

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Elizabeth Ewing – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Dorney

7 August 2004

Began her theatregoing career in 1945, early experiences in Sheffield, musical theatre in London 1956, premiere of *Separate Tables*.

KD: I wonder if you could tell me something about why you first started going to the theatre and where you went?

EE: I first started going to the theatre, when I was choosing to go to the things [myself], in 1945, which was when I'd left school and was out at work. And I used to go to the Lyceum Theatre in Sheffield and the resident company for part of the year was Harry Hanson's Court Players. And they did 3 act plays and the actors that I can remember from there: Margaret Diamond, Raymond Jacquerello and Anne Lyon. And some of the plays I saw: *Mary Rose*, by JM Barrie, also his *Dear Brutus*. And then they had touring companies and one of these [plays] was called *Off the Record* and starred Hubert Gregg and Bill Gates. Hubert Gregg was an actor and songwriter, and Bill Gates, he was a very popular BBC radio presenter...

KD: So he was one of the reasons that you went?

EE: Yes if I liked the people in things, and I would read the reviews and go.

KD: And where did you read the reviews? In the local paper or?

EE: Yes. I used to read the local paper, and I used to read any paper that had anything in it about the theatre. So I had quite a good knowledge of what was on in London and what was touring

KD: So what would you [read]? Can you remember any titles? Did you read *The Stage*, for example, or?

EE: I think, I'm not sure, I can remember reading, I think it was the *Daily Telegraph* and there was a theatre writer called WA Darlington and I used to read him, so I got a lot of information from that. And if there were people in it that I knew, at that stage we didn't have television so it was people from the radio that you liked to go and see. SO that was how I came to see *Off the Record* which was a good comedy. I also went to see *Bell, Book and Candle*, I think that was by John van Druten and that was a witchcraft thing that I knew about.

KD: And it had been on in London and transferred?

EE: I think it had, and it was eventually made into a film. Eventually it was. And then another one I saw at the Lyceum was *Lady Frederick* by Somerset Maugham and that had Coral Browne in it, and I always loved to see the big names so I was aware of Coral Browne

KD: So she was already famous?

EE: Oh yes, because she's been dead quite a while and she was quite a good age when she died. That was about an ageing actress with a man younger than her and she didn't think it could be right and she let him see her after the play she was in taking all her make up off and getting down to what she really looked like. So it was... and then a very popular show that toured all the time, *The Desert Song* with John Hanson, he was always known as the Red Shadow. And then I went to, all of those were at the Lyceum, but then we had the Empire, a Moss Empire in Sheffield which doesn't exist now.

KD: Where was that?

EE: Well I think it's Charles St in Sheffield it was, but I was out of Sheffield for a long time and when you come back, things have changed.

KD: So it went while you were gone?

EE: Yes, but that was late 60s and its replaced with shops now, but there, the Empire had a different kind of thing. They had variety shows with assorted acts, like performing dogs and a woman who used to tear up telephone directories and things like that. And then they had somebody well known, and it would be, like a comedian from the radio. Al Read?? Was very popular, he used to read a newspaper and make comments about little snippets of news in a funny way. But what we went, I went with my parents to see Al Read because we loved him on the radio. They'd be the main attraction, but often people would leave the show before the last act to get their bus or tram home. And so when we went to see Al Read he came and did his bit and the last act, which is normally the top of the bill, it was a man playing with a whip doing shapes, I thought it was quite funny. And I also saw, this was someone from radio, the late Beryl Reid, who started out as a comedian on radio playing a character, a naughty schoolgirl called Marlene and another character whose name began with S and when she said it, she used to say, 'did you notice how the spit came out?'. But she went on to be a terrific actress and I saw her, but much much later on in London in a play. And she also did films, *The Killing of Sister George* and she had a wonderful career.

KD: Yeah, she was in the film of *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, wasn't she? She was Kath?

