean that worries me sick, I think that's... When John McKenzie retired, I tried to get the Institute to set up a fund to provide scholarships for young people who were financially unable to go to an institute of higher education, which would have been known as the John McKenzie Scholarships, or the John McKenzie whatever, bursaries; they didn't do it and I'm very sad about that. Oddly enough it was Neil Fletcher who was supposed to be trying to get it done but he's done nothing about it.

Well you never know, it might happen.

Well, I live in hopes. But I wrote to him about a while ago, and I don't think anything will ever happen, and John's gone now, he's no longer Rector anyway, and they may not think it appropriate to do it.

Well I suppose it sets a slightly dangerous precedent because that's a problem that won't go away.

Well it won't go away but I mean I think it would have been a gesture.

Yes, I agree.

A public gesture with real... You know, I mean, John brings in millions from overseas for the Institute every year. I reckon they should have taken a million anyway and set it aside and invested it as a, you know, as a...it would have been worth another, what, it would have been worth a 1.23 million if they invested it, because you know, you do it, you can do it through a charity and you get tax relief on the money and all that I guess, it would have been worth a lot of money and you could have given quite a lot of students an opportunity. I'd like to have seen that happen.

Now, you've, you know, obviously a very interesting professional career and you've seen whole sort of generations of changes and developments in the art world. The one thing we haven't touched on is your personal life, and I know that you've brought up two families and I think it would be interesting to hear something of that.

Yes. Yes. I always...I think actually that I've been very fortunate in my personal life, as a matter of fact. It had a terrible beginning, and I was pretty poor, pretty poor, right up until I was almost middle-aged really, I mean I had a very... You know I went to art school at 27, which is when most people have well embarked on their careers, and I was there until I was 31, and I remember my last day at art school standing in the antiques room there thinking, God! I've no grant, I've no money, I've got to find the rent next week; what on earth am I going to do? And that's how I really began seriously thinking about lecturing and so on. I didn't want to teach, I wanted to paint, and my first few years after I left art school were marvellous really, what I call my kind of honeymoon period. I used to get up early in the morning and paint all day, and go out drawing and then paint all day the next day, and drag my pictures round the galleries and try and exhibit them and so on. But I mean I was earning pennies, you know. It's hard for people to realise how things have changed. Incidentally talking about, one of the things I wanted to say about, I'll come back to this, one of the things I wanted to say about colleges and teachers, tutors, is that when I was Acting Principal of the London College of Furniture in 1970 my salary was £3,500 a year, which is about how many students we had including all our part-timers by the way. The Rector of the London Institute of course which is a much bigger organisation has a salary of £125,000 a year plus. The heads of the individual colleges all have salaries in the region of £70,000 to £85,000 or more a year. The deans who run departments, which are much smaller than the college I ran, they all have salaries of £45,000, £50,000 a year. I would have thought that the... I mean I used to feel even when my salary was what it was that we were reasonably well paid oddly enough, I mean you know, one has to look at the kind of relative values of these salaries, but I always thought that we in further and higher education were reasonably well paid, and it always surprises me that, and I think you said it, that people are reluctant to go into teaching.

I don't think I'm thinking literally of the sort of, you know, the paper hour; the problem is the job insecurity, the fact that you might only be employed for, you know, in the new semester system, for twelve weeks at a time.

Yes, yes.

Well twelve weeks out of fifty-two...

It was always so though, that isn't a change, you were always only employed for twelve weeks at a time, one term. All the contracts, going right back to the 1960s, '55 I think when I first taught, the contracts were for one term.

So I mean in terms of, you know, being married and having a family, how did you manage?

Well, I... By the time I married and had a family I in fact had started to teach at the London College of Furniture. I married my first family late in life really, I was forties. I mean up until that time I really sort of, I mean I can remember, I lived in Hammersmith and I had to do a lecture for the Design Council, and I can remember having to make a decision as to whether I took a bus down to Petty France to get slides for this lecture, which was going to pay me something like five quid for doing it anyway, you know, or buy a pint of milk, and I decided to walk there and back and buy the milk. I mean I was that hard up. I mean one really was very hard up in those days. You know, when I was showing my pictures at Wildenstein's, pictures were selling, the pictures were sold for £30 each and they took a commission. That of course shouldn't surprise one, because I remember in the early Fifties going into the Leicester Galleries and looking at exhibitions of Henry Moore drawings, those wonderful Underground drawings, and they were £30 each. You could have bought anything in those days, of Graham Sutherland...

That was a lot of money at the time though. My father is an art lecturer and £10 a week, that's what I remember, from the Fifties, 1950.

That's right, yes. So you know, you have to look at these things I guess in... But you know, one really was very hard up, but then you could live reasonably cheaply too. By the time I decided... I mean I spent my first, I guess from 1951 until, up to sort of, the first five or six or seven years, I spent painting, I really wanted to be a painter, and I succeeded to the extent that I had a lot of one-man shows, I participated in a lot of, you know, mixed exhibitions and so on, but the amount of money that came in was really very little. I supplemented my income by, I mean I went and did work on farms in the holidays whenever I could, I worked for the Post Office at Christmas, all the things that all students I guess do anyway, or many of them do, those who haven't got much money. I was working, I lectured for the Workers' Education Association; I lectured for the Design Council; I went around the country lecturing to all kinds of organisations, simply to scrape a living, and you know, I really feel I did scrape a living, I mean I was very very hard up. Part-time teaching was my salvation really, I mean I got part-time teaching jobs, and that rapidly developed into more work, and then the offer of a full-time job, and then the offer of a better full-time job, and the offer of another better full-time job, and that really was how I first... I mean I was middle-aged in the conventional sense before I earned a living.

I mean, did that affect your wanting to commit yourself to marriage, or was it just that you didn't meet the right person?

