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Colin George – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Harris

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Actor and Director. A Man for All Seasons; audiences; Birmingham Rep; children's theatre; Coventry Belgrade theatre; The Crucible Theatre, Sheffield; drama students; The Elizabethan Theatre Company; Albert Finney; Tyrone Guthrie; Peter Hall; Laurence Olivier; Look Back in Anger; Harold Pinter; The Playhouse Nottingham; The Playhouse, Sheffield; repertory; Maggie Smith; television.

KH: This is an interview on the 21st of November with Colin George. Can I just confirm that I've got your permission to put this into the archive?

CG: You have.

KH: Brilliant, I'd just like to start by asking about how you began working in the theatre?

CG: Yes, I began straight from Oxford. I'd been... I suppose inspired by Laurence Olivier principally and his film Henry V, but also I saw him as a boy, in his first Richard III, his first great performance, at the New Theatre, with Olivier, with Richardson and those great seasons they had, Hotspur, you know and so on and decided I'd go into the theatre. And my mother, God bless her, said, 'Well, get a degree first darling, then you'll always have something to fall back on', which proved absolutely right, because when I was middle aged - not middle aged, but getting on, three kids and that and no money having left Sheffield and all that - I went to Australia to set up a drama department and later worked for twelve years in Hong Kong, was head of acting at the drama... and that saved my life.

So I was up at Oxford and I think it's quite interesting, it was... we're talking now getting up '49, '50, '51, just post-war, I left school, because I hadn't been... I'd missed the war, I did National Service. We were told 'look, you've had a wonderful education, go out and serve the community', which sounds very sort of different from nowadays, you know: 'get on and make your way in life irrespective of anyone else'. So at Oxford I wanted to go in the theatre, I got to Oxford and decided with a friend that I would form a touring company, inspired by tales of Benson going round in the twenties and thirties, everyone said nowadays you could do that, Wolfitt had done it. And cutting a very long story short, a fellow undergraduate with me, Paul [Armand] a Canadian who's now gone back to Canada, long since become a director in telly, he was enthused with this idea, to be the administrator, I would be the leading actor - the Benson if you like - of the company, and we decided to contact Cambridge. So I went over to Cambridge, I had a motorbike, we'd go everywhere on a motorbike, I was on the back of this bike, we

went to Cambridge and we saw Dadie Rylands as he's called, Rylands, who was the theatre man and met John Barton and David King. There was another enthusiast, but he was a year behind, called Peter Hall, so he didn't meet me because he was not worthy of meeting us. He was in his last year perhaps and John was already employed by the University and so they said 'yes'. So the idea was, now you couldn't do it so old, you got fifteen shillings a week and all found and that was it. So we had a cook and we eat all together and we took our sleeping stuff with us and it [was] very much rogues and vagabonds. We opened at the British Council Gardens and we did first of all a play called *Taming of the Shrew*, the Cambridge people, actors joined us: Peter Jeffries, he's now gone, he came with us and we opened at the British Council Gardens, went to Exeter with *The Shrew*. I was playing the lead, there was a little girl sort of hanging round Oxford at the time and she came to do the Page and didn't say anything, I've got a shot of her. Got to Edinburgh and we went to [Riddles Court] just on the Royal Mile and we were one of the hits of the Festival - because the Fringe had only just opened, nothing like nowadays, there was a Fringe Club but there was no organisation, you made your... and we were one of the hits of the Festival and having been living on baked beans on toast we were suddenly eating steak because our cook came from Edinburgh. Anyway they did a revue one night - this was the walk-ons - and this girl was brilliant, anyway the next thing I knew she was on Broadway, and that was Maggie Smith. So dear Maggie, and I acted with her son Robert Stephens at Stratford in the nineties and saw her again and she said 'ah!'.

So after that we then fortunately managed to get to the Arts Theatre Cambridge through Dadie Rylands and a man called Michael [McOwen/McCowan?] a director, who went on to become Head of LAMDA, he saw us, got to the Arts Council, gave us money and we started again in the spring. No fifteen week contracts - we lost some of the wonderful adventures we had, I mean, when of course some of the students we had, went back to Oxford and Cambridge and we went getting people in London and Paul did a bit of casting. We has this old boy, Irish boy, who liked the bottle a bit, but he was a busker in London, I'll tell you this small story, [he] used to busk the queues and he was a doorman at one of the theatre clubs. Anyway I did *Henry V* and he played Exeter. Anyway I was in London queuing myself - before we got going again - you bought stools in those days. I heard 'once more unto the breach' and I used to say, 'bend every spirit upto its full [places emphasis on the full] height'. And this chap did exactly the same. And I went up and it was the old busker, who'd taken my stuff! So we went up with the Arts Council for two years, touring Number Two theatres, which have gone mainly now - Kidderminster, lots of places, they weren't the Number One's, it was what we called the Number Two's, most have which have gone - which is interesting in terms of what happened, the television was just beginning to make its mark.

I did *Henry V* on television, with the Elizabethan Theatre Company in the Coronation year and up until then - up until the Coronation - television was only thirty miles from London - it probably strikes you as strange now, with Sky and everything. So we were just in at the beginning, which was in fact going to ruin the theatre as I grew up in it. And we toured for two years, then the company, as often happens, broke up. I went to Coventry. So how it started, was really, to answer your questions, [referring to list of questions sent by KH before interview] it was an idealistic way of... I wrote out our sort of, our creed which was 'We turn our back on the West End, you see what I mean, giving Shakespeare to the people.'. So what we did was Shakespeare - we had a permanent set, we did it as near to Shakespeare as you could: no lighting effects, just straight light up and a stage we took round and put up an inner stage. John did *Henry V* and actually he taught me very much all I know about verse speaking, he was wonderful and then this young unknown director called Peter Hall came along and did *The*

Merchant of Venice, in which I played Bassanio. Then I wanted to play Hamlet and he said 'no, no he didn't want me as Hamlet'. Anyway he was going off to do a play which had an awful title, I thought it would never be a success. It was called Waiting for Godot and we never saw Peter again. But after that I went to Coventry so Peter Hall, John as I say, the academic, but full of good ideas and I went back to the RSC in the nineties in his production of Peer Gynt which I think is one of the best things the RSC has done in years. Small Company, only twelve, Alex Jennings as Peer Gynt, Haydn Gwynne as [?], and the rest of us did everything, I did about eight parts. John, I learnt a lot from; Peter was just a very good director and just because we fell out that last time I met him when he was running the Old Vic, 'Ah my Bassanio' you know, it was all that. Impression of... [referring to a written question about Birmingham Rep] Well, I went to Coventry - I should mention Coventry because that's important - this was before the Belgrade and we used to do... this is interesting to you. We used to play Coventry, Netherton, Nuneaton and Loughborough. So you opened in Coventry, then you started rehearsing the next play of course, then you went on a bus to Netherton for three days, then back, then another three days, and then Loughborough, rehearsing in the mornings, off at two o'clock on the bus and you never thought anything of it, you just did it and I know in the back they had a table in the back where people played bridge. And we did... Frank Dunlop was directing, and a man called Anthony John who went into television but Frank directed and one of the... What I'm saying is the actors in three weeks did that tour and rehearsed a new play. It did give us three weeks' rehearsal - well three weeks' mornings - but of course when it was matinée at Netherton or Nuneaton, off we went.