EE: Oh was she? Oh right. And another headliner was Terry Thomas. I think he was someone who, during the war had performed with ENSA, he was in the army and these people, they had these talents. And he was very good at doing these impersonations, and he had these music hall act in which he was a DJ who lost all his records and he ended up having to impersonate requests, things people had requested. And he went on to be very big in films, Terry Thomas. And then you got the London touring shows, but not necessarily, not really, with the cast that they had in London some of them were names that you didn't know. Some of them were at the Lyceum and some of them were at the Empire, and of those I saw *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Oklahoma!*, *Carousel*, *Brigadoon*, *Gay's the Word* with Cecily Courtneidge and she was a very big star, along with her husband Jack Holbert and that was by Ivor Novello. That was sort of a bit of a different kind of show from what he did, and he also did, I also saw of his, at the Lyceum, *Careless Rapture*, that was one of his early ones, *Dancing Years* and *We'll Gather Lilacs*, I'm not sure, there was certainly the song, I'm not sure if the show was called that. It was a wonderful thing, a love story going through certain periods in time, which was lovely. And another play, a straight play I saw at the Lyceum was *Castles in the Air* and that had Jack Buchanan in it. He was a big song and dance man pre-war but often they do turn to just straight acting. Because I liked him, you see you heard a lot of people on the radio you see, and if they came, you could go and see them. Another comical one was *She Wanted A Cream Front Door*, and that had been done...

KD: She wanted?

EE: Yes, it was all about keeping about with the Joneses. And that had been in London. There used to be the Aldywch farces I believe and I think it came from the people who did the Aldwych farces.

KD: So it was a comedy?

EE: Yes,

KD: And was it farce?

EE: Well, it was funny yes. And my parent saw, in London, the original Kiss Me Kate, with Patricia Morrison, [she] was Kate. She was known for the films, very very long hair, and I can't remember who the man was. They saw that, and I had told them to go and see it. They were going to London for the first time.

KD: For the first time ever?

EE: Yes

KD: And this was in 1945?

EE: No, that would be more 50s. I said, I always said, 'you must go to the theatre', and we used to laugh, and I used to say to them if they said to me, Mother used to say, about staying out late or whatever, I would say, 'Oh but you know Mother I'm always true to you in my fashion' and that was a song from Kiss Me Kate. And when they got to London, they went to the theatre and they saw that up on the board, on the pictures outside. And because I'd said that they went to see it. Absolutely loved it.

And then there was also the Sheffield Rep, which was the forerunner of our Crucible.

KD: And they were at the Playhouse?

EE: Yes, that was in Townhead St and they had a permanent company which changed as people did move on. The most memorable thing I saw was there, which was a great favourite of mine always, was Private Lives, Noel Coward.

KD: And who was in that?

EE: Paul Eddington was Elyot and I can't remember who was Amanda. Of course he went on to TV fame from there. A lot of people from Sheffield Rep went onto big things.

KD: Who was in charge there?

EE: Geoffrey Ost was the producer there. The other actors there were Peter Barkworth, Helen Uttley, Rowena Cooper who came to the Crucible recently in the Studio play Birdcalls, which was written by somebody...

KD: :Lesley Glaister.

EE: Yes. And Peter Sallis who was in, still is in Last of the Summer Wine and Wallace and Grommit, and Patrick McGoohan who I used to work with

KD: Did you? At the bank?

EE: Yes he worked at the High St branch and I worked at George St we used to have to meet up each day at the local clearing house to do our cheques and he used to help me, the little junior, do my sums. And he left, he went, the story is he went to Geoffrey Ost, he wanted to act, and he said 'I will sweep the stage if I can just come 'and he ended up as leading man. And then when I was working in London in 1956 he was in the West End in Ring for Catty. It was a play, it was kind of like, the Carry On Series, like Carry on

Nurse, and he did that and then he did Dangerman and The Prisoner and then Hollywood took him and he still appears sometimes in Columbo or things like that.

KD: It was a good breeding ground, Sheffield Rep.

EE: Well I think rep, if you talk to a lot of actors they'll say the best training is rep. And then we always had long running pantomimes, both at the Lyceum and the Empire, and they'd start just before Christmas and they'd run as long as March.

KD: Really, why?

EE: Well they just did. And London always had a lot of pantomimes, at the Palladium and other theatres had them.

KD: All year round?

EE: No, no, they'd start in December and they'd go through to March

KD: So everyone could see it?

EE: Well, they were so popular, I mean Sheffield had two, one at the Empire..

KD: And would you have, you know nowadays they have famous people appearing?

EE: Oh yes, oh yes they had big stars, who always would appear in them. And I can remember, I would always go and see them, and I saw Cinderella at the Empire and that starred Albert Moddley who was a comedian off the radio, he was off a Lancashire, and he used to say 'about 92' which was his catchphrase, and he was Buttons in Cinderella.

KD: But with no accent?

EE: On no, he played it as himself, he was no actor, but he was really cute as Buttons, so that was...