I guess it did. I mean I... Yes, committing myself to marriage. I mean I have a feeling that, I mean I...I think I was emotionally retarded really, I mean I...I think my being brought up in a home, a boys' home, was a...you know, without any of the...in fact my whole early years without any of the family love and comfort and all that, you know, which I realise is so important from my own children, without any of that, and I mean without any at all, a fairly brutal upbringing I had. I mean at school I can remember having the living daylight beaten out of me, being publicly thrashed, you know, nobody, I mean, very few people these days could even begin to understand what it was like 60 years ago, 65 years ago at school. The beatings you had, you know, the canings you had, and the... And we had...I don't know whether we had particular sadistic teachers, I have a feeling... I mean there was one who used to regularly thump us across the back with a steel ruler, and another ghastly man who had a large whistle with a knob on the end of it, and he used to go around the class giving the kids what he called whistle pie, which was to bang you on the top of the head with the knob of this whistle, which was incredibly painful. And then you know, if you misbehaved badly you were dragged up in front of the whole school and publicly thrashed; I was once. And canings on the hand were a regular, six of the best, you know. And there were teachers who revelled in this really. So you know, I had all that, which oddly enough I don't think, although I have memories of it, I don't think that affected me badly. I do think however that my upbringing left me emotionally damaged. I mean I found it very difficult to make relationships. I was very withdrawn, very shy, found it very difficult to relate to girls. I mean I had girlfriends, you know, but I found it, I think I was very...I didn't know how to behave with girls really. So it took me a long time to come to terms with women. I had the good fortune when I was at art school to meet an absolutely marvellous girl who was considerably younger than myself, and we had a long and loving relationship which I think went on for about seven years, and that in a way was, I mean, it probably sounds ridiculous to say it but that was a great healing process. Because she accepted me for what I was, without question really, and I was able to relate to her, we had a very good and loving...and I think that relationship, and I think that was a kind of healing process for that emotional, early emotional deprivation. I had a number of girlfriends after that. I had long periods of loneliness, because I worked and I was alone, and you know, I had no family to relate to. I don't know if it matters but I have a feeling it does. If you don't have close family relationships it becomes terribly difficult to relate to other people; you have to build, you have to build sort of relationships with, of all kinds with

the people around you, and that isn't an easy thing to do, particularly if you are, as I was, a rather withdrawn person. I mean I think my career has been marvellous for me because I had to meet thousands of people and talk to them and relate to them in various ways, and I made friends, I have friends that I've had for 30 or 40 years and we're still good friends, but that building of relationships took a long time. My first wife, I mean I have to say that my first marriage was disastrous, there's no question about that, except in one regard, I mean out of it I had two boys who have turned out to be lovely chaps, I mean they're great, they're good sons, they're now in their thirties and they are both, you know, wonderful young men, they're both very successful I'm delighted to say, both living abroad now, working abroad, but I see them and they come and visit me on a regular basis. They're devoted to my present family. That marriage was, I mean that was an interesting one, I mean I think that, at the time I think I was desperate to create a family, I can't quite explain that but I am aware that that was the case, and I met this rather nice Swiss girl, very nice Swiss girl, very beautiful girl actually, and we got to know each other, and we married. The cultural differences between us made it very difficult to be happily married together. You come to realise in a mixed marriage of that kind that you're not always speaking the same language in a funny way, you know, your sense of humour is different, your whole cultural background is different, and we didn't really get on very well. The other thing I realised about that, and I sort of hesitate to talk about this but I think it's sort of important, I've come to believe that a good marriage needs a basis of passion as well as all the other things. I know that people, you know, will say, well everyone is always talking about sex; I'm not actually talking about sex really, but I do think that a marriage needs a basis of passion, particularly in the early years. It carries you through a lot of the problems that you're going to encounter. My first marriage didn't have a basis of passion. I don't understand why it was, but my wife and I didn't have what I would call a good physical marriage, it was without passion, it's as simple as that. And the reason I talk about that I'll explain in a moment, but I think that in the end led to all kinds of things. I mean, sadly I divorced my first wife eventually really because of her infidelities, and I'm sad about that in a way. I found that you, I couldn't live in a marriage without a basis of trust, you know, you need that kind of trust in your marriage, you need to feel confident in the relationship you have with your partner. So we parted, but out of that marriage came these two smashing boys. And I have to say that although I've said that about my first marriage, I still know my first wife, I had dinner with her in Switzerland only a few weeks ago, and we had a - with her and her present husband, and I met her on a number of occasions, when I left Switzerland she came to say goodbye to me, and if she comes over here she'll come and see me, so we have a friendly relationship. I wouldn't say that we were friends but we have a friendly relationship, and we meet from time to time in a perfectly amicable way. And when

we did part, I mean we made, we had an agreement with each other that we would never criticise each other in front of the children, and consequently I think because we both behaved reasonably well with our children regarding each other, our children are still fond of both of us and they, you know, we have a...I have a lovely relationship with my boys, and so does their mother, so you know, all that worked out rather well. Now that was that marriage. After that marriage I had a kind of wilderness period which was very lonely and difficult. I had, you know, one had, I mean one met other people and one had love affairs which came and went and so on. And then I went to a party on HMS Belfast, which was a silver wedding of some good friends of mine, and there I met my second wife, Kate, who died two years ago. You have to realise that I was then in my fifties, and Kate was 23, so it was an unlikely meeting of minds and all that and affections and whatever. However we met and we talked, and Kate's a graphic designer and I'm in the arts, and I invited her out for a drink or a meal, and we became friends, and she visited me up in my little house I had in the country in those days where I was living, and I had a flat in London in those days, and so we visited, we became friends. And we were friends for a long time, it was a slowly developing relationship, it wasn't a...it wasn't a sort of, an immediately all-embracing one at all, I mean we didn't have...we weren't lovers. But we became very good friends, and then we became lovers, and, I mean after quite a long time. And Kate was determined not to marry, she didn't want to marry, she wanted a career. And I was, I must say, very much in love with her and wanted to marry her, but she wasn't having any of it. And then, she changed her mind and she decided that we would get married, and we married, what, nearly fourteen years ago now. And with Kate, I mean first of all we had all the things that I think are important in a marriage, we loved each other, we had, we were good friends, we shared interests, music and good food and wine, and opera, and travel, and a whole lot of other things, and we had a marvellously happy seven years before we married. And then we married, and we had our daughter, and then later our son, who are now nine and twelve, nine and thirteen years of age. And, I mean that marriage had everything that was right, I mean there we did have a basis of true passion and true love, which made the marriage wonderful really. And we, I mean, you know, I regard, Kate was everything, I mean she was a companion and friend and lover and mother of my children, and you couldn't have had a better marriage. So I had with her nineteen years of real happiness. And then of course two years ago she very sadly died of ovarian cancer, and that was a terrible, I think the worst time of my life without any doubt. And of course I now have the two children, and one of them I've sent off to boarding school at Christ's Hospital, which is fantastic by the way, that's an interesting institution, and the other one lives with me here, and he will go to Christ's Hospital I hope in two years' time. And I mean that's really in essence the story of my life, I mean there isn't a lot more to be said about it really. I mean