And in The Lark when I was playing Warwick, Sir Barry Jackson came from Birmingham to see it - at Loughborough I think - and I was offered a part there. And by sheer bad luck I got pneumonia - or rather I had pneumonia when I was playing Bassanio - and I went on like an idiot and I did something to my lungs and I had to go into hospital but came out, I would have been there at Christmas, but unfortunately, the day I came out, I recovered, joined them for Julius Caesar the same day as Albert Finney. He tended to get, actually one time I did the upper class part and he did the... he was then very much a Manchester lad, he did the lower class, but wonderful person Albie, I've met him since many times. One of the good things about the theatre, when they really get to the top it's just... I mean, last night I met Brian Blessed - because after Coventry I went to Nottingham - and it's just like old times you know which I suspect you may get with other professions but particularly with us. At Coventry though, I remember, it was tough that travelling but we enjoyed it and then I went to Birmingham later than I intended and I had a good two years there. It was... Sir Barry was running it, and you mentioned Look Back in Anger - there was also the Birmingham Alex which did the modern stuff, rather than West End stuff, but Sir Barry wasn't very... we didn't do very many modern plays like Look Back, we did the classics of course, Coriolanus and so on and a new play called Happy as Larry, a play called The Iron Harp, about the IRA trouble, but I when I was there, I had a good string of parts, with Albie, taking often... He did Henry V, which I had done and the director Douglas Seale said, 'I'm afraid Albie's doing Henry, well what would you like to do?' So I said I'd do Fluellen, which was a very good part and of course I took all the notices because you can always get the notices as Fluellen if you have a young, fairly inexperienced Henry. But where Albie's so good is, he played Henry, it was a school's matinée, and he came and said, 'I was just doing the end of my big soliloquy, 'Upon the King', when one little boy turned to his friend and said to his friend in the front row, 'he's always talking', which is very Albie - he was always laughing at himself. Then Charles Laughton came to see him in The Scottish Play as we call it and whipped him off to London in a play called The Party. Pinter, who'd written this play, had to change the name to The Birthday Party. Now I'll tell you about Pinter. In this

company, there was the Alexandra doing the modern stuff - by modern I mean West End.

KH: Right, OK.

CG: OK. And a pantomime and all that. Good company - Derek Salberg ran it. Anyway, he came to a party that I gave, with his wife, who was expecting a baby at the time and he'd been to see this Iron Harp, where I'd played this English Army officer and had a love scene with this girl - it was very, just sitting on a sofa, not these modern love scenes, so you know, 'when we get married you'll see the sun set over the Cotswolds' and that, and he said, 'I came to see that play, you did that scene with the girl.' He said, 'what do you think of it?' And I said 'oh well I thought it was well written, you could do something with it.' He said, 'People don't talk like that' he said. I said, 'Well, you should write a play', he said, 'Well, I have done, it's being done at Bristol, called... not The Party... oh it's gone, anyway not The Party! To cut a long story short, that was Harold Pinter. And I met Pinter when I was at Leicester years later - I didn't remind him of that - and I was in Betrayal at the Haymarket Leicester, he came to see it, he's a wonderful man. So Pinter was there, acting in modern stuff and then his first thing wasn't... The Room! The Room, I think was the first thing they did at Bristol, I think at either The Theatre School or the University, it wasn't at The Bristol Old Vic. So my impression of Birmingham was... I mean it was the top three weekly I believe, three weekly rep, but check that. We had plenty of time to rehearse, Douglas Seale directing, who directed at Stratford, and a good company. Geoffrey [Bale] who was a character actor but he went on to Stratford, he played Duncan to Sir Laurence's Scottish Lord and had a photograph of Sir Laurence kneeling to him which he always used to show, or had up in his dressing room I think. Michael Blakemoor was there too, who became a director and then this lung thing came up again and I was playing my best roles: Captain Fisbe in Tea House of The August Moon and they wanted me in hospital. I went to see the doctor and I'd been in once and come out again and anyway cut a long story short he said, 'We want you in next week.' I said, 'I'm opening a show' so I rang up the hospital and said, 'Look, can you give me three weeks?'. I knew the sister well, she used to come to see the shows, she said, 'Oh yes.' So I did the show and went to the hospital, came out, and thought I'd never act again. I did a lot of lung work but I thought 'well, maybe I won't be able to act', I wasn't sort of... when I came out of the operation, I had a lobe removed, in fact your body is such that you recover, but they treated me so well... they thought it was cancer but it wasn't. It was an adenoma, which is a benign growth. I was on recuperating with my mother in Wales and Val May rang up from Nottingham, because I'd written to the Arts Council and said I would like to do this [directing] and he said, 'I'm looking for an assistant director, would you like to come?' and I said 'yes', so I then, instead of not acting, I acted and directed. I mean, I was playing Hamlet and rehearsing Reluctant Heroes in the day. I mean, it was ridiculous!

KH: So was that a two week rep?

CG: That was a two week rep. Two week rep, and so what moved me in really was I always wanted to... I mean, this starting a company, I wanted to not pursue an acting career as such... I mean, now if I was a young man I'd get on the box, get a name and then I could get the money, but in those days it was a different path which I think is interesting historically from your point of view: you learnt in the provinces, or then went

to London, I mean if you were a young actor then, I don't know if it applies now with Equity, you couldn't go into the West End for six months or a year unless the producer made a special plea: 'This is Alice in Wonderland, I want this young girl.'. So I wanted to run a company, which I did because when I came off from Henry V, telly that time, I had three telegrams from agents and I went to see this Michael [McOwen] who directed me and he said, 'well what do you want to do with your life Colin?' I said, 'Well, I want to run a theatre'. So he said, 'Well I should go to Coventry then'. So I had to go to Coventry or just sit around for film roles, now I might have sat around for film roles but if I'd ended up in Hollywood I wouldn't be talking to you here so what's... You know this is what life does to you. So I moved into assistant directing.

KH: How did the Playhouse compare to the Rep?

CG: Very interesting, it was a converted - believe it or not - cinema. When I say cinema, small hall really with a screen at the end of the stage, hardly much bigger than this room we're in, very small stage, but deeper, the dressing rooms were all underneath so all the dust came through. And the standard though was good and, let me tell you - I think this is interesting - when we went, we always used to do a sprinkling of Agatha Christie [etc] and then a Shakespeare which the schools would come to, the odd new play and in fact the first play I did was *The Long and The Short and The Tall*, we did the premiere, it had been done at an amateur in Edinburgh. Then it went to London - it was called *Boys It's All Hell* when we did it, a quote from General Sherman in the American Civil War. They changed the title, they got Peter O'Toole to play in it at the Court and they made a film of it. I was in the first production at Nottingham Playhouse. Then *Fanny's First Play* by Shaw but we then put in the Agatha Christie's and then we got more money, then after that rarely did a Christie, it was mainly good stuff, Anouilh, we did, I'm just glancing at it here [referring to book of press cuttings] Here's the season I meant: first of September, 1958, *Boys It's All Hell*, *The Long. The Short and The Tall* by Willis Hall, *Fanny's First Play* by Bernard Shaw, a double bill of *Memory of Two Mondays* Arthur Miller, *A Resounding Tinkle*, N.F. Simpson - my first production ever - *Peer Gynt* by Ibsen, *French Without Tears*, *Rattigan*, *Potting Shed* by Graham Greene, from the West End, *Solid Gold Cadillac*, then *December Towards Zero* by Agatha Christie. Gradually and that's useful having that there. So they did, I'm pretty certain, two weeks, weekly rep, you see next to Birmingham, that's as good as Birmingham but of course it isn't three weeks and it isn't, but it had a good reputation.

KH: So you were directing and acting at the same time?