KD: So when the Ivor Novello plays came was it Ivor Novello appearing in them?

EE: No he wasn't in them

KD: But he would have been in London?

EE: Yes, or other people did them. He wasn't particularly a singer as such, he was the musician, wrote the music, and I think that somebody else used to write the words, it was Christopher someone whose name I can't quite remember. There was an actor called Barry Sinclair, I think, used to play parts Ivor Novello would have played but it wasn't always a singing part. And he did make films, he was what they call a matinee idol, Ivor Novello, and I saw, yes I told you about the ones of his...When I was working in London for a while in the 50s I went to a midnight matinee for charity at the Palladium.

KD: A theatre show?

EE: Yes and that was Laurence Olivier was in it doing a number.

KD: And what was it for?

EE: Well it was for some charity I can't remember what now. I know I was working down there.

KD: And when were you down there?

EE: Well that was 1956 I was, I went to work at head office and we could afford to go to all the theatres because they gave us pocket money as well as paying for our accommodation. And when I was there I saw so many shows. And at the Palladium at

the midnight matinee we had to walk back home, back to the hotel in Lancaster Gate because the tubes had stopped and everything. It was wonderful though.

KD: So what was Olivier doing?

EE: Well I think he did that song, that triplets, 'we walk alike, we talk alike, we look alike' and something like 'we hate each other very much'. And they were dressed like babies, I don't know who he did it with.

KD: I've seen the...

EE: Danny Kaye has done it. And they did it in the film with Jack Buchanan. Jack Buchanan late in life was snapped up to go to Hollywood and he made *The Bandwagon* and that was a sort of a stage type movie, you know about a stage person and that midnight matinee was the very beginning of Shirley Bassey, when she was about 16 and she was discovered. She was the girl from, where was it Cardiff? Tiger Bay. Yes and I always remember that I was very impressed with her then, she was one of the ones I remember.

KD: So that was variety acts, the Palladium?

EE: Yes, they were all acts. You get people who like Laurence Olivier who did serious acting who'd go on and do a comic turn. And I saw, while I was there, *Salad Days*, that was a lovely show, Julian Slade, *House Across the Lake* with Flora Robson, and Andrew Cruickshank who used to be in the *Doctor Finlay* series. *Dry Rot* with Brian Rix, and his company followed on from the *Aldwych* farces, you had the *Whitehall* farces and that. I saw *Separate Tables* by Terence Rattigan. I loved anything by Terence Rattigan. Because if I wasn't going to theatre I was reading the plays.

KD: And where would you get the plays from?

EE: From Sheffield Library. And I was also in an amateur dramatics society so it was one of my jobs, along with a friend, to comb through catalogues and find plays we would put on. I've just remembered that's how I came to know a lot about them. And *Separate Tables* was Margaret Leighton who was, oh, a fantastic actress, and Eric Portman.

KD: So this would have been the first production?

EE: Yes, that was in London. And I also saw, this wasn't when I was working there, it was when I was on my way to Paris with a friend and we stayed in London on the Saturday night and we went to see *The Boyfriend*, Sandy Wilson and that was the beginning of that.

KD: So, did you have a preference for musical theatre or?

EE: Well, I loved then, musical theatre, if I go to the theatre and it's a musical the moment the orchestra starts with the overture I'm gone.

KD: Transported.

EE: Yes.

KD: So, how expensive would it have been to go, can you remember?

EE: well it was quite cheap. You used to go the Court Players where I started all this theatre going for 2 for the price of one on a Monday night so that was the equivalent to an old 5 pennies each.

KD: And these were for good seats? Stalls seats or?

EE: No, no we'd go in the gallery for that. When you're young you don't mind sitting, they've improved the galleries since then, they were just benches. But it wasn't

expensive. And in London it wasn't expensive, but I'd got plenty of money because the bank were really paying for it.

KD: So when you went to see *Separate Tables* was it already a phenomenon, were people saying?

EE: Well I knew that it was good and I liked the actress Margaret Leighton particularly and Eric Portman, they were favourites of mine from films and it was just wonderful to go and see all these people in the shows.

KD: How did the audience behave when he [Major Pollock] is found out?

EE: Well, I don't know that I can remember particularly but I know that everyone was really wrapped up in this, I mean I still can see in my head the staging of it, and with Eric Portman.

KD: And was it, because obviously it's not supposed to be, a lavish set?

