

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Pamela Howard – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Kate Harris**

**9 November 2005**

Scenographer and director Pamela Howard on her memories of training at Birmingham Rep; Relationship between directors and designers in the fifties; Watching the Berliner Ensemble in London; Watching Arnold Wesker's plays at The Belgrade Theatre; Jocelyn Herbert; Working at Birmingham Rep as a professional designer; Meeting Helene Weigel at the Old Vic, 1965; Impact of Berliner Ensemble; Changes in theatre design.

KH: This is an interview on the 9 th November 2005 with Pamela Howard. Can I just confirm I've got your permission to use this interview for the British Library Archive?

PH: Yes you have my permission thank-you

KH: If I could just start by asking when you first started working in theatre as a designer- your first experiences

PH: Well when I first started is perhaps curious because I'm not quite sure myself when I first started. But when I first started was in 1954 when I went as a student to Birmingham Art College or as it was called at the time City of Birmingham College of Arts and Crafts, and they asked me what subject I wanted to specialise in, and because I'd read- I was only sixteen at the time- and because I'd read what you could do, and I'd seen that there was theatre design, I said, 'Oh I want to do theatre design' and they said, 'You can't' and I said, 'Oh dear why not?' and they said, 'well because there aren't any students', and it turned out that the teacher on the course was Finlay James who was the assistant designer at the Birmingham Rep to Paul Shelving and Paul Shelving who was already elderly, was the designer who had designed, with Sir Barry Jackson, who died but two years earlier- '52 he'd died, but with Sir Barry Jackson had done all the Shaw plays at the Malvern Festival. And Finlay James who was this young, rather weird Scotsman, was supposed to be running a theatre design course and being Paul Shelving's assistant. But he had absolutely no students so of course they said to me 'well you can't do this' but eventually I managed to go down to the old Birmingham Rep in Station Street and speak to Finlay James and he said 'Oh yes you can come and do theatre design' but what he really meant was I could work as an unpaid assistant at The Birmingham Rep for four years and that's indeed what happened. And I have to say it was about three years before I realised that the Birmingham Rep was not the Art College because I thought it was, I hadn't any idea and I didn't even realise that people who worked there got paid. I mean I did used to see people with brown envelopes on a Thursday and faintly wonder what they were, but it never occurred to me in a million

years that you could get paid. So that's really how I began. I began when I was an art student but my art student years were working at The Rep and starting as a bucket cleaner, for- who became a very great friend- Daphne Dare, who was Finlay James or Jimmy as we called him, his first assistant and I was the bucket cleaner and later on, Daphne Dare who sadly died, two or three year ago, became my next door neighbour and she ended up doing my technical drawings and working for me so it was a strange reversal of roles. But that's how I began really.

KH: What kind of work were you doing on a day to day basis?