I've had the good fortune to have nineteen years of really happy marriage, we did everything together, and, well, one could say a lot about that I suppose, but I don't think that's appropriate. Anyway, we had this wonderful nineteen years tragically brought to an end by Kate getting this terrible disease, by a doctor who didn't diagnose it and didn't care, bother to diagnose it, who wouldn't do any tests to find out what the... Kate, I mean I'm rambling a bit, you'll have to forgive me but it's a highly emotional thing to talk about. But Kate felt that she had cancer. Her mother had died of cancer. Kate always knew she would die of cancer, she told me that from the very beginning. Her father had had cancer, and he recovered, her mother died. Kate believed she had cancer. She never went to the doctor, she was very, you know, she never complained about things, never went to the doctor if she could absolutely help it, but she went to the doctor and said, 'Look I believe I have cancer.' 'Absolute rubbish' said the doctor, and wouldn't even consider it, and he didn't do any tests, he didn't check up. Had he checked her notes he would have found that her last cervical smears were ambiguous at least, doubtful, and if he had, if he had done a test then, which he didn't do, he could have at least prolonged her life. Now of course the question then arises whether that would have been a good thing or a bad thing; it would have been a good thing to have had more time, but one begins to... I mean having experienced that particular illness and the awfulness of it, I wonder whether that time could have been, would have been worthwhile in the context of the quality of life that she might have been able to enjoy. Anyway this doctor didn't do the tests, so we waited for six months with Kate becoming increasingly unwell and in great pain, until in the end I said, 'Look, I don't think I can stand this,' and I made her come to the doctor with me again, and I took her, and she was then taken in to hospital. She was going to have an operation in a few days' time anyway but by this time it had got so bad I made her go to the doctor on Sunday, Sunday morning, and I rang the doctor, took her to see him, and he sent her straight to hospital. And two days later of course we were told that she had ovarian cancer. And although they told us they had removed the cancer and that she might, that she would have to have some chemotherapy just to confirm that....

End of F5903 Side A

F5903 Side B

[Continuing the tape with Bernard Gay on the 22nd October 1997. Tape 7 Side B.]

They knew that she was going to die really. The chances of anyone recovering from ovarian cancer are pretty remote; I think nine out of ten girls who get it die. Kate was then just 42, and this was June. After the operation for about three weeks Kate recovered remarkably well, and then three weeks later she said to me, 'You know Bernard, I have lumps in my groin again, I believe I've got more lumps coming'. And, she went for chemotherapy, and on the 8th of September she died.

So it was very quick.

Yes. She stayed with me, she stayed at home until three days before she died, and, she collapsed at home, she got up in the night and then collapsed and couldn't get up again, and I eventually got her back into bed. Fortunately I had some friends who had come to stay with us to help look after her a bit, and managed to get her back into bed, and she looked at me and said, you know, 'I don't really think we're going to be able to manage any longer, do you?' And I'm afraid I had to say, 'No, I don't think we can.' And, we had made arrangements with our local hospice that she would go there when it became necessary, and she was only there for two-and-a-half days when she was gone. I always think of that day as the first day of the last bit of my life to be honest.

Well you have got two wonderful children.

Well yes, I mean, there I'm lucky, they are great kids. And my daughter is very much like her mother of course, extraordinarily like her, and gets more like her every day, it's very strange. Even her interests seem to be the same. It's very curious that. When you watch your children grow up, as I've been watching my daughter, and my son too of course, it's very interesting when you look at them, you realise how very much they're a mixture of the two of you, you become very conscious of it. I mean I can see, I mean my daughter has my skin colour for example and my son has his mother's skin colour; he has the physical make-up of his mother's side of the family; Imogen has much more the make-up of my side of the family as it were. But I see her personality developing very much like her mother. I mean her mother for example liked, was meticulous and could do small, intricate things with her hands, which is why she was a graphic designer as much as anything else I guess, because it's that, the work

she did was that kind of work. Well our daughter is exactly the same. And there are lots of other interests and attributes which I see in her, which are exactly those of her mother, and I see them developing which is very interesting. And, so it's lovely to have her around and see her appearance getting more and more like her mother, and her attributes getting more and more like her mother. I only hope that she grows up with all the character attributes of her mother. I mean the thing I think, you know, I haven't said this but I mean I think the thing that made our marriage happy was that Kate was...had wonderful integrity; she was totally honest, and she was good, I mean she was good in that she had, she was politically good. I mean she was much better than I am, I mean her approaches to race and to, her political approaches to everything were extraordinarily liberal. I mean she had a marvellously open mind, she would think about things. She was...I mean she was deep down honest, and she was really very good. I mean, after Kate died I had to have some counselling, I found myself so over-wrought by the whole experience that I had some counselling. I got counselling for my son who suffered very badly, and was terrified of being left alone. I mean they are very aware, my children are very aware that I am an old man, I mean you know, that I'm much older than most fathers are, and they're very aware of that, it's very interesting. I mean they often talk to me about how old I am, which is amusing in a way but of course at the base of all that kind of conversation is the fear that they're going to be left alone, particularly my son. And so I got, I had some counselling for both of us really, for all of us, but I needed counselling as well, and I remember that one of the women who were counselling us a bit, and she was from the hospice, said to me, 'I don't...' She had obviously done a lot of counselling with men, and she said, 'I never understand you men, you always think your women were so perfect.' And I remember saying to her, well look, it isn't that I thought that Kate was perfect at all, she wasn't by any means perfect, you know, we had our difficulties, like all marriages do, you know, we had our rows; there was even one occasion when she went to thump me and I almost hit her back. But that was only once, you know, and I felt ashamed of myself, terribly ashamed of myself. But the truth is that when you find somebody who has so many good qualities, I mean it's a kind of miracle really, you can go all through life and never find it. It wasn't that Kate was perfect, but she had so much integrity and so much honesty and so much decency and so much love that it was a wonderful thing to experience really.