CG: That's right, I was associate director and I acted.

KH: How did you plan out your rehearsals if you were acting in it?

CG: In fact what happened was that there Val would, with the board, would chat with me a bit, say 'I'm thinking of doing this, this and this, and say well, you direct *Reluctant Heroes* next, then you can have the play before *Hamlet*...' You know, we worked it out, but I think it was a mix of classics, new plays and the odd pot boiler and I always remember I went into the bar after one show, after we'd done an Agatha Christie and

one of the locals said, 'I didn't think much of the play tonight' and I said, 'At one time this is the only play you would have come to see' and we had actually improved the taste of the audience. It sounds very patronising, but you know if you give people better stuff, if it's entertaining and well done and it works.

KH: Did you find that your audiences were very loyal, in that the same people were coming every week?

CG: Yes, this is interesting. At Nottingham, yes, you got a regular audience and Sheffield where I went, even more so. In Australia where I worked it was slightly different, well not slightly different. In Adelaide - I worked there very successfully for about four or five years - ninety five percent attendance but we did the musical Annie Get Your Gun, we had a huge audience and in the morning we had a warm up in the company and we used to occasionally invite school children and this Port Adelaide was the sort of rough area of town and after we said 'have you been to anything at the Playhouse?'. And usually kids would have seen the Shakespeare, and they put up their hands and we said 'what did you see?', 'Annie Get Your Gun', 'Have you been again?' And they said 'No' and that was it. I think we think if you play down to your audience they'll come all the time, but you can't... I mean, the people that came to Reluctant Heroes probably didn't come to Hamlet, and a cautionary tale, I did Hamlet and then we lived out in the country then and the boiler went wrong. A chap came out to mend the boiler, and he said 'I'm sure I've seen you. Yes! I saw you as Hamlet.' I said, 'Oh yes! Do you go to the theatre now?' He said 'Oh no it was only when I was at school' and that's the feeling that you get you know, it's gone now a hell of a lot, mainly because television has perhaps broadened the audience's taste a bit but it's still... apart from in London now, the big musical blockbusters, the theatre here, which is run by Ambassadors mainly, it's built for musicals, but they do get the opera, they do get the ballet and they get a straight play.

KH: So as you carried on at the Playhouse, were you having more choice over what kind of productions were going to be put on? Or was that down to the other person that you were working with?

CG: No that was Val, more than me. When I got to Sheffield I had, but there's a story about that. No it was mainly him and the board, I would be consulted and if one said 'well there's a good play on', to him... but he was very much the man who, with the board, who approved. So that's how we decided, it was really his decision with the board's approval and perhaps a suggestion and so I came in on the lower level. I mentioned The Entertainer and Roots [On C.V sent to KH]. Did I mention Look Back in Anger when I was at Birmingham?

KH: You didn't mention that, no.

CG: Let me just mention that. Because we never did that, I very sort of outrageously asked if I could do - organise - a reading of Look Back in Anger on Sunday night.

KH: At Birmingham?

CG: At Birmingham Rep. It had just been done in London, and this was a big thing, to actually have people saying 'God I hate Sundays' and I read it there, then I played it at Nottingham - I played Jimmy Porter - and I played Mick in *The Caretaker*, so we tended to do, you know, these new plays - *Wesker*, *Roots*, I did, I directed that. You can say that we definitely tried to do the new playwrights who on the whole weren't West End playwrights, so they didn't mind... Some people would say if you did a West End Show, light comedy, the royalties were tied up for years for people to tour, they wanted a star. If it was *Roots* or something, well *Wesker* being a sort of man of the people as it were, he let his... I think when he did *Chips With Everything*, he allowed any theatre in the country to do it at the same time it was done in London - at *The Court* I assume. So and *Look Back in Anger*, there was a tour which I saw in Nottingham - no, I saw it at Birmingham Rep, Birmingham Alex.

KH: What were your impressions of *Look Back in Anger* when you first... did you see it, or did you just read the script?

CG: I read about it, then never saw it in London but saw it at Birmingham with Alec [McOwen] playing it and so when I got to Nottingham, then I said you know, *Look Back*. But I think new plays then, they weren't tied up in the same way as a West End play if that makes sense, you could get...

KH: So it was easier to put them on?

CG: Easier to get permission to do it because the authors were interested in having their work done and of course a lot of them, I mean *Look Back in Anger* was a success in its own right at the Court, but you wouldn't get a West End star doing *Look Back*.

KH: How far do you think that the productions that you put on of these plays were influenced by the way the London ones had been done?

CG: I don't think as much as you imagine. Well, we did it on our own. One play we did was E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India*, which they adapted and did in London. We did it at Nottingham Playhouse, and we invited him along and I met Forster - marvellous man - and in the trial scene he had a punkah wallah with a huge fan. Now in London they cut that because it was disturbing the wigs or something. He came to me, Forster, and I had a letter from him saying, 'I so enjoyed you having the punkah wallah'. So in fact we could do it without kow-towing to any stars or anything else, it sounds very arrogant that but we could do it freshly and I mean that's a case in point where E.M Forster came to see us. So when I say that, that we were doing a play by E.M Forster at Nottingham fortnightly with him coming to see it, which had just been done in London... Robert Lang played Dr Aziz, he's not with us any longer, he went down to the National of course eventually with Olivier. It was different from... We were hungry for them, I'm not saying they're not hungry for them now, but they tend to do almost brand new ones now, so the West Yorkshire Playhouse and then take it in. We were happy to do that and instead of doing *No Sex Please We're British* or whatever.

KH: What do you think the audience reaction was like to the new plays?

CG: Well very interesting, that's a very good one, more so in Sheffield but at Nottingham, I think it's better to answer your question when we get to Sheffield.

KH: OK.

CG: Because that's more interesting. Now I'll just tell you, the main challenges in directing were, I mean getting a good company but that was so much easier than now. I went back in '80 to Leicester and tried to run a company as I'd run it in Adelaide and as I'd run it in Sheffield and you couldn't get people to come.

KH: Why was that?

CG: This was Leicester, the Haymarket, this was 1980, '81.

KH: Why was it that you couldn't get people to come?

CG: Because of telly - television and their agents. They didn't want them to go because they could get on the television and earn twice as much in half the time and they weren't available for television, and in fact Reggie Salberg - the brother of Derek Salberg, who ran the Alex - used to run Salisbury, very much the old theatre school, wrote to me and said, 'Look there's this brilliant young girl whose gone to drama school, can't get a job anywhere can you take her in and give her a chance?' - because we could only take on two students then. You know, it was quite regulated, two students a year into a company from Equity and one for the Children's Theatre Company. So I took this girl on, we were doing *The School for Scandal* and two productions later she'd left, agent said 'I'm sorry, they were off to telly'. Now she'd have stayed at Sheffield for two years, so this whole... when people say the rep has gone. It had a sort of, I think it's demeaning to say it was a training ground, and even David Hare, who I think is a wonderful political writer, saying 'oh they did all this rubbish, they did all this rubbish in the sixties and seventies.'. That's not so. We did - as you'll gather from that programme I read out - at Nottingham, good stuff, you'd find that at *The National*. Not so many new plays of course and you couldn't do... well, we had companies of fifteen, twenty... When I was running *The Crucible*, that's just the end of your time [c.1968] I had twenty-five in the main company, five, six, seven in the children's theatre company and a studio theatre company going. Now that's *National*, *Royal Shakespeare Company* size now, almost, to have that many people on. I hasten, that was the beginning of the season, then we'd pare them off. By the end of the season we were doing two for the seesaw, but we could have a big company. So the challenges were really in regional theatre were the time factor, but then you don't cut corners, once you've got to know a company for two years, you get to know how to stretch them as actors in different roles. They don't always play the juvenile lead, they play the villain or they play a character part. In those days of course make-up was the great thing - you could make up.