PH: Well on a day to day basis I was doing work which nobody would do now but one thing I was doing was that, Jimmy, Finlay James, he used to draw his costume designs in pencil outline and then he would put Y for yellow and B for Blue and R for Red and I would colour them in. Well I can't imagine me asking one of my students to do that because they just wouldn't do it but I thought it was wonderful I mean I thought it was absolutely fabulous! So a lot of those drawing that you'll see in the archive were in fact coloured in by me. So that was one thing and then I used to clean buckets for Daphne and Daphne was the main scene painter and then in between everything else, we had to make yards and yards and yards of dead leaves which were usually ivy leaves, sometimes they were other leaves, and they were always dead. They had to look dead and they were cut out of canvas and they made your hands sort of bleed and you put wires down each of the sort of veins of the leaf and they were wired on to a rope and whenever anyone had nothing to do they had to make dead leaves and the reason for that was, that the kind of plays they were doing at the Rep at the time were always plays like The Potting Shed and The Chalk Garden which had lots of leaves in and there were always flats of scenery but they never ever met together properly so you always had to drape leaves over them to disguise the fact that they didn't meet. So there was an endless call for- and Jimmy used to say, 'Oh you'd better make some more leaves dear' and that's what we'd do, so we were always making leaves and I thought in my naïve and I now see childish way, I thought that in order to be a designer, I thought that you probably started with dead leaves and then you graduated to live leaves and then probably you went to flowers and in fact they did do a play called Lizard on the Rock and I made all the bougainvillea and I thought that was fantastic because it was pink and made of scenic gauze so I thought I was really getting somewhere. And then I thought when you'd got to sort of flowers you probably got to design something so that's what I imagined in my naïve way. But that's what I did and then I also, of course I learnt scene painting and Sir Barry Jackson was still alive, he was very elderly but his idea of good scene painting, he liked anything that was cheap, and his idea of good scene painting was if you could get canvas and make it look like velvet, he thought that was terrific. And if you could paint a bookcase in perspective with the light coming across the spines of the book and so that you could see the lettering on the spines, kind of picked out in highlights, he thought that was very good. Sir Barry Jackson had a house in Malvern and he always liked to do plays that had windows in because he used to take the curtains that we'd painted on the set and put them up in his house and I never went to dinner at his house because I was much too young but people told me that if you got to go to dinner at Sir Barry Jackson's house one of the things he most enjoyed was saying, 'Do you like my new curtains' and they would say, 'Gosh they must be very expensive? Velvet from Paris?', and he'd say, 'No, from the theatre'. So I think the choice of those plays in those latter years was fairly dictated by whether they had a window in them or not. I know that this isn't a very grand history, maybe this is the other side of grand histories, but that's how it was. So of course I, and I learnt wonderfully to turn my hand

to anything and that included making bits of costume, and as I've written in the book [PH's book *What Is Scenography?*] about going up-to the costume people. The costume people were up in heaven up at the top in this attic and the people who made the scenery were kind of like the guardians of Hades down in the depths and we were sort of in the middle working with all these poisonous materials that we didn't know were poisonous at the time and I think that the sort of overall impression. I used to hear all the time, they used to say, this was the phrase, in fact Daphne and I, just before she died were talking about this, they used to say, 'G.B wouldn't like this' or 'G.B would think that was very good' and I used to think it was something to do with Great Britain because my own family were not British, they were from a Jewish refugee family, so I imagined that G.B must be, but of course it wasn't, it was Bernard Shaw and although he was dead that was their point of reference. So they would say, 'Oh I don't think G.B would like this' and I used to think it was something about being British, I didn't really know what it was about. But on the other hand it was the most fantastic training and I now look at young designers and they can't do a quarter of what I could do. My training, my art training really began when I left there and went up to The Slade School of Art as a fine art student in '58 but those four years were incredible.

KH: Was there much interaction between the people working on stage design and sets and things, and the directors and the cast?

PH: I would say none, absolutely none, we were totally, totally separate and certainly the actors never spoke to us at all and I can't remember whether I wrote about this in my book but the truth of the matter was that that was still the era when actors and actresses dressed up to go to rehearsals. I mean they absolutely would not have gone as people do now, in jeans and sneakers, well we didn't even have those then. But you know and they called each other Mr and Miss and wore hats and all the ladies had their nails very polished and little fur kind of coats and often hats and men had bow ties and they kind of knew their lines before they came to the rehearsals so there was none of that finding your way through it, they were expected to know

KH: When they arrived

PH: Yes, when they arrived.

KH: How were the director's wishes as to the stage designs communicated to the people making and designing them?