I think you've been a very lucky man.

Yes. Yes. Well yes and no I suppose.

Yes.

I mean I do find it very difficult now of course.

I should say for the tape by the way that Bernard Gay does not look his age.

[LAUGHS]

Or sound it.

Well people always say I don't look my age, which is great, and I mean bearing in mind that, you know, I've had... I mean, I said earlier that I, I mean I think I've had a very good and fortunate life. I mean you know, I think I've...I mean I'd be able to get through my...I've had a wonderfully fulfilling career. I mean not wonderfully successful financially or anything of that kind; on the other hand I'm a lot better off than I ever thought I would be, you know, I'm not strapped for a copper or two, I have enough to live on with my pensions and so on. I've had a marvellously fulfilling career, and I've had nineteen years of happy marriage; I just wish they'd been thirty. And bearing in mind that I've had, I mean within a year of Kate and I marrying of course I was having open-heart surgery, so you know, it's twelve years since I had this open-heart surgery, which has been amazingly successful, I mean I was lucky, I had, I went to Papworth and had Mr Walwork, the man who breeds transgenic pigs, he did the operation, and he gave me an implant, an aortic implant, and I have had twelve years of healthy, active life, and I hope to have a few more, you know. I mean my ambition, I mean, I don't have many ambitions now, the only ambition I have is to live long enough to see my children as teenagers, able to look after themselves; whether that will be fulfilled or not is, I can't say in the lap of the gods because I don't believe in gods, but there it is. But, I mean that's, you know... I mean, that's the other thing of course, I'm one of the people who has no religion. Kate did have religion, and loved her faith, came to believe that, well she came to believe there was no god anyway, and, I mean more than that, and I feel the same, and I mean, I feel that... The Humanists have probably got it right. I mean I respect the philosophies that lie at the basis of religions, and think that the world couldn't operate very well without them, but I don't believe in God, and neither do I believe incidentally that we have much control over what happens to us in our lives. I mean you know, I don't regard, this may sound odd to you but I don't regard the little bit of success that I've had in my career as something that I've done. I mean I think it's all to do with your genes and, you know, I've been blessed in my genes with fairly good physical health, a modest degree of intelligence, and an ability to do

lots of things reasonably well, not brilliantly well, I mean I'm not single-minded enough, but I don't think that's to do with you, if you know what I mean, I think that's just to do with the kind of physical and mental make-up that you're endowed with when you're born. I don't actually think that we have much to do with that, I don't think we have much control over that, I think it sort of happens. I never understood in the course of my life where a lot of the knowledge that I seem to have ever came from, I don't know where I got it from.

Well it didn't arrive accidentally I'm sure.

No I suppose not, but I don't know what... But do you know what I mean if I say that I don't really, I don't actually believe that we can individually and personally take credit for things that one, that we do.

Well I'm not sure I agree with you actually.

No, but I don't you see, I think that we're...we're endowed with abilities and talents in varying degrees and you just use them, you know.

But a lot of people don't use them and that's a tragedy.

Well that's because they can't.

No but I do think it's a combination of circumstance and choice that actually makes things happen or not happen in our lives.

Yes. I mean I think of when I was at art school, there were brilliant boys and girls there who were so talented, and nothing has happened. That wonderful talent they had when they were in their late teens and early twenties hasn't been fulfilled in any way, you know, they've had very unproductive and relatively uncreative lives. Though that isn't quite accurate either, some of them have had creative lives in other ways, but they haven't, they didn't fulfil their potential. Now, I don't think that's their fault; I think that they didn't have the range of abilities that you need to have a reasonably successful life. I mean I think that talent isn't enough you see; I think you have to have... I mean I can, I have a friend who has a son who was a brilliant, brilliant, brilliant mathematician. He had absolutely no capacity whatever for coping with life, so he's had to be cared for, cosseted and looked after by others because he's totally incapable of managing his life, and yet he's a brilliant chap.

Well I think those real extremes are a very particular case, but I think for more ordinary mortals, you know, skills can be taught and, you know, there are techniques for learning how to operate in the world that...

Yes but I don't think you can claim... Yes, all that's true for the majority of people, you know, but I don't think, if you...if you've been able to make anything, if you've managed to have a fulfilled and happy life I think it's very much the luck of the draw. I don't honestly believe that we have a great degree of control. I mean I'm not really aware of making serious decisions about doing things. I kind of drifted.

No but you did in a way. I mean if you look at the pattern of your career, you've been involved in an enormous number of things that have relied on your energy and initiative, and that just doesn't come naturally, that comes out of work and commitment and...

Well I just think I happen to have that kind of make-up, I had the energy and the initiative there. You know, I can't kind of say I did that because I... I mean, I was just one of those people who couldn't say no to things, you know, if somebody said, would you join us this group or committee, or would you do this, I'd always say yes.

Well that's a choice. Now just two last questions on the art front, and you know, I can always come back to one, I mean one thing is, in your retirement are you likely to go back to painting yourself, do you feel a desire to? And the other question is, in terms of fine art training particularly, I mean how do you see its function, what do you see the function of educating someone in fine art to be?