[referring back to question about new plays] But *The Entertainer* and Wesker's *Roots*... and remind me about this.

KH: Was *The Entertainer* quite a difficult production to put on, because Olivier had done it and made it kind of his role?

CG: No well actually you see that's the thing, it's interesting you should say that. Whoever's made it their own in London, at Nottingham, they came to see their company do it and there was no rivalry if you know what I mean. And I think Olivier himself... I mean, he came up to Sheffield when I was there, and I'll tell you that story about him in a minute because that's relating to the attitude. Were they influenced by Royal Court? No because we never saw them, how could they influence us? Unless we had French's Acting edition. What you may say was they influenced us in that they gave us the plays to do, which was much more important - do you know what I mean? Otherwise you'd be doing Agatha Christie. Then... I think I'll go to Sheffield next, Oh [referring to question sheet] you do mention Mick in *The Caretaker*, yes that's very interesting, [reading from sheet] 'What challenge did it present?'

KH: Where did you play that?

CG: I did that in Nottingham.

KH: Was that a difficult play to do?

CG: There was one very difficult point. It was censored and I had... what was the line I couldn't say? It was directed by John Neville, and Davis has this line saying, 'Do you know what that bastard said to me? Piss off!' You couldn't say 'piss off.' I had one line... Dash it, it's gone now! But I said the word on the last night and it wasn't four letter, Oh yes, 'you stink from arsehole to breakfast time' and I had to say, 'you stink from coal hole to breakfast time.' - I couldn't say arsehole - so on the last night I said, 'you stink from arsehole to breakfast time!' and I thought if they come to arrest me they come to arrest me. You see you forget we were censored, so Pinter was censored.

KH: Did censorship have a big impact on your work when you were trying to do plays? Was it something you were very conscious of when you were directing?

CG: Well no, because when you got the play from the Royal Court or whatever it had been censored. We got... Pinter published his play in full, do you see what I mean? He published the text he wrote, not the acting text - so we got from the Lord Chamberlain, this is the following amendments you have to make: 'coal hole to breakfast time.'. It's interesting isn't it? But the work, yes I think in - and more so when I got to Sheffield, I'm thinking of Ionesco and that - the regular audience, brought up on Agatha Christie or whatever, even good classical work, found it difficult sometimes. I mean, we forget that until *Look Back in Anger*, we didn't have people taking their trousers off on-stage unless it was a farce, you know, a sort of Whitehall farce, and having someone ironing on stage

or whatever was just not... that all happened in the kitchen off-stage and it may seem strange to you... There's a wonderful article by Kenneth Tynan on the new, saying, you know, that the modern West End play is French Windows leading onto the garden, in comes a man with a tennis racket and in fact if you look back it was very much that. Beautifully written often, but the guts of the sort of working class play and all that was new. [Reading from sheet again] How did it affect my work as a director? Well [pause] that's interesting. I suppose you might say - I'm just theorising now - that, in coming to direct Anthony and Cleopatra as I did at Sheffield, I might... certainly I didn't want 'the voice beautiful', I wanted the verse of course but not the... I wanted a sort of reality to it, because one was doing Look Back and then you're doing let's say Merchant of Venice, so this is a Jewish money lender, he wants this money - 'The quality of mercy' is actually someone pleading in court, he's not just making a beautiful speech. I suppose that you could say that indirectly that happened.

KH: So the realism from the new things transferred into the more classical things?

CG: Yes indeed, it transferred, I'm sure it did and I'm sure that's very much the same now. Look at the BBC tonight are showing all these modern [referring to BBC series of Modern adaptations of Shakespeare's plays] Have you seen them, these modern ones?

KH: I've seen them.

CG: Which are great fun. They don't offend me. Having spent my life - I say offend me - having spent my life working with Shakespeare and been at the Royal Shakespeare, I'm so glad they haven't just done the actual words and mucked around with it. They've completely altered it and I find it fascinating. I don't think it's going to get people interested in Shakespeare particularly - if they're not interested, they're not interested - but having said that, I'm delighted they're doing it. I only wish he was getting the royalties!

KH: So when did you move to Sheffield?

CG: I moved to Sheffield in [pause] 1961.

KH: And that was to take up position as Artistic Director?

CG: No, initially as Assistant, but before I left Nottingham - this is rather important - Val May left to go to Bristol, and Frank Dunlop took over and got up Johnny Neville and we got on very well. I did a lot of work with Neville. He did the Scottish Play and I played Macduff, but then I directed him in A Man For All Seasons, John Neville. And we took it to Malta, and they're a very Roman Catholic island - it probably still is - so that it was billed as 'the play of St Thomas More', and when Thomas Cromwell of course, who got rid of him, came on, on the first night, he was booed from the audience, as was - slightly - Henry VIII because he'd broken with Rome: fascinating. That was John Neville and Frank and they did a lot of new stuff. Maggie Smith came to perform there, I

wasn't in the play unfortunately, and they then were ready to take over and did the New Nottingham Playhouse, so they were easing their way into the New Playhouse, that's what got them there, but that's... Again you see how things were moving. So I was doing all right, but I felt I wanted to run a theatre and Geoffrey Ost - who'd been at the Playhouse for twenty-five years in the old... he'd been there since before the war - had a heart attack doing a Shakespeare as you might imagine, he did one a year and they were looking for an assistant. And this will interest you in terms of how it works. I applied, I'd just done a production of Richard III at The Old Vic which was then the National Theatre which got dreadful notices, I'm in a book called No Turn Unstoned which Diana Rigg put out, of all the bad notices and I'm there, but I got one good notice from a man called Walter Kerr, who wrote for... in those days it might have been The Telegraph, it wasn't Charles Spencer and I applied to go to Sheffield to be assisting him [Geoffrey Ost] and one of the people had seen the good review of Richard III, which was luck. And also they got money from The Arts Council, now this is interesting. They had a Board who ran it completely, no public subsidy but I went - they also had five hundred pounds from The Arts Council. One or two board members resigned, they didn't want interference from The Arts.

KH: Really?

CG: Yes, resigned because they had money from The Arts Council. Now you may not find many other people who are able to tell you that! I went to assist Geoffrey Ost, he was very nice to me, and they started with a play called The Amorous Prawn I remember, and someone called Janet Manners performed. And he'd engaged her for a season and she left to go to Manchester and he was flabbergasted - and she actually was Janet Suzman, who went on to go - because he'd been used to having people for two years, this is what I was saying, we'd engage... I'd go down to London, when I was at Sheffield, I'd audition for two days, sometimes at the Irish Club or Spotlight and see all the graduates, not all, I mean, I saw them about every ten minutes virtually, five an hour. I mean, they just had to do a speech, thank you very much, just to see what they looked like and all that and in fact when I was at the Royal Shakespeare Company I found an old one where I'd auditioned, Alex Jennings, and not taken him! He said, 'You could have started my career Colin!' [Laughter]. We would then engage them for two years, first year doing bits and pieces and then going on and that's what Geoffrey had done for years and suddenly that changed so we had people who stayed then perhaps for four or five years. The Arts Council money came in - as I say they were a bit worried because they knew I'd push it towards the Classics and that and we did mainly good West End. I did a play, Autumn Crocus - you know we did mainly West End plays, one Shakespeare a year, a very good children's play at Christmas - and a man called Alan Cullen who wrote it and I got Alan to join the company as an actor. He was a school master from somewhere in Yorkshire or Lancashire and he joined us as an actor and stayed and wrote wonderful Christmas plays. The Lyceum did the pantomime and we prided ourselves on doing good stuff for kids, not rubbish, although indeed Morecombe and Wise were playing at The Lyceum the first year I went so I couldn't complain. I didn't go and see them, I didn't bother. So they did a good programme but then... I stayed there for two years, and then I realised they were never going to sack Geoffrey - which I quite understood - so I got in touch with Johnny Neville... it was one of the few times I've played politics in my life, he was running The New Nottingham Playhouse and I said 'any chance of coming to assist you there?'. I wanted to be Associate Director, but he said, 'no you can come and assist me but I want to run it on my own.' - he was taking over from Frank Dunlop. So I went to Nottingham, gave my notice in, and the