EE: No, no it was quite simple, yes. And there were other characters as well. There were a young couple, I think they were a honeymoon couple in it

KD: Yes, they're living down there aren't they?

EE: Yes, and of course it is Margaret, when they made the film they had different people for the two stories, whereas when you saw the London play it was Margaret Leighton she was the downtrodden daughter of the old lady and she was also the other person, she paid both parts. And Eric Portman played them both.

KD: Really? So who played the wife that comes back? Was that Margaret Leighton?

EE: I can't remember, no, this is along time ago, it's what 50 years ago?

KD: When did you go down to London?

EE: 56 I was working in London, through part of the summer.

KD: Oh, so what were her costumes like? She wasn't?

EE: Well, they were present day I think, I really don't remember the costumes of those

KD That's really interesting, I'll have to find some production photos.

EE: Yes, I also saw *The Pyjama Game* in London.

KD: That was already famous in America?

EE: Yes, it came from America, Edmund Hockridge and Joy Nichols. She was on a big radio show called *Take it From here* and it was a big thing when she got the part in that, to play the part of Babe in *Pyjama Game*. And I had seen Edmund Hockridge in *Sheffield in Carousel* with my friends, we waited at the stage door to see him.

KD: Did you? Didn't you see someone else at the stage door and he told you off? Something about you shouldn't be going to the theatre you should be going to the cinema?

EE: Oh no! This was an anecdote about Donald Wolfitt. He was in *Shakespeare* at the Lyceum and people were queuing at the Library Theatre, at the back of the Library for the cinema there and he told them they shouldn't be going they should be watching his play. So that was that.

KD: Oh I see.

EE: Yes, no it was great going to the stage door to see Edmund Hockridge and then we saw him in *The Pyjama Game* and that was lovely.

KD: And was that expensive?

EE: Well, they weren't terribly expensive even in London, but then at the same time I had more money in London than I had here. And there was a thing which you could do, when you went to the theatre with my parents, because I know I went to see Brigadoon with them, we would go in the stalls. And I don't think it can have been expensive because they wouldn't have paid loads of money. But when I went with friends we often went in the gallery because if you went in cheaper seats you could afford to go to more things. But there was this system in London and I can't quite remember how it worked, but if you wanted, I know we did it for Saturday matinees and I know we did it for *Sailor Beware*, you paid sixpence for a little fold-up stool, but then you could go away, but it guaranteed you a place in the gallery.

KD: Really? So you pay 6p, you would get the stool from the ticket office

EE: Yes! Yes! Or there was this little man with them or something.

KD: And then you could go in, watch it, come back out and go back in?

EE: Well, no. You would go in, say the show started at 2, if you went in at 12, 1 or something, pay your sixpence for the stool, then you could go off, have something to eat, come back. I'm not sure just how it did work because it sounds very precarious doesn't it? But I know that when I was going down to London and you talked to people, I had a friend in the bank who had already done one of these London sessions and she sort of told me about things, so you know, you're eager to do it. Or we used to, if we didn't do that, the big booking agent then, I mean there was no theatre tickets half-price place, or all these little agencies, the big one, was Keith Prowse and booked your seats. We used to book them for the evening to go and book ahead for the better seats. Oh and another one I went to was *The Crazy Gang* at the Victoria Palace. They were a very big thing, Flanagan and Allen, Nervo and Knox, Norton and Gould and Eddie, Eddie somebody, Eddie Gray/Grey and it was a lot of, very good

KD: And that was variety as well?

EE: Yes, yes, they used to have very long runs at the Victoria Palace.

KD: So was there much difference between the kind of audience who would go to variety or musical than those who would go to the more serious?

EE: I think there probably would be, I think, I mean a lot of people loved to go to the variety shows because they had all these people from the radio you see. I mean I liked to go to, I liked to see names, people that I knew, I'd heard of, read about and, but I had a mixture really, but musical has always been my favourite, along with the serious plays with the good people in, like seeing Flora Robson and Margaret Leighton, Eric Portman, those people. And we saw Peggy Mount she was in *Sailor Beware*. These were first runs. Went to the Savoy Theatre which tended to do D'Oyly Cart, because they call them the Savoyards there didn't they?