Well, I would...let's take that question first. I think that the function of an art education ought to be to provide the students with the skills and knowledge which enable them to practise in what's going to be for them a kind of, a lonely professional life if you see what I mean, to provide them with the skills and the knowledge which make it possible for them to practise. And that means a fairly wide range, breadth of skills and knowledge, transferable skills are really the key to everything. If you leave art... It used to disturb me, I mean I can think for example of a visit I made to Winchester College of Art, many years ago now, because you realise that I've been retired for thirteen years, and I remember going in to the sculpture school there, and I remember going in to Ealing College in London, and realising that the students weren't being given, in the case of Winchester, visiting the sculpture department, and

realising that they weren't being taught the skills of carving and modelling and casting and so on, and in the case of Ealing nobody was taught to draw, that they were all fine art students, and that they were allowed to pursue extremely narrow, limiting avenues of art, you know, painting the same abstract painting over and over again with slight vary, you know, slight variations. And that they weren't being given a range of skills and knowledge that they could take away with them from the art school and use for whatever practice they wanted to use it for, that they weren't getting that. So I think that the job of an art school really ought to be to encourage creative processes, I mean there are a lot of young people who are very creative, there's no question about that, I mean I'm always astonished how creative they can be, but I think really the job of the art school is to, while encouraging that creative process, not to direct it in any particular direction, but to give, to provide this range of skills and range of abilities and experience and knowledge which makes it possible to go away on your own and actually practise whatever it is you want to do. You may not want to be a painter or a sculptor or whatever, you may go into something else entirely different. One of the most...well no, I won't bother about that, that's neither nor there. But I mean you may do something entirely different, but if the art school can provide you with those transferable skills, your career is reasonably, a career is reasonably assured. So that's the answer to the first question. The answer to the second question, am I working and so on now. The answer actually is no, I'm not. I haven't painted very much for some years. The desire is there quite often. I mean I remember, you know, when I visited Brittany with Kate some few years ago, five years ago I suppose, I looked at Brittany and thought, my God! I mean I guess really that it brought up all those memories of Christopher Wood and Alfred Wallace and all those kind of Cornish painters, and I looked at that and thought, my God! this is wonderful painting country, it's beautiful, it's got all the elements you need for painting, you know, it's all there. And I've thought a great deal about going back to the kind of landscape painting that I used to do. Now, I've thought about it quite a lot; starting is the problem. And now that I am left with really rather less energy than I used to have, and two young children to bring up on my own, I'm finding it very difficult. I often think I really must, I mean I can't tell you how often I look at my brushes and my paints and my easels and my, you know, and think, I really ought to do... Well I'm not sure that I have the, I'm not sure to be honest that I have the energy kind of to do it. The other thing is that I really do think that painting, however you do it, that painting is a process where, which feeds on itself, one picture produces another, you know, you have one idea, it produces a series of pictures, and each picture leads you to the next in some strange way. And so you need the time, you need a lot of time, and you need a lot of energy to do it, and I'm not sure that I can...I'm not sure that I can, and I don't believe it's an excuse, I'm not sure that I can fiddle around with doing the odd painting, so either I get down

to it and do it seriously or I don't do it at all. And I think that's the thing that really stops me. I mean all those things, you know, a lack of, you know, I'm getting older and I don't have the energy to do it, and I've got the kids to bring up, and the house to look after: I've got so many pedestrian things to do that I don't, I'm not able to do it. In fact I'm giving up everything, I'm giving up all my work now I think. In a way I don't mind that, I mean I don't regard myself as a man of great talent and ability or anything of that kind; I mean I painted a few modestly decent pictures and sold a hell of a lot of pictures, and I'm very glad to have done that. And people liked, some people respected my work, and that's great, you know, I've done that. Been there done that. I can live with that I think.

And just professionally, in your administrative and academic profession, what do you see as your greatest contribution?

Well I don't know about contribution but I did really, I loved my inspectorial work. Funnily enough I was talking to a one-time head of an art school only yesterday, who had a pretty, who has I think a low opinion of some of my HMI colleagues, but I reckon that HMI in my day really did make a serious contribution to the system, I mean we tried to discover and encourage best practice wherever we saw it; we were able to bring teachers together to improve the quality of the work they were doing, you know, by having, through conferences and so on; we worked with the local authorities; we were able to advise Ministers. I mean I think that was, in a funny way I think the Inspectorate was as creative a role as anything I did, and I loved the job, I mean you know, and, there are a number of things that I can point to in that. The little bit of intervention I was able to do to protect and save the British School at Rome from losing its scholarships; the promotion of areas of work like conservation and art history in the public sector of higher education; and the work I did with the London art schools, and you know, getting local authorities to appoint art advisers: all that kind of, all the things that help to promote and develop the system. You know, the work I did on the DATEC, BTEC system, setting that up nationally, all those things, you know. And the exhibitions I do of students' work, the 'Germinations' exhibition, and the earlier one, the 'Young Blood' exhibition at the Barbican, the 'Germinations' exhibitions at the Royal College, all those things, I mean I think, I found all that very creative and, you know, very...I thought it was a great job. And one was free to, in my days you were free to pursue to a degree those interests within the system which were your interests, and you were able to develop them, you know, and do all kinds of things that maybe it's not possible to do any more.

I don't...thinking of the, you know, kind of quality assessment structures now, they bear no relationship to that kind of free-ranging activity that you talk about.

No, ours was a much less formal system I think, and we didn't have sort of multiple-choice questions to answer when we visited colleges; we were able to, you know, you were able to freely walk around and make judgements. I mean I thought the marvellous thing about visiting the colleges was how, because the system believed that HMI were honest brokers as it were, how welcome you were. I mean, there was only one college that I was ever unwelcome in, and that was dear old Fred Brill at Chelsea School of Art, who hated HMI collectively anyway and didn't want them anywhere near the building. And I remember he wrote an article in a magazine when I visited Chelsea saying that something sinister was happening at the DES, HMI were beginning to visit. But he and I became very good friends later, and he later wrote to me and said how helpful he thought I had been to him in Chelsea and so on. And so I mean all that part. And my and large, I mean I found that wherever I went I was welcome, people were incredibly good to me, and still are, I mean I meet them and they are, you know, I have good friends in the system. I thought the role we played was really, you know, quite an important one. We tried to rationalise the system in a kind of, in a kind of very open and human way, you know, it was informal but, there were formal structures, you know, there were regional advisory inspectors whose job it was to advise the regions how to set up their total system, to keep some sort of balance over the region and consequently nationally, because they all met together. But it was a very flexible, generous-minded system I think.

Yes it sounds very interesting.

Yes.

Now I think on that positive note, we're going to wind up. Thank you very much.

My pleasure. I hope I've said something useful.

Oh I'm sure you have.