PH: Well I think that Finlay James and Paul Shelving had probably what I suspect was the briefest meeting and then they went away and they did a model and the director saw the model and approved it or disapproved it and then when it actually came to getting it on the stage it was just expected that the whole thing would have to be repainted and everybody would be up all night. And Jimmy always used to say, 'Oh it'll be alright when it's lit.' But it was all, part of it was that you stayed up all night re-doing the costumes because when it actually came to it the director didn't like it or something like that and I think the word collaboration hadn't properly been invented except that, well I don't even know that it had been invented by Peter Brook, who of course had

already been there [at Birmingham Rep] and done things at this time. But even he was just, he did work with Paul Shelving but I don't think it was remotely a collaboration I think it was more or less Peter Brook saying 'I want this' and Paul just going off and doing it really. The general thing which is so different now, was that a design was expected to be no more than a background in front of which actors acted. So as long as the actors knew where the entrance would be, nothing else, it didn't sort of impinge on them and because the actors were always facing out front, half the time they never knew what was behind them, they never saw it. So if you talked to them later they had no idea, absolutely no idea and that's what it was like in those days.

KH: In your book you talk about the change in design, in theatre design from kind of the 50's onwards- would you be able to talk a little bit about that- what you think the changes have been?

PH: Well I think there was an enormous change. I think I should just add though that although a lot of the plays that I worked on, as I said at the time when I was there, which is the 50's, we can look at the 50's in terms of music and writing and all sorts of things and there is kind of sameness about that. But the theatre, The Birmingham Rep Theatre had of course done the first modern dress productions of Shakespeare and had in its time been quite avant garde but it was not immune from that sort of deadly fifties thing but then what happened was that well several things happened, I've got to say these things in parallel, the first thing was that The Berliner Ensemble came to London and people went to see it, we all went to see it, in a coach as I remember and I think it was quite simple to imagine that we'd never seen anything like that before and we'd never seen such simplicity and such beauty and such power, I mean they certainly didn't have dead leaves I can tell you! So that was very, very, very impressive but on the other hand, they were foreign, so there was an element, especially in Birmingham, where you went oh well they're just foreign and then they're German aren't they so it's nothing to do with us really. But that was an important thing in I suppose awakening our awareness but much more important than that in terms of Birmingham was the fact that, and I have to sort of precede this by a story- I don't think I wrote this in the book, I hope I didn't, but anyway I can say it for this. There was a young man in the company, in those days they had people called, they were called spear carriers, now we call it players cast and these were young people who were just brought in and they did anything, ASM or anything else. And there was this one young man who came, and he was completely different from anybody else, the first thing was he wore a thing which we'd never seen in Birmingham called jeans and I'm talking 1958 here, well we'd never seen jeans in Birmingham and he wore a thing called a T-Shirt instead of a proper shirt, which we were completely amazed about and he had a beret on his head and he said, 'Fuck' and we'd never, absolutely never heard that word in Birmingham, I mean we simply hadn't, and that was the young Albert Finney and he was there just doing anything. Anyway he told us, he got to know us, he was the first actor I think we had ever known. He got to know us and he said that not far away in fact only forty five miles away but it could have been Timbuktu, was Coventry, and that there was a new theatre that the people of Belgrade feeling so sorry for the people of Coventry after the war, donated money and wood and they'd a theatre called the Belgrade Theatre and he said that if the motorway would be finished by the time this event happened, he was going to personally drive and we could go with him, to see these plays written by this man called John Osborne and this other man called Arnold Wesker, and they were plays about our lives, he said and we thought plays were only about other people's lives. We'd never thought for a minute they could, or you know about Cleopatra or somebody, or rather grand people who had

drawing rooms. We certainly didn't think there would be plays about our lives and I remember saying to Albert Finney 'don't be so silly of course it's not' and he said, 'Oh yes they are' and there was a play called Little Malcolm and his Struggle Against the Eunuchs, which was also about an Art School and I thought well..The thing was that the motorway was finished and despite the gloomy predictions that we'd all die of what was then called motorway madness because they predicted that these ghosts would jump out from behind the bridges and we'd all be killed, we did go to The Belgrade Coventry and we saw Wesker's Chicken Soup with Barley and Roots and Chips with Everything and all of that.