first thing I did was *The Merchant of Venice*, with Alastair Simm as Shylock and a young actress straight from RADA called Gemma Jones, as Portia, and John Barton came to see it, I think he was scouting for Gemma Jones probably.

KH: So how had your job changed by moving?

CG: Nottingham was much more upmarket, it was the upmarket theatre. In a way now you've got... Well, the Crucible had done wonderfully under Grandage, and the West Yorkshire Playhouse and at one time the Bristol Old Vic. Sometimes you get one local, like Birmingham Rep when I went was 'The Rep', and Nottingham was 'The Rep' then to go to. And he wanted me there because I did Children's Theatre. The real lure to get me back there, I did Children's Theatre on a Saturday morning and he wanted a Children's Theatre and we'd worked together - I'd directed him before, I'd directed him as Oedipus - and then Sheffield asked me to come back and be a director. So they realised that they weren't going to have another assistant hanging on for years and they were very good about it. Now this is most important, so I went for my interview, for Artistic Director now, they had - when I went there under Geoffrey - a committee that chose the plays, you said 'how were they chosen by Val May at Nottingham?', at Sheffield they chose the plays, they had a play reading committee, very sort of well-read people but not theatre people, amateur people. I mean, there was one lady who'd been one of the first ladies in Cambridge, way back in the twenties - very well-read and all that, and a local doctor and all that, but not theatre people, and I said 'if I'm going to run the Playhouse, I say what the production is. I'm very happy to have a committee and chat to them and to chat to you the board but it will be my decision' so they said 'right'. Well, I went outside for half an hour, back in, 'no we can't really agree to that', 'I'm not coming otherwise.' So I went out for another half hour - I'm guessing half an hour, it was a long time, it wasn't just for ten minutes - and they said all right we'll accept that. That was absolutely crucial and now we go back to new plays, and we did a survey. This is relevant. Someone wanted to do a survey of an audience in the provinces and this firm from London came to Sheffield, and to give you an idea, they used to come, the Sheffield audience, once a week to see The Playhouse, the next week to see The Halle Orchestra playing in the main concert hall. So it was very much a middle-class audience and they did a survey of that audience. I remember there was an International Conference that I went to, which Bill Gaskill was at, about audiences, I didn't bring the information, and he said, 'Colin it would have been fantastic to have it!' because we discovered that the audience, ninety-nine percent came from two postal districts in the whole of Sheffield and you're in Sheffield now, no one from Lower Brightside! Two postal districts! We gave the programme away, if they'd fill in the [survey], they refused not to pay for it some of them, 'I've paid for my programme for years and I'm paying for it now!' It's hard to believe, isn't it, that they were so... And they were loyal to the theatre. Now when I went in I started doing *The Chairs* by Ionesco and Brecht and Pinter and you know all the modern... So I was the first person to do Pinter there, to do Brecht there, to do Ionesco there, to do Artaud there. And the other thing I did do, to my credit was... Coventry was the first to start a Children's Theatre Company, and we and Watford were the next. I went to Coventry to look, I said 'we must have a Children's Theatre Company attached to the theatre', and we and Watford were the next. There was Coventry, Watford and us. TIE. We got money from The Arts Council, I had a company of five. I did the first shows myself, then [Gwen] Walford who's a wonderful director - she goes round the world now directing - she came and I had an excellent company. In my company was a man called Roy Kift - he became a playwright - and Alan Armstrong who's since done very well, he's never off the telly now.

KH: And did you tour this round?

CG: We toured it round the schools for free, and did some wonderful work. We also went in doing a science program because they weren't doing science, the sciences were... We didn't have very much money, but we were given money to get kids into science, because people were coming over from the Vietnam war, you know Americans saying, 'can these young undergraduates think of any more ways we can poison the rice crop?'. Well, you don't win the hearts and minds doing that sort of thing! So we went in for three days with this program. First we went in and to the Beatles music we set up dances. So if you and I were oxygen, we danced with this person who was Hydrogen, that's water, H₂O, and then we ended with an atomic explosion. We had them in a triangle, one, two, four, all the kids, with rolled up newspaper, so the first one he hit these two or he hit these four and [makes noise of explosion]. Now the next day we went in - we went in three days - we blacked out the room, a few lights, chairs set just too far apart to touch one another, they came in all [kids] 'hello', [actors] 'Shut up sit down.' They were in sort of semi-uniform, uniform tops, they sat down, silence for about three or four minutes, they got giggly, then they got a bit frightened. Then in came someone and they said, 'On your feet!' They stood up. In came this man, 'Sit down Gentleman.' They sat down. He proceeded to brief them on dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima - very difficult to get any pictures off the English or Americans, the French gave us a picture of an atomic explosion in the Sahara - and the screen went white, one, two, three, four, five, then you saw the mushroom cloud. Anyway at the end - and this plane, Enola Gay - now there were twenty five, thirty kids including girls and he said, 'Any questions?', and I was expecting one of them to say, 'Can I go to the lavatory?'. And someone said, 'How are you going to select the crew, sir?'. We didn't ask them to say 'sir'. And he said, 'a series of exercises.' So we did a series of exercises, one of which we got up six of them and asked them questions, 'how many sorties have you given?' [child's response] 'ten'. We hadn't given them any information. And one question was, 'Have you ever been frightened on a mission?' [children's response] , 'No'. 'No', 'No' and then we came to this boy, 'How many sorties have you done?', [response] 'twenty, thirty', 'Oh that's a lot, have you ever been frightened on a mission?' There was a long pause and he said, 'Yes, once'. And I could have hugged him. Then the third day we went in and for the first half, to Pink Floyd music we told them what happened in Hiroshima. They all, when the bomb had gone off, those who survived went to the park to the water, which was the worst thing they could have done, to drink. So we had them doing this going across to the water and then the second half of the evening, of the morning or afternoon, we gave a thirty-minute version of Beckett's Endgame. Now Endgame is quite a tough piece - you know it - a wheelchair, two people in dustbins and these children are eleven, twelve, I'm guessing - couldn't have been much older - loved it, because they had a point of reference. So that's point number one. Point number two is, I saw a teacher about five or six months later, 'oh the science programme, how's that gone?'. He said, 'Well it's interesting, we've got one little boy, who has never answered a question in his life before and now he answers most times, two or three times he'll answer.'. I said, 'Oh, does he get it right?'. He said, 'No, he gets it always wrong.' I said 'Yes, because we're not teaching science, we're teaching something much more important called self-confidence.' And at that time - until Thatcher came along - they had a full-time drama teacher in some of the schools and I went to see them, a, b, c, d, you know they had streams. Bs were probably the best, As were hopeless, they just talked about it the whole time, the intellectuals, Cs were very good, Ds were almost as good as the Bs and they were hardly

able to read or write, they were rifling telephone boxes for money, but they could act because that was something they could do, that was one of the things I found out. So it was a great time at Sheffield. But I introduced also Repertoire. You got two for the price of one for the first week, and I think the '67 season [looking at programme] was the first season [reading from programme] 'Playhouse Theatre Vanguard, don't be surprised if your children come home from school with tales of our exploits, this term sees the start of our regular visits to Sheffield schools by a team of Playhouse actors. What's it all about? The intention primarily is to offer children at school an opportunity to develop their personality, through coming into contact with a live form of theatre. The infants watch a play which provides encouragement, to shout encouragement and advice, the older children take part with the actors in a prepared improvisation.'. So this season we started with Ring a Roses by this man Alan Cullen. This was about the plague in Eyam, so that's local stuff, [gesturing to programme] there he is Alan Cullen. He wrote this play about... now, Eyam is near Sheffield, well, you know Sheffield...