End of F5903 Side B

End of Interview

F5897 Side A

Interview 2nd September 1997

Bernard Gay was born on the 11th April 1921. BG describes the appalling conditions of his early years where he never met his father and only saw his mother a few times. He describes being brought up in Exmouth by a 'baby farmer'. BG gives a strong sense of the real poverty of the period in the absence of State support. He describes moving to a waifs and strays home by the age of 9 where he stayed until aged 14. BG tells of the harshness of life at the home as well as the deprivation in there being no literature or music etc - the sole form of entertainment being play. BG tells of making play theatres from shoe boxes. Vividly remembers receiving tangerines from his mother as a gift at Christmas.

Bernard Gay talks of not being able to understand why he was in the home, suggesting it might have been because of his father's absence. BG tells of his surprise at discovering that he had two sisters when he went to find his mother when he was 16. He describes staying with the family for a year or so and then moving on as there was nothing to hold him there. Suggests he resented seeing so little of his mother. BG remembers Miss Wellaway as being very cruel. He tells of his move to the children's home coming out of his stealing sixpence from Miss Wellaway. Talks briefly of his father, as well as referring to his mother's family owning a hotel in Torquay.

BG describes how the home had a printing works attached to it where all the more intelligent children went to work. BG suggests that he was not considered bright enough and went to work as a gardener for a C. of E. priest. He describes running away after some time and went to stay with his mother where he lived for 18 months. Refers to his total lack of education and being confronted by an 11-plus paper where he had not been taught the material for any part of the maths paper. Describes a lack of support by any adults at the time except from an occasional teacher, including an arts and crafts teacher. BG talks of being forced to write copperplate and asking to revert to his normal script after which he was able to write well.

Refers to his mother having found a new American partner. BG describes avidly reading the complete works of Dickens to the fury of the new man in his mother's life. BG talks of his mother running a café. BG describes his sense of his mother being very hard-working in a tough time during the Depression. When he left his rediscovered family BH did not return or keep in touch. Suggests that much of this period was so negative that he has repressed the memory of it.

At this time BG joined the Merchant Navy just before the outbreak of World War II. Describes an incident where he saw his mother in the street and chose not to make contact. At this point BG recognises the deep resentment that his mother, who knew where he was, had chosen only to spend a few hours with him during his early life. BG suggests that his time with the Merchant Navy was the beginning of his life, not only in terms of travelling but in opening up the world of literature and the arts.

Talks of his role as steward and gunner in the wartime Merchant Navy and the way that this civilian organisation related to the armed forces. BG tells of the flexibility in recruiting and moving within the system. He describes seeing American escort ships being sunk before the US was officially in the war. BG talks of his good fortune at being forgotten while on sick leave which led to his spending five months in New York. He talks of seeing active colour prejudice while in America.

F5897 Side B

Bernard Gay returns to his time in New York which turned out to be very fruitful in extending his understanding of the arts. He talks of being introduced to an artist, Muriel Hannah, with whom he struck up a mutually beneficial relationship, as a result of which he was introduced first-hand to modern art. He talks of being particularly struck by Picasso and Alexander Calder. BG tells of this induction period finally making him realise that the arts were a possibility for him professionally. Because of lack of knowledge however he started work in a drawing office. In 1947, when he discovered he was eligible for a grant, he applied to Willesden School of Art in the textile design department. Talks of doing some evening classes at St. Martin's before that. Comparing the two environments he commented on the impersonality of the evening classes as well as the sense in which Willesden was a technical college with an art department on the top floor.

Bernard Gay recalls Quentin Crisp modelling at Willesden and describes him in some detail. BG describes the sense in which he was seriously committed to art as a career and how his grant went up when he changed from textile design to fine art. BG talks about the extraordinary talent of Willesden School of Art's principal, J.R. Lockie, for selecting staff-practitioners who subsequently went on to hold key roles in the art education field. BG tells of the different kinds of teaching styles at the college from the practical to the inspirational methods of de Saumarez. Talks of the change of energy downwards when Lockie left. BG tells of returning to St. Martin's for drawing lessons after he had left Willesden, as well as attending the Working Men's College to do lithography.

BG refers to the lack of resources at Willesden including there being no library. Talks of the energies of the Willesden sketch club and his involvement with it. He talks of Stanley Spencer and other established artists coming to do criticisms at the sketch club's monthly meetings. Tells an anecdote of Stanley Spencer explaining how he achieved his huge canvasses in his tiny work environment.

Bernard Gay talks of his failure as a student but of his success as an exhibiting artist, his first picture being shown at the Gimpel Fils Gallery when he was in his second year at Willesden School of Art. BG talks about how he achieved this and the financial arrangements of the period.

F5898 Side A

Bernard Gay talks about surviving as a student, supplementing his grant with work, but not needing much as there wasn't much to buy in the post-war period. He talks of scavenging for material as well as re-using other artists' abandoned canvasses.

BG talks of the 'cultural ethos' of Willesden School of Art, and discusses the arbitrary relationship between talent and future visibility for students leaving art school. Refers to the necessity for a 'spectrum' of abilities in order to survive, including social skills and determination. Talks of building the Lisle Street Gallery for the Artists International Association and sitting on the committee as an example of the sort of energy needed. Talks of aims and objectives being important for his own practice.

Bernard Gay talks about his formal inspiration in landscape in the early years as well as his interest in the nature of painting. Refers to the elitism of art practice as well as the necessity of great historical models to drive one forward. BG talks of finding contemporary art more difficult to fit with this conception of art. Goes on to refer to the destructive effect of American art on European art in the post-war period. Refers to the Willesden School of Art still teaching in the Renaissance model in the late Forties, where European modernist models were unknown and only the English tradition, exemplified by Paul Nash, acted as an inspiration for contemporary practice. BG talks of finally coming to terms with abstraction as he moved towards design as inspiration and practice later in his career. Describes a pair of canvasses on tape as an example of how he made this shift. Gives a chronology to this change moving from the Fifties to the Seventies as well as indicating how other interests affected his practice. Refers to the problem for the artist of repeating his own clichés.

BG gives an indication of how his gregarious nature was an important factor in shaping his career. This led to working for the Design Council as a lecturer on design and design history at a time when it was not much done, as well as lecturing for the Workers' Education Association etc on art history. Refers to exhibiting at Rowland Browse & Delbanco, the Leicester Gallery, the Redfern, Wildenstein, the Piccadilly Gallery and so on. In relation to his teaching and writing activities, Bernard Gay talks of being largely self-taught.