KH: Did that make a big impression on you?

PH: Yes and that's just what I was going to say, and the person who designed that was Jocelyn Herbert who sadly died one or two years ago, and we met Jocelyn and Jocelyn said she'd been to The Berliner Ensemble and she'd seen the work of Brecht and she'd worked there and we saw on the stage, for instance, in Chicken Soup with Barley, which they've just revived at the Tricycle Theatre, well we just saw a line of washing, a light and a chair and it wasn't a real room at all and we couldn't believe it and I fell in love with Jocelyn, I mean with her work and she remained up to her death, my influence and a mentor and a friend and she'd met Caspar Neher who was the designer who worked with Brecht and she knew all about it and she was bringing that aesthetic to London and in a way it was Jocelyn's work and then her subsequent work at the Royal Court that was the marker for us although via Brecht, because she brought that sensibility right to our doorstep so I think she's a very, very fundamentally important person in the shift as it was in those days from that kind of fifties stage naturalism to a kind of poetic realism which is what happened in the late sixties, seventies.

KH: You went on to work at the Bristol Old Vic didn't you- sorry not the Bristol the Old Vic in London- is that right?

PH: Well I did do some things- Daphne Dare it was who worked at the Bristol Old Vic- I did do some things at the Old Vic but of course the Old Vic wasn't by then a theatre company it was just as you say in French a garage theatre where you went in, that wasn't really the formative things, but what I did do is after I was at the Rep I then got a scholarship and went to The Slade School of Fine Art and then in 1961 I believe, I may have got my years wrong, I came back to the Rep when Peter Dews was the director and I did, my almost first design job was to do the modern dress As You Like It, that featured the young Brian Cox, now you know such an established character but at the time he was a young thin Glaswegian lad, as Orlando and that was the time of Carnaby Street and it became known as the Carnaby street Shakespeare because I used all these Carnaby Street costumes and so I did that and I did Galileo; which I see they've just revived just now; with the young Michael Gambon. And I did a Peer Gynt with Brian Cox and Michael Gambon, they were in the company together and that was all on the old Station Street with the late Peter Dewes.

KH: How did you approach the designs for those plays?

PH: Well by then I was starting to forge, I suppose by then I was starting to forge an individual signature and curiously I've just been looking at those drawings, what's left of them, because a lot have been sold, there's an American University that's just making a catalogue of my work and they're going to acquire my archive and I was looking at them and I was interested then, as I am now, in primarily the actor in the space, and it's exactly what I was doing, so I started drawing pictures where you could actually see the actors whereas most people at the time if they did drawing they drew the set but it never had any people in, but I always started with the people and worked outwards from that so that became if you like a signature of the work that I've done. It's not all that different now, I mean it's a bit better but it's not all that different.

KH: When you returned to the Rep did you feel like there was more of a dialogue between you and the director?

PH: Definitely, definitely, it had changed. It had changed. And I mean Peter Dews was a blunt Yorkshire man and he hadn't come up through that Rep tradition and he would say 'Oh I'm having none of it', he would say, 'I'm not having anything of it' and he had a real eye and I later did some work with him at the Chichester festival theatre and we did some good work together. He was a difficult man but he'd come from television and he had a completely different idea and he was very, very, very good for the Rep and he put a few bombshells you know and Albert Finney, when he was there, he used to walk around saying, 'I don't know what's going on here, I just don't know what's going on', and I think he thought it was completely appalling and he wanted to get out of there as quickly as he could. I've often wondered if he remembers those days, he probably doesn't but one day I shall no doubt run into him and ask him.

KH: You talk about, in your book, the impact that the Berliner Ensemble had. the impact that the productions that you saw had on you, could you maybe say a little bit about that? Was it in 1965?