I saw *Spider's Web* there, Agatha Christie's *Spider's Web* and Margaret Lockwood who was a big movie star after the war, she was in it, at the Savoy. And then I saw *The Reluctant Debutante*, I think that was at the Cambridge Theatre, and that was the debut of Anna Massey, the daughter of Raymond Massey and a lovely film star, called I think, Adrienne Allen. And Daniel Massey's sister, and she was, now she seems to play very prim people, and sometimes sinister, because she was Mrs Danvers in a production of *Rebecca* I think on tv a long time ago. But she was the kind of giddy teenager in the *Reluctant Debutante*, that was by William Douglas Home, who didn't want to be presented at court. And I can see her now, how she was rebelling against it, and she got

fantastic reviews. You see, I used to read all the reviews and then I got a chance to see that in London.

KD: So, do you remember going to see any Tennent productions, HM Tennent?

EE: I don't know which were Tennent productions but I was certainly aware of HM Tennent because I used to read every word in the programme, I read everything to do with theatre and I certainly knew that they were a production company. I used to think at first there was one person called HM Tennent, then I realised, I discovered along the way that it was an actual production company.

KD: because they're very famous for the kind of sumptuous productions aren't they? They would have Balmain dresses, yards of silk, so that would obviously be a huge spectacle. Do you remember if there were any productions that went to that you remember purely in pictorial terms?

EE: well I remember of course, The Boyfriend and the era of the Charleston and all those lovely clothes. I remember those.

KD: Because this is still the era of rationing isn't it?

EE: Well yes, the rationing did go on, and clothing coupons, after the war. So I suppose it did limit what they could do with the clothes.

KD: But certainly your hunger for those kind of clothes must have grown? Cut 28:53

EE: Another one which I saw in the 1960s at the Cambridge and that was the beginning of it, the show. It was Half A Sixpence with Tommy Steele who had started life as a skiffle player.

KD: So he was already famous?

EE: Yes he was known, yes. He did all these songs. And they did this show, it was adapted from HG Wells, Mr Kipps I think, about a young man who worked in a London store who came into money. And they made it into a musical show, because they'd started to do that and Marty Webb was in it. And she must have been very young because she's still doing things, Marty Webb. And that was very good, that was a rare day out I had in London then because I was married with family by then.

KD: So whenabouts would that have been?

EE: That would be ... 63 because I can do it by the age of one of my children.

KD: So did you notice, I know you know about this idea that there was a shift in the kind of theatre was after 1956 when we got the angry young man, kitchen sink. Your experience doesn't really reflect that, does it? What you were going to see?

EE: No, I think Look Back in Anger was the start of the kitchen-sink wasn't it, and that was at the Royal Court, well I only went to the Royal Court for the first time this year. Because when that was on there I was up in Sheffield then, and you didn't go down to London. I was lucky to have the experience of working down there, as well as seeing the Sheffield things.

KD: That was on while you were working down there wasn't it? It started in May 1956.

EE: Did it? Well I couldn't have included it in my list, but then I read more about, and because I couldn't go and see it, I got the book.

KD: Oh you did? Who did you read talking about it? Who was talking about it that you read?

EE: Well I'd have read the reviews in the papers about it, and a lot was said about it.

KD: Yes Kenneth Tynan wrote about it a lot

EE: Yes that's right and John Osborne came to the fore with that. And because I loved reading plays anyway, I always used to do amateur dramatics, I can remember reading *Look Back In Anger* while my eldest daughter was a baby in a pram in the garden and I hoped she wouldn't wake up so I could go on reading the play.

KD: Did you ever get to go and see it?

EE: No, only on film. It was done on film wasn't it? But that was all. Other things, different things I saw, the seaside had summer shows, when we went to the seaside on holiday. Some of them were awful.

KD: ok, so where did you go the seaside?

EE: Well I used to go from here, from Sheffield I lived in, and you used to go to Bridlington or Scarborough and they used to have the seaside concert party. And I always remember, there was this man, there's always the token tenor and the token soprano and the token tap-dancer and there's the comedian on. And there was a man singing a song about, it might have been something like 'ol man river, toil all day' and he was going on something like this with his arms as if he was hitting... and the sound came, he wasn't making the sound, and me being inquisitive, looked round the side and there was a man at the back in the wings, with this club. And they were very bad, but Blackpool was an absolute mecca for shows. People who were in variety always wanted to get a season at Blackpool because they had 3 piers there, the Queen's Theatre, the Winter Gardens theatre and the Grand Theatre. And I remember going to see the Beverley Sisters there because I had an aunt who lived there and that was the show. And they were very big in those days, the Beverley Sisters and that was the show that I chose to go to. Oh and in Bristol I saw variety shows, you see they used to travel round these variety shows, and I was visiting Bristol prior to going to live there and Anthony Newley he was top of the bill.