F5898 Side B

Bernard Gay continues talking about his lecturing activities coming not only out of financial necessity but from a bottomless curiosity. Talks of chairing the Design Council's selection panels and this being fed by his learning experience over time. BG discusses the resistance by fine art students to contextual studies coming out of some art historian's inability to communicate effectively between the history and the student's work. Refers to doing this job at Hornsey College of Art during the late Sixties to full houses of staff and students. He sees his success coming out of his enthusiasm. Talks briefly about the Hornsey troubles, suggesting that it was led by the staff - particularly those of the contextual studies and art history departments.

BG returns to the Fifties where he describes the straightforward method of introducing his work to the galleries. BG tells several anecdotes about West End dealers at this time, stressing how unproblematic it all was in terms of the gallery's and the artist's responsibilities. He stresses that there was little support beyond this system unless one was one of the early contracted artists. Talks of exhibiting with the

British council, Local Education Authorities, as well as Art for Schools. BG refers to buying for Camden later in his career.

Bernard Gay talks about his involvement with the AIA from 1948 onwards, referring to the organisation's level of politicality, the picture loan scheme, and the running of the committee. Talks of the distorting relationship when politics becomes involved in art, referring to his own apolitical stand when he has been in positions of judgement and power including his role as committee member and teacher.

F5899 Side A

Bernard Gay talks of his expanding educational role in the period from the mid-Sixties starting with his work at the London College of Furniture where he initially taught drawing to day-release students from industry. BG refers to finding ways of addressing the students' low level of literacy via 'drawing models' so that they could pass their City & Guilds exams. BG describes his role expanding to become art teacher to the whole school where he was able to play an innovative role in terms of curriculum and exhibitions etc. He talks in detail of setting up an Interior Design School within the college. Refers to the courses relying on discretionary grants.

Bernard Gay talks about his developing a series of six design programmes for the BBC at this period, including textiles and concrete, as well as writing on Botticelli.

Talks of his time with the Hampstead Artists' Council and how it led to the establishment of the Camden Arts Centre. Bernard Gay talks about his developing a scheme to facilitate the council allowing the Arkwright Road Library building to become an arts centre. Talks of chairing the Camden Arts Trust for a quarter of a century. BG talks about setting up a leisure art school within the centre, as well as developing a series of didactic exhibitions starting with 'The Artist at Work', followed by a De Stijl exhibition, 'Classics of the Twentieth Century Design', etc.

Refers to the centre's early philosophy of wishing to show distinguished but neglected artists, such as Kenneth Martin and Claude Rogers, rather than young bright stars. Talks of his role at the centre being unpaid but a labour of love, but acknowledges that it did pay dividends by being one of the contributing factors leading to his being invited to work for Her Majesty's Inspectorate. Refers to this appointment finally forcing him to leave artistic practice behind.

F5899 Side B

Bernard Gay continues talking about the politics of the Camden Arts Centre including its relationship to the Camden Council and the Camden Arts Trust. Talks of the Council's increasing involvement leading to the setting up of their own Arkwright Arts Trust to manage their share of the activities at the centre. BG describes how this led to a duplication of administration leading to costly consequences for the centre where large amounts of funding was diverted to staffing rather than exhibitions. BG talks about this process starting fairly early on and increasing over the next twenty years. BG expresses his disillusionment with the way this political over-involvement destroyed the dynamic of the early centre leaving it positioned in the mainstream in a

rather ordinary way at the present time. Talks of how he would have liked it to have developed by serving its own past and present local artists and continuing to rediscover artists and designers who have slipped out of sight. Refers to his gratitude nonetheless to Camden for having the insight to encourage the arts at all.

Bernard Gay returns to discussing his exhibitions including shows at Wildenstein's and the Institute of Contemporary Arts. Talks of the curatorial problems of creating a collection of paintings with reference to the local authority schemes of various kinds. BG refers to the ILEA collection of artefacts being at Camberwell College of Art, but wonders what happened to the painting collection. BG talks about the ICA in the early days. Briefly discusses the mixing of the age groups when he was at art school as a 27-year-old ex-serviceman.

F5900 Side A

Interview 11th september 1997

BG talking about the effect of an accumulation of experience at the start of the 1970s. Refers to his only having one day of formal training for what was to be an extensive career in administration for Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI), as well as the sense of learning 'on the job' in relation to teaching as well. Talks about his own instinct towards a student-centred approach which was unusual at the time. Refers to the development of regionally run courses which were to lead to nationally run courses. Talks about the relationship between academic and administrative hierarchies.

BG discusses his appointment to HMI in 1971. BG refers to a period of involvement with the ILEA (in the Ken Livingstone era) where education was seen as a democratic ideal. He then goes on to talk of his disintegration over time into a 'sort of madness' that began to impinge on the whole idea of democracy. Tells several stories of the way that this thinking filtered down into his personal life but talks of HMI being essentially apolitical and largely untouched by these external activities.

Begins to formalise his experience at HMI. BG talks of learning the ropes as well as being 'mentored' for the first year. BG describes the various support structures, the tasks involved as well as the importance of networking. BG refers to his various roles within the Design Council where at one point he chaired five separate design selection panels. Talks about his fellow panel members and the way decisions were arrived at.

F5900 Side B

BG continues talking about the Design Council and the development of the Crafts Council and the way he had influenced its formation. BG reveals the way in which his activities for HMI operated outwards in terms of influence and development into related areas. BG reinforces the sense of HMI's role being that of 'enablers'. Talks of the Inspectors gaining a powerful overview of current practice which led, for example, to their running conferences so that there could be a forum for dissemination of the best practice to a wide audience of fellow practitioners. BG talks of being in a good position to advise individual institutions at various levels as a result of this wide

insight into fellow institutions in terms of funding, teaching practice etc. He goes on to develop on this overview theme in terms of regional and national planning. Refers to Camberwell being the first art school to offer art history as a result of an Inspectorate intervention (1974/5). Continues talking about his involvement with other initiatives at Camberwell and elsewhere spinning out of his role at HMI.