PH: Yes that was of course a bit later but talking about me personally of course that did have a huge impact and I suppose the first thing was that I got a job as the putter up of an exhibition at the Old Vic about Karl von Appen who was the designer of most of the work that they brought. And just putting up the pictures was an artwork in itself and from that I realised how carefully everything has to be prepared and then I had the great and fantastic privilege to meet and be with a lot, Brecht's widow, Helena Weigal, I treasure a book that she gave me, and I learnt from her that nothing is too much to prepare for the spectator and she showed me the costumes that she'd worn as Mother Courage and how the material had all been worked on and rubbed and scrubbed to get just the right quality of wornness. As Brecht says in the poems, I mean I really came to Brecht through the poems, his lyric poems, and in his theatre poems he says nothing is too much trouble and keep the spectator in suspense, don't show them everything all the time, you know lots of really good common sense things that have I think very much influenced me and then of course very judicious and careful use of colour, not just colour splashed anywhere, but you know it might all be grey, like in the Coriolanus everything is monochrome and then Volumnia comes in and she's red and you think Oh my god and you totally know what that's about and the lyric quality, I'm not just thinking of the politics of it, the same quality that's in the poems, of a kind of singing beauty. Lyricism was in the words, was on the stage. I think it taught us that one could really create

beauty on the stage by even the tiniest thing if you were careful enough so I guess that's the biggest influence really, that I'm terribly, driving people mad, some people call me 'reach for the valium Howard' the technicians here [at The National] I'm very, very, very particular about every tiny little thing. It must be just right, it isn't, oh any old thing will do. It is never like that, it must be truthful and right and I don't mind if there's not much of it and I don't really care about money but it's got to be right, it's got to be beautiful, an old chair, it's got to be right.

KH: Just to return to when you were first working at the Rep, were you working under a lot of time pressure then?

PH: Definitely, I think it was three week. I've actually forgotten if it was a two week rep or a three week rep

KH: I think perhaps it alternated over the period

PH: It was a quick turn around anyway. No sooner did you do one then you did the other. And we worked nights, we worked days and nights, and days and nights and days and nights. I always worked at night, never gave it a thought, Daphne and I used to talk about this in the latter years of her life and she used to say 'Oh I can't work nights anymore' and I said to Daphne 'do you remember the nights we used to work at the Rep' so night work was always part of what you did. I was making somebody laugh the other day as I was saying well, there was, up in the paint shop, there was a huge [..], about twice as big as this table and they were gas rings because there wasn't emulsion paint like there is now, that didn't exist, so you had to melt the rabbit glue, and it was always stinking, when the curtain went up you smell this glue from the paint and then you mixed the paint into the glue with water and you had samples up by the gas cooker of recipes of this much of that, and then people were always getting their hands burnt with the boiling water because you were heaving great buckets. I mean now of course it wouldn't be allowed. And all the paint was powder paint in brown paper bags and some of it is now banned, aniline dyes and Prussian blue, our bare hands, we used to shovel it in with our bare hands. When I got married in 1959 I had to wear gloves because my hands were blue [laughs] I mean it sounds funny but I did. And Jimmy Finlay had a little frying pan and he used to come in, in the morning and he used to cook himself his breakfast on the same gas rings where we'd had all the Prussian blue paint and all these poisonous things and he'd fry himself an egg and bacon and stuff and have his breakfast and [laughs], make a cup of tea, all in with the glue and we used to drink it out of an old paint pot. I can't believe that we're all alive still really, well of course Daphne and Jimmy aren't but what made me say that? I've forgotten what you asked me?

KH: I was asking about the time pressure

PH: Oh the time pressure yes, so we sustained by the fact that Jimmy had this kind of kitchen going. Yes we worked nights, there was a lot of pressure, but we just accepted it as that's what you did.

KH: Did you go to watch all of the performances that you'd designed for or not really?

PH: I did but people didn't and certainly the people in the carpentry shop never did. They never had. I mean Jim McAndrew who was the head carpenter who was a permanently drunk wonderful Irishman, who came to a terrible end on New Years Day, when in a drunken stupor he was walking down Broad Street . Have you heard this story?