KD: He was doing variety?

EE: Oh yes! Yes! Singing, 'I'll never let you go? Why? because I love you' quite a nice melody.

KD: So what time was this?

EE: That was 1960 about 1960 when I went to see Anthony Newley in Bristol.

KD: And did you go because it was Anthony Newley?

EE: Yes! Oh he was very popular! And afterwards I wondered why ever I wanted to go. You know, he was sort of big, and the things that he sang.

And then of course he went into big productions with the music by Lesley Briccuss, *Stop The World, I Want to Get Off!*

KD: Yes, he wrote that didn't he?

EE: Well he probably did yes, along with Lesley Briccuse. And he ended up, because I think he's dead now, he did *Scrooge*, he went to that. And then of course he went to America and married Joan Collins briefly. So yes, there were a lot of things to choose from. There used to be a theatre at the Attercliffe Palace in Sheffield.

KD: Really?

EE: Oh yes! And they used to have things there were that perhaps a bit risqué. But I [35:03] went to a very good amateur performance of *The Country Girl* and there was a girl in it who was an amateur actress, there were some really good amateur actresses

and singers, we still have in Sheffield, Sheffield teachers and Croft House. And there was a girl called Marcia Ashton who was in The Country Girl and she was wonderful and she became a professional. And I last saw her as, she got in as an actress in Brookside when it still going. She was the mother of Patricia, Jean she was called. It packed up didn't it? So it was quite interesting when you'd seen somebody in the amateur theatre, because it was like with Patrick McGoohan, well he wasn't an amateur theatre he was rep, but you know.

KD: And in what way was the stuff at the Attercliffe Palace risqué?

EE: Well there might have been some nudity I think, maybe, I'm not quite [sure], I know that one didn't go there.

KD: Was it a club theatre then?

EE: No, no, no it was down amongst the steelworks, when the steelworks were all still functioning, and it was, they were acts that wouldn't have been considered good enough to go to the Empire.

KD: How would they have got round the Lord Chamberlain, I wonder?

EE: I don't know, all I know is that my friends and I, we didn't go to the Attercliffe Palace because they would be acts that we didn't know. And we just liked the big names really, people we admired off the radio, and then of course television came on and you like to see those. But they were acts that weren't considered brilliant, although I'll tell you who did go there, he made a name for himself after the war, it was Arthur somebody and he used to do a good act, a very funny act, and I think Nicholas Parsons was his straight man. It's just coming back to me.

KD: Oh really? Not Arthur Mallard?

EE: No, no, no, no. I can't remember the other name, it might come back to me eventually. I seem to remember him doing an act where he was a soldier and he'd got a gun and he had a bloodstained bandage round his head/ Isn't it funny? I haven't thought about this for years. And he became very popular, there was nothing nasty about his act but I think there were some things that your mother wouldn't have liked you to see. Perhaps.

KD: Right. That's really interesting, I didn't even know there was an Attercliffe Palace.

EE: No it's long gone, but I did go once down to Attercliffe.

KD: To see?

EE: The Country Girl. 'Under the dear old ... [inaudible]' And I also went to see another good amateur group, Student Prince.

KD: That's the name of the group or the play?

EE: No no no, The Student Prince is Romburg, Siegfried Romburg. 'Drink, drink let the toast start'?

KD: No, I don't have the encyclopaedic knowledge you do!

EE: Oh yes, well, I go back a long way.

KD: So, were you aware of the Lord Chamberlain?

EE: Well, I think I did know about it, that there were things that couldn't be done. There used to be something called the Lord's Day Observance Society as well that used to stop things, I think. I seem to remember that, but it didn't interest me particularly because none of it affected me in anyway. I always had plenty of things to go to.

KD: So you weren't ever aware of something being turned into a club performance or anything like that?

EE: No, no.

KD: You didn't see *Saved* or, I can't remember what it's called, *A Patriot for Me* or any of those?

EE: No. Because is that John Osborne, *A Patriot for Me*.

KD: Yes and it has this huge gay ball scene where everyone was in drag and that's one of the things that the Lord Chamberlain objected to

EE: Oh I see. No I wasn't interested. I think that, John Osborne, it was really a period then when I didn't do a lot of theatre because I was married and had young children. I mean that trip to see *Half a Sixpence* was a rare experience of going to London. And it was only then in the 70s when the children were old enough for me to take that I started them off quite young.