Still acting under the HMI banner, BG talks about initiating and organising the first 'Young Blood' student exhibition at the Barbican Centre when it first opened, as well as the European equivalent 'Germinations' exhibitions which toured all the participating countries. BG goes on to talk about full inspections in terms of the way the Inspectorate team was structured and the method of debriefing at the college under scrutiny.

F5901 Side A

BG continues talking about HMI in terms of controlling purchasing powers of colleges, as well as enabling them to obtain new premises etc if it was recognised that they had a problem. Talks of helping to set up the DATEC (Design & Art Technicians' Education Council) courses. BG again reinforces the dynamic activities of the HMI resulting, eg, in initiatives such as the first mandatory grants being awarded below degree level. BG talks of his role as an Inspector in saving the scholarships offered by the British School at Rome. Talks about the politically-led demise of the system that he worked in during his time at the HMI leading on to the London Institute.

Describes the structure of the original London Institute as well as its continuing development, referring to it as a higher education corporation with a central management team. Talks of the logic of the original choice of colleges as well as the rationalisation that resulted from the amalgamation. BG talks about the political background in the period running up to the Institute's formation as well as its broader implications for all aspects of education. BG goes on to discuss his feelings about the changes in terms of a 'tougher' system as being largely positive.

F5901 Side B

Bernard Gay continues talking about the London Institute. Talks of being asked by the ILEA to conduct a full inspection of the London College of Printing after he had left HMI. Tells of the impact of the print unions on the staff and students at the college at the time. Returns to the London Institute and his role in sitting on the appointments committee to select the first Rector of the institute, John McKenzie. BG goes on to discuss acting as Chair to the Formation Committee of the London Institute, describing its emerging structure and strategies. BG talks about the response of the art academics to coming under the rule of a businessman. BG discusses the inherited debt problem of the early days.

Bernard Gay goes on to discuss John McKenzie's managerial style in detail and which he considers to be tough but extremely effective, not least in the way in which he effectively deployed the talents of his governors. BG talks about the make-up of

the governing body and standing committees connected with the institute. Bernard Gay talks about the responsibilities of the public servant role of the unpaid governor.

F5902 Side A

Bernard Gay continues talking about the London Institute in several contexts including its overseas activities which John McKenzie is currently taking responsibility for now that he is no longer Rector. BG discusses the benefits and the problems.

BG goes on to discuss a whole set of related responsibilities that he took on during his career finally discussing his teaching at the Royal College of Art in the early Eighties with graduate students on the Industrial Design Engineering Joint Course.

BG refers to this being the period of Jocelyn Stevens' reign and goes on to tell several anecdotes about him including his interest in CHEAD (Conference of Heads of Art & Design Institutions), his fundraising activities and his personal style. BG also talks about his experience of working with CHEAD. BG speaks of his experience of the Royal College in positive terms, referring to Christopher Frayling's ambivalence re career direction before he settled to being Rector.

F5902 Side B

Bernard Gay continues talking about the Royal College in terms of failures in resourcing.

Interview 22nd October 1997

Bernard Gay discusses the experience of being involved in the two phases of the formation Committee of the London Institute which included the ILEA's involvement in the early stages. BG discusses the politicality of the art world and the tensions bred by the London Institute initiative as well as putting it into a broader perspective within higher education changes under Margaret Thatcher. BG talks about the Court of Governors and how it was organised in terms of structure and ability to take action. Bernard Gay attempts to evaluate the effect of the changes in practical terms and in relation to educational values. Refers to the enormous development of physical resources such as libraries and IT facilities but questions the capability of the colleges to make the students use them to the full.

Talks about the insecurity of teaching posts in the early days in relation to the current practice of limited contracts. BG refers to the problems of dead wood staff 'clogging up' the system in the past and the difficulty of getting the right balance between an overprotected and an unprotected system. BG gives an overview of the necessity for the changes as well as identifying a few regrets and possibilities in terms of who came on board at the London Institute and who didn't, as well as who may join in the future.

Bernard Gay discusses the effect of the London Institute on peripheral art schools in London such as Wimbledon and Kingston, referring to the market economy and the competitiveness underpinning current education policies.

F5903 Side A

Continues talking about 'outsider' colleges such as Wimbledon and the Central School of Speech and Drama being potentially more vulnerable than the Institute colleges or the colleges that come under a university umbrella such as Kingston. Returns to talking about ILEA's benefits and problems as a funding body and the way that fed down to the London Institute who had to take on considerable debts. Bernard Gay expresses his concern that potential students from the lower end of the social spectrum will not come to college in the future.

Bernard Gay talks about his personal life, in which he considers himself to have been largely lucky. Recaps on the beginning of his career particularly in terms of the sense of possibility as well as the experience of early poverty. BG talks about his first marriage not taking place until he was in his forties. After a brief discussion of the problems of earnings, BG talks of an emotional backwardness resulting from the harshness of his upbringing affecting his ability to form relationships in his early adulthood. BG talks about an important transitional relationship, as well as long periods of loneliness. He talks of the difficulty of not having a family framework to act as a model for future relationships and the sense in which he has had to be self-taught in this arena.

Bernard Gay talks of the failure of his first marriage, excepting the birth of his two sons of whom he is very proud. BG talks about his desire to create a family as a motivating factor in his decision to marry. BG discusses what he believes to be the correct basis for a lasting relationship which he did achieve in his second marriage.

BG describes meeting his second wife Kate when he was in his fifties and when she was in her early twenties. He talks about the way that their friendship developed into a much closer relationship resulting in marriage and the birth of a daughter and son.

Bernard Gay talks of Kate's tragic death two years ago from ovarian cancer after nineteen years together. Bernard Gay makes it clear that there was an element of medical mismanagement attached to her death in terms of a late diagnosis.

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Bernard Gay continues talking about his wife Kate's death. BG talks about his massive sense of loss, but also the way in which they are both continuing in their children. He refers to his wife's all-encompassing integrity and goodness and the hope that this will be in his children. BG talks about the effect on his children in terms of their awareness of his own age and how that might affect them. Bernard Gay briefly rounds up his experience of life, referring to his successful open heart surgery twelve years ago.

Bernard Gay goes on to quantify what he believes the purpose of a fine art education might be, going on to discuss his feelings about his own art in these retirement years. He identifies his work with HMI as the most significant part of his career.

End of Interview