KH: Yes, I know it.

CG: And you know, they cut themselves off, when the plague hit, so we did a play about it called called Ring a Roses, because 'Ring a Roses, a pocket full of posies, Attishoo, Attishoo, we all fall down', is the plague. And we'd done one called The Stirrings in Sheffield on a Saturday Night which I must tell you about. But we did that, then we did The Daughter in Law, D.H Lawrence, The Knack by Ann Jellicoe... I'm just seeing if I can find the whole season.

KH: How were audiences reacting to the new plays, then?

CG: Oh now, very interesting. So they came along, as I say, they wouldn't pay for their free programmes and it changed. We didn't lose numbers but they would choose what they came to. They would not come one fortnight to see us, the next to see the Halle. So they'd come to Ring a Roses, they would probably not come to The Knack by Ann Jellicoe, straight from The Royal Court. They'd certainly come to the Christmas play with their kids, they'd come to the Shakespeare. Oh, some of that old audience didn't come to see the Shakespeare once a year - it was the one time they didn't come; they wanted West End, isn't that interesting? So we broadened our audience, and youngsters used to start coming and one said, very interesting, 'We don't mind kicking the doors now.' He didn't mean kicking the doors in, what he meant was going in the door of the theatre without feeling 'this is not for me, this is for the upper-classes', you know what I mean. So we definitely changed our audience. We never did another survey before we went to the Crucible, unfortunately - it would have been nice to know.

KH: So as a result of the survey that you did, did you try different marketing methods to get new people to come? Or was it simply just the change in the choice of play?

CG: It was just the change. It was the repertoire, the children's theatre work and the local press picking it up. So really and truly I think it was marketing. And let me just say about working outside London in those days. What was difficult was getting good publicity people. If they were any good you'd get them for you know, six months and

then they were off because the money's on the television, the money's on the film, the money's in the West End, the money's in the commercial theatre. So we had often very well-meaning, good, honest people but not the people with so much flair that they were off in a minute. Let me go back to your questions too, because Sheffield was a very important time because I moved there you know, [reading from sheet] 'my role in the creation of the new Crucible Theatre', was - and I want to write a book about it so I won't tell you all now! - but very briefly, one night Tyrone Guthrie came to talk on Sunday night, to raise funds for the new theatre. The actual story is that the City Council said, 'we want to build a new theatre' because Leeds was getting one, Nottingham's got one, Belgrade Coventry, you know, everybody's got to be in! And they felt Sheffield shouldn't be left out, and they assumed we'd build something like... the Lyceum was doing Bingo, so we were the only theatre then. So on the Saturday before, I was involved with, David [Brayshell] who'd been a lawyer and also on the board, became the administrator of the new theatre - full time - and we went seeing, interviewing architects in London and we eventually chose Ove Arup, they'd been involved in putting up the Sydney Opera House among other things and this was their first theatre, they went on to do Warwick and they've done other stuff since, they've just done St Katherine's docks in London or something, and they were highly respected. And so on the Saturday, they did two things which were very good, I said we wanted to build a stage which moves out into the... mainly because in our children's theatre it gets out into the audience, when we go into a school we don't say, 'sit down', they don't sit in serried ranks, they sit around in a semi-circle. So we went down to Nottingham, where I'd been with Johnny Neville, and I got permission, and they had the full stage up, the full thrust so I said, 'sit out the front' - I went to the back - I said, 'I'll do "oh for a muse of fire!"'. I went forward and I said, 'Now, you notice when I come down on the lower stage I'm in the same room?' and they said, 'Only, Colin, when you're at the very front, otherwise you may as well be on a proscenium stage.' That was Saturday, Sunday Tyrone Guthrie came, gave a talk, afterwards he said, 'What sort of theatre are you building?' and I said, 'Well, we're trying to get out into the audience.' So he said, 'Well really you should think of a thrust stage', he said 'it was no good at Chichester because they hadn't got the money really to raising the seats at the right sort of angle' and in a week - such was his influence - the board sent me and David to America, we went to New York, we went to Minneapolis, we went to Stratford Ontario and at Minneapolis, before I went in the building, the foyer was all right but I looked through this gap where you could see the stage, this gleaming polished surface and I knew that was the theatre we should have. And cutting a long story short - you can get my book eventually - we then, I said, 'well if we're going to do this, Guthrie', I said, 'we should have Tanya Moiseiwitsch' who had designed it with him. It was based on actually the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh - Stratford - they'd built one at Minneapolis and so Tanya became consultant designer and Wilfred Harrison (who went on to run Bolton) he left - he liked the proscenium. But we did do an experiment at Sheffield University, one of the big halls, I went to the back wall and I'd heard from Tanya that Alec Guinness had said when he went to Stratford Ontario, Stratford in Canada, and after the first test he said, 'I think you need another yard, it's too short.'. So they put on "Guinness' yard", so I thought 'that's interesting', so I went up to the University with Wilfred - he was the audience - and I came forward and I started, 'oh for a muse of fire,' and I said, 'I think the front ought to be there'. And he went to one side, I to the other and I was Othello, Iago says, 'he takes her by the palm', yes and he's talking about this, and we measure the distance and then - no e-mail in those days - telegraphed Stratford and we were within six inches of the length of Stratford and about a foot of the width! And that was how we... so it started from that, and when I told this to a man from the Architect's Journal way back in the seventies and he said 'Ah, you built an Anthropomorphic theatre.'. Oh yes, the balcony height - it had

a balcony at the back - just so Romeo can't touch Juliet's hand, you know what I mean. These things are important because they're based on... and I think that's why the Crucible works. But you've got to know how to use it and then the tunnels.