KD: So is there anything memorable that you took them to see?

EE: Well, it comes out of the period, it would have been in the 70s. Stella will tell you, her sisters were at school, she wasn't, so the first thing she saw was, I took her to see *Showboat* in Southampton. It was an amateur production but excellent, that was her very first thing, *Showboat*. And then, when they were bigger, Stella I felt was too young to go to London, you know the big London theatres, and we went to see *Charlie Girl* with Anna Neagle. She'd been a person who sang and danced and her name was really Marjorie Robertson and then she changed it to Anna Neagle. And she did a lot of films after the war, she married a film producer called Herbert Wilcox and they did this *Charlie Girl*. And she was quite old, 60s and she was a mother in it and she danced and could still do high kicks and everything. And it was the era of pop groups, Gerry and the Pacemakers and Gerry Marsden he got a role as the Cockney boy who goes and works at the country house and falls in love with the daughter, whose more of a tomboy, Charlie, and likes tinkering with motor cars and things. They redid it, a good few years on with the American, I saw it again, with Cyd Charice, a big star from American movies, she came over and did it. And I don't know then if it was Joe Brown or Paul Nicholas that did it, the boyfriend role. But that was more recently.

KD: It must have been Joe Brown because Paul Nicholas wouldn't have been old enough would he?

EE: Well Paul Nicholas is not all that young is he?

KD: I'm not sure. When would it have been, in the 70s?

EE: No it would have been redone in more the 80s.

KD: Oh right, sorry, I didn't realise.

EE: And then we went to see, when Stella was old enough to go up to London, we went to see, oh what was it? *Annie*, fantastic, yes we loved it.

KD: And when you were down, you lived in the New Forest didn't you? Did you ever venture down to Chichester to the Festival Theatre?

EE: No, because you see I have never driven and you couldn't, it's always been one of my ambitions to go to Chichester, but it wasn't possible to get there because of the getting back. I used to go in the 80s to Winchester, to the things that came there because you could get a train to Winchester from my village and catch the mailtrain coming back from London. And that's when I did a lot of theatre with my daughters because we'd go to London for the day, and that was so cheap, you could do a trip to

London on a cheap ticket if you ate enough cornflakes and you got vouchers for reduced train tickets. And you could go to London, you could see a show, and you could have a meal out and you could go to an exhibition on £20.

KD: For four of you?

EE: No just for me, but was cheaper for the girls because their tickets were half price. But it was really good, but that was of course much later, in the 80s that we did a lot of that.

KD: Did you have a favourite of the post-war actors, you know Richardson, Olivier, Gielgud?

EE: Well, I was always for so long into these musical shows because they changed so much with the war. Because, before the war, not that I really went to those, except I did go to Whitehall cinema when I was a tiny little girl, they were, the shows hadn't a story. And then the shows started, with Rogers and Hammerstein, an Irving Berlin did Annie Get Your Gun. And Oklahoma! and Carousel were adopted from novels and it was an entirely different kind of thing and there was so much in them. And the music was absolutely wonderful. And then of course they did My Fair Lady which was taken from Pygmalion and I just loved the music. And in those days you would come out of the theatre humming the music.

KD: Would you ever buy the records?

EE: Oh yes! I've got the records and I've now got CDs with them on because I just love them. But at the same time I did like a serious play, and now I've got to the stage where I love a really serious meaty play, something really meaty to make you think. And if you go with one of your daughters you discuss it for

KD: For hours.

EE: Yes, I mean that's all part of the enjoyment.

KD: So can you tell me anything about when you were first going, and over time, people's dress and things would change?

EE: Yes, well, yes. You were very much more formal.

KD: Even in the gallery?

EE: Oh yes! Yes you know, I mean women then, I certainly didn't, go out in trousers. They were things that you'd potter about in at home, or wear to a picnic, they weren't jeans and all that. And I mean, you used to dress, the favourite thing was, you'd have a matching, a skirt, with a matching jacket. And you called it, I mean nowadays you say a 2 piece don't you? But you called it a costume.

KD: Yes, I've heard the expression.