KH: I haven't heard this story

PH: ..and a drunken driver crashed into him coming off the road across the pavement and he was, I'm laughing but it's really not funny, he was squashed against the wall and killed. But everybody thought it was a rather appropriate end for him to be killed by a drunken driver. And he was one of these brilliant old school carpenters who could make absolutely anything. I mean just anything but they were always drunk and they had their carpentry work shop down below and then the paint shop was above you see and there was a trap door, so they would make the scenery and it would be fitted to the paint frame and then we would wind up the paint frame, it would go up through the hole in the floor and then when we'd finished it would go back down through the trap and they'd take it up to the stage, so we were on top of each other like that. But go to the theatre? Never. They'd go and fit it up, they'd put it on the stage and they did it completely brilliantly but go and see what was on never. It was enough to make it, they didn't see it and of course the director never ventured into the workshops so it was a completely separate world.

KH: Which changed over the period?

PH: Which changed of course yes. And also there weren't really women designers, they were all men. When I went back to the Rep as a woman designer, you know there was a lot of difficulty, a lot of suspicion, they expected me to get it all wrong. They didn't expect me to be able to draw a ground plan or an elevation and they didn't like to take orders from a women

KH: Did you find that difficult- in that environment?

PH: Yes, well I found it difficult and I found it silly. But we found ways of getting round it.

KH: You also, in your book, talk about the change in directors and the change in kind of- with a very male authoritarian director and how that's changed. I just wondered if you could say a little bit about that.

PH: I suppose that's what I was meaning about Peter Dews just thinking about the Birmingham Rep. I think he was in a way in that context, the beginning of a change

because directors, however brilliant, were often confused with producers, I mean it wasn't as clear cut as it is now and directors had the say, they said what they wanted and then the theatre owner, if there was a theatre owner, came in at the dress rehearsal and said that they didn't like that and things had to be changed and often the theatre owner's wife came and said 'Oh I hate green dresses on the stage', and then it would immediately be changed. But there was a kind of patriarchy, you know and a hierarchy and basically it was men at the top and women at the bottom. Women were ok for making the costumes but that was it and there wasn't a sense of real collaboration in the sense of your input being valued. The final product was probably valued but not the process I don't think, in fact not I don't think, I know. And it was in the end surprising when you know people wanted to talk to you about the content of the play and there are still designers today albeit elderly in their eighties who come from that same school where. for instance Finlay James he never really read right through plays before designing it. He would read where they're set. It's set in a palace or something, and he had a lot of fine Art books and he would look up the references in fine Art books and say, 'Oh I think it would be rather nice to do a chateau here' and he was always clever you know and put these things together but all this kind of readings, the psychology of it all, and going into the characters, well they weren't paid enough and they didn't do that. So it's difficult to collaborate if you're not really working from the same basic point of view you know.

KH: What do you think brought about the changes?

PH: Well of course I think it's much better and I absolutely wouldn't want to go back to those days. I think I'm disappointed in, I mean I'm directing now more and more work myself, it's the way my own work has gone. And I'm disappointed in a way because I think that the visual side of theatre has advanced enormously and I don't think the directors' side has really. I mean it has, but I think it's still kind of English graduates who don't know what to do in their lives and think they've had a nice time in the University Drama club and come in. you know I see too many people like that. Of course it's much better, I mean it's much more integrated, it's much more collaborative and the results are more interesting and I go to theatre festivals all over the world and I see fantastic work so I think yes we've gone along with progress, not enough maybe, and the schools have all improved enormously. Now of course there are thousands and thousands of young people coming into study theatre design in one way or another and nobody knows how they can possibly be employed but I think it is. I don't weep for the old days let's put it like that. I feel I've seen progress.

KH: That was something I was going to ask you about. In your book you mention dress parades. I was wondering if you could just explain what they were because we've not had anyone who's really talked about that.