CG: So, we had awful criticism. I mean, Sheffield, I think, now has taken to the theatre, but because we didn't built a theatre, we built a performing space, I mean they have snooker, they have... I was amazed, they wheel me out sometimes for their gala - I didn't go to the gala this year, I couldn't go - but sitting next to the Lord Mayor's Lady, she said, 'I went to see a squash tournament!' I think, you know they built a squash court, they have concerts. It's a performing space that's very powerful. It's a very, very good theatre but you've got to have actors who can act, by which I mean project a bit, you can't hide behind a studio theatre projection. But going to Sheffield then, at that time, for me was marvellous, because I had a chance of putting up a new theatre. How many directors get that chance? I mean, some are put up now I understand. The other thing is when we put it up I got the actors together and said, 'what do you want from your dressing room?', 'Somewhere to lie down, wash basin, window', and when Peter Jeffrey took over from me there - he's now at LAMDA - he said, 'you didn't half look after the actors!'. Everyone has a window, in the whole building, except the dining room. They're now re-doing outside, I mean it's thirty, forty years ago isn't it, so it needs re-doing. Not re-doing in terms of... we got a studio, we were the first people to get, David and I went to see the Gulbenkian foundation and said 'we want a studio'. They'd only given money to universities, and I'd been to Leeds to talk on it and seen the University had equipment we'd have given our right arms for, lighting and that, but because you're professionals, 'no you have to make do with tin cans.' Well we had lighting of course but not the sort of equipment they had at the University. But then with this the Gulbenkian relented and they gave us money to put up the studio which was not in the original design, and - well I mean it was in the original design, but 'if possible' - and they built it.

CD2

CG: [Reading from question sheet] 'What are the main influences on your work as a director?' I think... I mean I watched all the Olivier, Ralph Richardson stuff and so on but that was...no I got a grant to go to Italy for two months to study theatre, to study opera in fact, but I went and I saw the work of Giorgio [Strala?] in Milan, he was one of the great post-war directors, Brecht was his great thing and he influenced me a lot. A proscenium theatre but you know they'd be a chair on the side of the stage like that and at one stage someone would sit there at just the right moment, do you know what I mean? They were either ostracised from everybody else or something. He had a wonderful way and also it wasn't just moving people on stage, it's what the production was saying. It's very hard to describe when you're influenced by someone but he certainly influenced me a lot. Guthrie, of course enormously, Tyrone Guthrie.

KH: What was it about Guthrie..?

CG: Because I went to see - and that's to do with the Crucible, he said, they paid for me to go - we went to see, we not only went abroad, [Brayshell] and I saw at Minneapolis about four or five productions, including The House of Atrius which was the Orestes

Agamemnon play and the way he used the chorus and everything, and Douglas Campbell who came over to act when I did *The Persians*, when I opened *The Crucible*, was a great help in setting that up. Then we fell out, because I wanted to do it my own way but I got a lot of information from him before, so he was an enormous influence on me. Geoffrey Ost in terms of his professionalism, he was a painter, lighting, I learnt a lot from Geoffrey, he painted wonderful watercolours, he lit the show. We never had lighting designers, I lit all my shows. And when I started at Nottingham, the head lighting man was a man called Tony Church, and I auditioned for Birmingham late last year, for Jonathan Church and he said, 'I think you know my father.'. And I said, 'God! He started to teach me all I know about lighting.' He didn't give me the job I may say [Laughs] unfortunately, my flattery didn't work! But Geoffrey taught me a lot about that. So a lighting designer was anathema to him, I had no lighting designers working for me until I went to *The Crucible*, I did my own lighting then and it was Michael Elliot who said - who was at Manchester - 'You've got so much to think of Colin, before as a director, to have the lighting taken off you is a huge...'. You know what you want and if you know lighting, the thing is I used to give the lighting director my cues and they would then argue or whatever, but they had a list of cues, what area of stage I wanted covered and so on, whereas now sometimes they just work as they go along and previews you know.

[Reading from Question sheet] 'How do you think regional theatre has changed?'. Well, television has killed it, as I knew it, because I get *The Stage* every week - the amount of working going on is phenomenal, I'm delighted but where you could go, stay for two years as a young actor, play everything from *Scrooge* to *Romeo*, that sort of thing and then go to London, or go on a big tour or whatever, television has killed it. And I've done some work in prisons, you know, going in doing Shakespeare, and I went in to a prison with a man who was on *Star Trek*, Barry [Morse]. He's an old actor, he must be on the way to ninety now - or perhaps he's eighty-odd - and he was an actor before the war and a local newspaper man came to interview him and he said 'You're doing this, what do you think?'. And he said, 'The Theatre's gone that I knew. If in my day you had reasonable talent, you were well trained at an academy, you could learn a living. Now the television has killed all that because you can be a very good actor... it's not what you know it's who you know.' But the thing is that the theatre I knew has gone. And I'm sure there were tacky reps you know. It's idealistic to say they were wonderful days. I think I was in at a very lucky time when public money came in - that's why the Sheffield story is so important. Five hundred pounds, some of the board resigned, but that gave us an opportunity to develop plays before the television got rid of what youngsters would only come for a short time.

KH: Do you think that the role of the director has changed?

CG: It's interesting, I think that they... I remember Simon Callow in his book on acting - it's very anti-director - says that the actor is the theatre, and I think... well, I was a director and I think I'm an actor really but I was an actor director, does that make sense? And actually when I gave up acting to direct, which was at Sheffield. When I got to Sheffield and I started with Geoffrey, acting, and then I gave up because I was really running a theatre more for Geoffrey. He was fine, but I had more responsibility than I'd had at Nottingham, and to do both I needed the time to prepare and when I went back to do a part... *Stirrings* in Sheffield I must tell you about, but I went to play the chairman and took over in that and my ex-wife was in it, playing, and she said afterwards, 'Colin you're not taking the stage', I'd lost that. Then I got it back by doing one-man shows,

which I did in Hong Kong, which is post Sheffield in the eighties to nineties because it was all in Cantonese and I wanted my own language... They spoke English, I may say, the actors did.

So, Stirrings in Sheffield I must say because that was important, when you say audience and giving them what they want. I'd been to see Peter Cheeseman's work at Stoke, and of course he stayed at Stoke the whole time: I left and he did a thing called The Jolly Potters which was about Stoke, which packed them in. I went to see it, it was great fun, music, very much like Joan Littlewood's Oh! What a Lovely War. All I mean by that is song and dance and that, and I said to the Sheffield board - I was very proud of this - I did a revue first, You Me and The Gate Post (I didn't direct it, but it was all right) which we'd done at Nottingham. Then I did - and this was again the board were very suspicious - The Boyfriend, which of course packed it, and I said I wanted to do a play about Sheffield called The Stirrings on Sheffield on a Saturday Night - it was a song I'd come across and someone called John [Hainsworth] did some research and one of the board said, 'I know the Sheffield audience, and this will empty the theatre' - I wrote it out actually.

So Alan Cullen wrote the sort of libretto - the script really - of the play, with these Sheffield songs in, very lovely - my ex-wife was a great singer - and Roderick Horn composing and he was actually still writing it as we were rehearsing and it was one of those things. So we come to the first night, and 'this will empty the theatre', and we had a full theatre because it was a two for the price of one. And the first number, it goes up on the pub, a bit of dialogue and then [sings] 'the stirrings on Sheffield on Saturday night.' It finished to a huge round of applause. And you could see the whole actors sort of [breathes sigh of relief] because I'd rehearsed a long curtain call, with about four reprises and Wilfred Harrison - who was always very loyal - my assistant, did say, 'I suppose then we're going to do The Boyfriend Colin.' I said 'no, no', but of course it worked and we did it as you know, there and at the Crucible and we never had a seat in the house available.