EE: And you had the costume, and this would maybe become your best outfit, you'd go off into town and you would buy a hat that matched this costume and shoes that were right. And then you would have the gloves, and, you see we wore hats, and the hat that became fashionable was the beanie hat, which was like a skull cap with a roll round it and a feather on the side of it. And you had knitted hats, and I wore Kangol hats to go out with, and I would even go out on a date with a boyfriend and I would always wear a hat. And I had a red one, the Kangol hats, they still make them I think, but it was like a pill box hat, like what Jackie Kennedy used to wear. And we used to like to dress like the film stars did. I used to love to go to films and we'd see what people were wearing, and then with being in a family where my father was a tailor and my mother an expert seamstress. And we'd copy things that the film stars wore. I remember I had dresses with

inverted pleats where the inverted part was a different colour from the rest of it because we'd seen it in the films.

KD: And this is what you'd wear to go to?

EE: Oh yes! Yes. And in the winter you'd wear a nice smart coat and as I say, always the gloves and the hat and the handbag.

KD: And did you keep gloves and hat on in the theatre?

EE: Oh yes, people did. Because I always remember a cartoon at the time in the paper. Someone sitting in a theatre or a cinema and there was a woman in front who was wearing a hat. And the person tapped her on the shoulder to remove the hat, and when she took the hat off she'd got masses of hair and it spread out even more! But yes you did wear hats, it was quite the thing to wear, and I don't quite know when that stopped. I think there was a sort of revolution with things in the 1960s, I think the Beatles changed a lot of things and those groups. And then your life changed, you went from being the smart person about town with the decent job and everything or whatever and then you married, you had children and things were changing all the time then. And clothes became much more casual, you certainly wouldn't wear the hats, gloves and things. You'd wear, separates became such a big thing, really in what you wore. I mean I used to wear, they are fashionable again now, hand knitted jumpers, jumpers you buy looked like hand knitted. Always hand knitted, you had these jumpers, Fair Isle, lot of Fair Isle, I mean I had a Fair Isle beret that I knitted all in these colours and that. And then I had, you did embroidery, I know I had a velvet, felt jacket with little points and little sleeves and my mother put transfers on it of emblems of the British Isles. And I embroidered them all, the thistle, and the daffodil, and the rose and the shamrock. I wore that with a grey pleated skirt.

KD: And how did people behave in the theatre, because there's an image that the people in the gallery were always quite badly behaved, and they would boo and hiss and talk through things. People like Noel Coward were always complaining about their behaviour

EE: Well, I never experienced that. I can't say I ever did. I think you might have got it at the Attercliffe Palace more but then they didn't do Noel Coward.

KD: No, but just generally, people would...

EE: People really, as far as I can remember, were always very well behaved. I can't remember, and as you can see I've been to loads of things, I can't remember when there was ever an incident like that.

KD: No heckling?

EE: No, but I think the things I chose to see, people also chose them for the same reason, because they wanted to see them, they liked the people in them, they'd read about them and they thought that they could be good. But I don't remember.

KD: Did you ever go and see anything with someone you were desperate to see that was really disappointing? Did any of your stars ever let you down?

EE: Not in those days no. I think as I've got older I have become more critical actually, of people. I saw one recently with a filmstar in who was, at the National, and she was the worst person in it. The rest were very good indeed. It was Charlotte Rampling in *The False Servant* and it's a play adapted from the French and way back in time, but they set it in the 1930s and, oh, the clothes were magnificent, the women. Those wonderful clothes cut on the cross. And Charlotte Rampling did look lovely but in it but her acting was awful. Very poor. Very hesitant, 2 or 3, a couple of places at least where she

stumbled on the lines. But the other people, Anthony Calf, who's someone you see on TV, he was very good. And a person called Adrian Scarborough. Very good play, wonderful set, and another thing that's changed in the theatre is the way they are done. Because you never saw a stage show where the curtains didn't come back and then at the end of one act they close, but now you go into the theatre and the curtains are already back and the scene is set. And there's so much, bits of revolving stage they use, and I find all that very interesting. You know, the presentation and this is of course, this new production I've just seen where most of the set was done with glass, and they had like a fancy sitting room with really elegant 1930s furniture and then it had a conservatory going off it, and it was all done with glass panels and some of them would open for some of them to walk through. And you could see through the glass, like a wonderful banquet laid out, heaped with bowls of fruit and everything. The set was absolutely amazing and there's so much scope now from that they can do, and it's very rare to go and see anything. And of course you get these things now like the Crucible, in the round, and I go to the Almeida in London, the new, refurbished Almeida and that is just all open stage. But very very interesting I think if you follow the theatre for a long time. It's really good.

KD: Ok. Well thank you very much Elizabeth. That's lovely.

EE: Quite alright.