PH: Oh right, Oh well, the dress parade was the big event, just before the final, the dress rehearsal all the actors were required to come and stand in a straight line across the front of the stage, they were required to walk on from the left to the centre, stand in a light and then walk over to the other side of the stage and then go one step behind and form a line. The actors, to a man I think, loathed doing this because they felt self conscious and they used to, you know if they had to wear a hat, they'd make one of those terrible sort of hat faces and then sitting in the stalls would be the director. I mean

if it was, Douglas Seale [director at the Rep] I remember and Humphrey Stanbury I remember being there as the theatre manager and Nancy Burman being there as the theatre manager and there would be Finlay James and probably Sir Barry and somebody, then the actor would be required to walk on and then they'd say, 'Hate the hat!' and the hat would go, 'Loathe the colour!' and then the dress would be dyed. Jimmy Finlay would always go, 'Oh I think it needs a few more sequins' and then we'd get a note saying can we cover Maxine Audley's dress with sequins and we'd be sewing on the sequins. So that's what it was and it was hateful and now people don't do that because you see the costumes properly in action on the stage as an ensemble together and the actors are spared that horrific idea of a dress parade. It was ghastly.

KH: Something else that I was interested in was this idea of having very separate sets and then as the period moved on to the fifties and sixties you had a more unified set where all the action took place and you had that sense. I wondered if you could just say a little bit about that?

PH: Well I think that's a very good point and it is a very important thing. I think the first thing was, the biggest things was, the change was that when I first went to the Rep it was inconceivable to think that the audience would come in and see a set already there. The curtain was down, you came in and sat in your seat, the auditorium lights went down, the stage lights went up and there it was. And I would like to know historically what it was or who was the first person to really establish that the audience could come in and albeit in a half light, the set would be there, because the minute that happened a whole different aesthetic had to come in, into the theatre. As the work progressed it became less and less acceptable although people still do it today to have stage hands come lumbering on, carrying off the scenery, you know when you've just seen a wall that's meant to look like a wall and then suddenly two stage hands carry it off. It is a bit kind of peculiar. So in the search for a different kind of realism, there was a stage convention for example that a painted fireplace, when painted in a stagey way, is what you would call a real fireplace. Well of course it isn't a real fireplace it's just a painting of a fireplace on a bit of canvas and then somebody, probably this was a Brechtian influence, started bringing on real fireplaces, whereas before you'd had a painted fireplace and if someone had to put their elbow on it and actors were always doing scenes like that, there was a bit of wood, and they put their elbow on it and the whole of the flat kind of wobbled and then suddenly, I think that was about '56, that became unacceptable and now of course people don't make flats out of stretched canvas, they're made out of thin ply, they may have canvas applied to the plywood but they don't do that terrible sort of wobbly thing anymore. So I think that it was all part of the demise of the front curtain that suddenly you had what was called a unified setting and although there might be bits that changed in it, more or less it was kind of a unity thing and you tried to link one scene with the next and only have your scene change in a major interval and that was certainly the way I did *Peer Gynt* when I went back to the Rep. Which was called at the time a unit setting where you had sort of blocks that turned round and linked up. They didn't sort of have clumsy scene changes. So I think it must have been around '56 that all this changed.

KH: And presumably the actors' costumes became much more important in the unified setting?

PH: Yes, yes that's right and of course what happened as well along with that was the development of stage lighting so you know lights were getting better, they were getting more focused, of course they didn't have what we have now which is the ability to have computers and moving lights and you can just turn the angle of a light from your desk, from your production desk but yes I think the development of stage lighting and lighting boards had a huge amount to do with it and of course that all came from Germany. So that gave a flexibility

KH: That wasn't there before.

PH: Yes, yes.

KH: That's great thank-you.

PH: Ok has that covered everything you need to know?

KH: Yes that's really fantastic, thank-you so much.