And when we went to the Crucible we opened with Peer Gynt and it was going to be Guthrie with The Agamemnon, and the last show at the old Playhouse, Britannia's Boys about the Empire, which Allen Cullen wrote, with music, very like The Stirrings, but it wasn't the same, it filled the house but the last rehearsal before we opened, before we opened, before we went into the theatre, on the Saturday, it was opening on the following Monday, I started opening on a Tuesday too. The Stage Manager was hovering around and I thought, 'Ah yes, the wigs haven't come or something' and he said, 'I just thought you ought to know I heard on the radio that Tyrone Guthrie died this morning!' [sharp intake of breath] So I'm left with The Crucible to open on my own, and [Dudley Campbell] was very helpful, he did The Shrew. So the audience we got, it was OK, but the prices... You see, it was at seven and six and we were suddenly now charging them a pound or something, you know for the expensive seats. So we then did A Taste of Honey - a northern play - full house. We got houses for the musicals at Christmas, but then it built. We did a children's show, again which - Pinocchio - which did very well. And looking back, we got an audience but not the capacity audience we'd had at the Playhouse because we're going from a 350 seat to 900, we had to treble our audience. So in a way by the time I left we were doing all right, and we did Calamity Jane - my last production - with someone called Lynda Marshall as the lead, she's since gone to do writing for television as Lynda La Plante and now does all the television. She was the last star and that packed it of course. But I think to say by the time we finished at the old Playhouse we'd got a loyal audience, the repertoire we played in, to the end, and we got them to accept that because they'd come at the first week, they'd tell their friends.

And I'll tell you one thing, just to end this, unless you've got any questions, as this is for the archives. Olivier, he'd been my idol, right, and he came up to Sheffield with a production of *Juno and the Paycock*, the National Theatre at The Lyceum - it was the first time the National toured, they weren't doing well in those days. I'm going back to '68, '69, which sounds remarkable now doesn't it? But they were touring, so he came up with Joyce Redmond and John Dexter - who has since gone - the director, to do 'An Afternoon at the Playhouse', just chatting for free, of course we were packed to the doors and I had no time to... I was rehearsing Sergeant Musgrove's Dance, I was so busy, I came on and said, 'Ladies and Gentlemen Sir Laurence Olivier!' and off I went. I didn't see. But I came back at the end and he said, 'So what are you doing?', 'Opening Sergeant Musgrave's Dance next week, Tuesday.'. So he said, 'Oh I'd like to see that'. So I said, 'Oh well, you're most welcome to come.'. So he said, 'Yes, I think I'll come'. Anyway so off he went. Monday came, Tuesday came, no word from Sir Lawrence, I mean he'd opened a show - Juno - I think it had perhaps, the second week elsewhere and so Tuesday, 'Is Sir Laurence coming?' I said, 'Course he's not coming he's directing the National Theatre, he's probably back in London'. It got to the half, right, I'm in the wings, and we had an outside line, it's now twenty five past seven and I said 'Look I'll ring his secretary.'. So I rang his secretary, I got through to her, remarkably, said 'I'm terribly sorry to bother you, but this is perhaps a bit silly but Sir Laurence said he might come to see the show.'. She said 'Oh yes, he's gone.'. He came with his glasses on, no-one recognised him, he bought a seat. Someone then recognised him. I shot down, you know the aisle, I said, 'Sir Laurence I'm so sorry.'. He said, 'No it's all right'. So then comes the interval of Sergeant Musgrove and I suddenly found myself protecting my idol, because first the press were round, 'What did you think of the production?', you see. Now what could he say? If he said 'oh I think it's quite good', - only quite good - or 'oh I think it's marvellous' Sir Laurence patronises the... you know. What could he say? And he said, 'I wouldn't dream of commenting on the work of my fellow professionals.'. What a reply! Then the interval came of course and I was fending him off from people, I mean ordinary members of the public just wanting autographs and things but... I think upstairs I've got a photograph of us in the foyer, so then the show came to an end - I didn't realise how ill he was, you know. I said, 'Would you like to see members of the company?'. He said, 'Yes of course' so round he came, I think it was on three floors, the back bit, the dressing rooms, he'd stop on the landings a bit to get his breath. He saw everyone in the theatre, from the leading actors, the supporting actors, the ASMs, the props, the lighting, the costume. There wasn't a single person working in that theatre he did not personally see, and when you say 'has the theatre changed?', I'm sure the... when I was at Stratford in the nineties, there was a good feeling there, wonderful, not the commercial, I mean the commercial, I've not had... the bits I've had to do with I haven't liked because I like the theatre as a family, which sounds a bit old fashioned but there was this family feel about it I think, and there probably still is, you know, at the National and so on. But that was very much the part of the theatre that I joined, and I still believe in... if I run a company that's how I run it and it's appreciated.

Appreciated also are children's theatre work. This is perhaps the last story, because it's relevant. The children's theatre work in Sheffield was extremely important. Just as I went from Sheffield, to Australia, to Leicester, to Hong Kong and spent twelve years there as Head of Acting. I went back last March and they put on a party for my students, I expected fifteen. Seventy turned up! And I realise now that in terms of what I did in my life, that was an important part of my life, training those young people, who are now stars. I mean, I saw... one of them was in a Kung Fu movie, on the buses and so on, I mean, they're stars, so that was a part and in a way we were training people, though doing good work at the time. When I opened the *Crucible*, the first night, the first week we had something called *Fanfare* which packed it. It started with me doing children's

theatre, about thirty children in the front, one or two handpicked only because they were bright, they knew what they were going to do but I had some costumes, and we did a sort of Cowboys and Indians off the top. And what'll interest you too, I was in denims, everyone else in monkey suits. And some critics said it was disgraceful that I should appear on this new stage in a denim jacket. Can you imagine?! I mean nowadays they could come on naked and they wouldn't notice. Anyway so we did this opening. Anyway so I'm on The Doctors [recent TV work of CG] recording this TV earlier this year and the man, the story was that a youngish man. I won't bother you with the plot. I didn't meet him in the morning but he came at lunchtime the first day, because now in Birmingham they've got a place at Selly Oak, and he said, 'You're Colin George' and I said 'Yes.'. He said, 'I saw your name on the list, I was eight years old when you were director of the Crucible, it's because of you I'm in the theatre. And I thought, 'Well, two people can't have the same name in Equity, they have to change your name. 'No it can't be Colin George, you must be dead!' he said [Laughs]. 'But here you are, you're still alive!' This is Ian Reddington, because when I left Sheffield they'd given the Crucible over to the young people, and purely because of that he'd gone to the local council somehow or other and he'd said 'I want to go to RADA' and they paid for him to go and audition in London and he got in, went to Stratford as a young walk-on, then he ended up on Eastenders and all the rest. But what I realise is, I keep meeting people who go back to those Sheffield days. And I'm not saying they haven't done it since - that's nonsense - but we were at a lucky time in that television hadn't quite got the force of hand it has now, with the reality TV and all that, it was something different...

And it had to change, you can't turn it back. Sir Ralph Richardson was asked - this is when television really came in - 'Is the Theatre going to die?'. He said, 'the Theatre's always dying, it has been since the Greeks. It'll go on dying and keep on going, because as you and I know that's a screen, a human being is different'. And the reality of that - and that's why I suppose going back to the Crucible's design - the audience is on three sides, they're aware of each other and one of the things that convinced me when I went to Minneapolis, was, before the show there was a great buzz. They'd be parties, they'd be laughter over here from a group of people. They weren't sort of sitting in a more formal sort of attitude to what was going on, it was like being in a huge sort of pub or something! And the fact you can see the audience on the other side, doesn't... you believe in what's going on. When I started we had what they called the moat or the gutter round the stage, which was the bit that divides you the audience from me. I do a lot of my one-man shows sometimes going to Arts Centres or schools and things and I always put the audience just that little distance away. I work with masks and you've got to be that far away, so you can make that imaginary leap - if you're cheek by jowl, so comfortably cheek by jowl, but not literally cheek by jowl - that's a different sort of theatre.