

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Terence Rigby – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate McNiven

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TR: My name is Terence Rigby, I'm an actor, and I'm in my sixties now. I trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in the late fifties after taking an interest in theatre when I was very young, in the boy scouts and then at grammar school in Birmingham and then later in the Royal Air Force, all on an amateur basis.

When I left the Royal Air Force I did various jobs, I had been training to be a surveyor, a quantity surveyor. Then I went onto the building works, as a labourer, then into a factory but all the time I was doing amateur stuff. And at the suggestion really of a school friend, because I never seemed really to him to be particularly satisfied with my lot you know. And he had a brother, a very lovely brother who was a professional actor called Bernard Kilby, very fine actor who I later went on to work with, and my pal, anyway his brother suggested that I try and get it out of my head and take an examination for RADA, so I did and I failed the first time but the second time I passed. So I did two whole years at RADA in London, which was quite difficult in itself.

KM: What year did you go to RADA?

TR: 1958-60, so coming from Birmingham I went back for the Christmas holidays in 1960 and I wrote to the Birmingham Repertory Company, a man called Bernard Hepton who is still with us and acting. He was at that time a director and actor. And he decided to take me on in a production of Anthony and Cleopatra which they were preparing as a small part player and also possibly to understudy a larger role. I was very thrilled because Birmingham was one of the top four or five regional theatres with Bristol Old Vic, Nottingham Playhouse (that is the old Nottingham Playhouse as opposed to the one that was rebuilt. I think that was Goldsmith St., Nottingham) and Liverpool. So that's Birmingham, Nottingham, Bristol Old Vic and Liverpool and they were the top really of British regional theatre at that time. I don't think I've missed anybody out. They were the 4 that all actors wanted to work in if they wanted regional theatre.

The other two companies (of course that's not to exclude the Royal Shakespeare Company, which was formed in the mid sixties, or early mid sixties, under Peter Hall, Sir Peter Hall. We are talking about the regional things, although that would include Stratford) were Pit Lochert in Scotland which ran a whole season of plays for about 9

months each year, actors would want to go into that company as well. And the only other place I remember was this curious theatre, well I say curious as we didn't know much about it, in Nairobi in Kenya which used to do a kind of summer season. Of course the idea of going to Nairobi to act was a wonderful kind of thing. It was obviously a colonial type theatre and you would get looked after pretty well but whether they were subject to segregation at that time I really don't know, although I did make one or two auditions for that company but was never accepted.

However, Birmingham (that's the old Birmingham, all the things I refer to are the old versions) the old Repertory Theatre at Station Street, and Bernard Hepton was directing. I suppose it's of interest [that] Derek Jacobi - the man who's now Sir Derek - he was making his debut at that time having come down from Cambridge, he didn't go to the drama schools but he came down from Cambridge University group.

One other interesting thing is that during my second year at RADA I went back, as usual, to Birmingham during the terms breaks. And I was introduced by a man who worked for the Birmingham Co-op man called Charles Moyle, who was a great amateur theatre enthusiast and also a professional theatre enthusiast. And he used to take parties from the Birmingham Co-op society in town once every fortnight to the local rep, which was the Alexander Theatre – I can never remember whether it was the Alexandria or the Alexander, I think it was the Alexander... you can check it out. And I was introduced to Derek Salberg who ran that theatre, and he and his brother Reggie were very, very well looked upon by the actors. Derek ran Birmingham and Reg ran Salisbury so they both had repertory companies, a group of actors, maybe twelve, who were constantly there and just turned over and did a play every fortnight.

KM: That's amazing to think every fortnight...

TR: Yes.

KM: A very quick rehearsal process.

TR: Yes, well of course there were theatres around that would do it every week as well. But they were mainly called summer rep. But to get back to this. Derek Salberg had a small part in a production that was coming up in an Agatha Christie play called Murder on the Nile. He had a part of what was termed a Nubian steward, who was on this riverboat when this murder took place. The whole thing was set on a riverboat. He needed an actor to dress up as a black man to go about and dust the rooms and squirt things in the air and occasionally bring a drink in and then disappear off and then come back and then wander out again. I think I had a couple of lines at one point and he paid me, I think he paid me 5 pounds. I was able to do it for two weeks as RADA was down at the time, so I was able to do it.

Effectively, in an odd sort of way, that was my first introduction to professional theatre in that play. However, technically I suppose I wasn't a professional as it were until I'd finished my RADA course and, going backwards now, that was when I got this part in Anthony and Cleopatra at Birmingham Rep. Bernard Kirby played Caesar beautifully, and Elizabeth Spriggs played Cleopatra, and Tony - dear Tony Steadman - played Anthony. And in those days we rehearsed for 3 weeks and played for three weeks, which was very, very special and was a reflection of the quality of repertory theatre itself. Bristol

would be the same and Nottingham and Manchester – oh, Manchester also had a very good reputation, I mustn't forget Manchester. I think that's the original theatre not the Royal Exchange, that hadn't started by then, the Royal Exchange came later. But Manchester did have a good following and was highly rated, almost in a group with those original four.

I stayed on at Birmingham and did *She Stoops to Conquer*, the Goldsmith piece, and at that time Sir Barry Jackson was the head, the overall head of the Birmingham repertory company. He was a very, very famous gentleman of the theatre and many other things I'm sure but that was his great thing, the theatre. And he had helped to start or actually created the Malvern Festival, which was where Bernard Shaw - George Bernard Shaw, the writer - premiered most of his plays before perhaps running them into London. But Barry Jackson was there, and I actually met Sir Barry and he was a very elderly gentleman when I was there, and in fact during the time that I was there he died and we went to his funeral and, you know, saw him off. So that was for me quite a historical little thing which happened in Birmingham.

After Birmingham I got tipped off - and this is a way in which jobs used to happen in those days, perhaps more so than these days - I got tipped off by a friend who had been at RADA with me called John Malcolm who now lives in Edinburgh, and unfortunately his health is a little poor so he's not able to work these days. He tipped me off that he was going to be in a play in Hull called *Caught Napping*, which was a farce, and he recommended me to the director who was a lady and I just turned up in Hull and was given a script and played this part.

KM: How did it compare between Birmingham and Hull?

TR: Well the great thing about Hull at the time was that it stank of fish! [Laughs] It really did stink of fish because the ports were nearby and that was where all the boats came in, and at certain time of the day they'd be unloading the fish and the wind would carry the smell right across the city. That would be a lesser kind of theatre, it was really perhaps a touring type of theatre, a theatre in which shows would pass by for two weeks, pass by for two weeks etc. And so we must have had say, two weeks rehearsal for this particular one, we weren't a tour. I think they were trying to set up a company like Birmingham or the other places, you know, a repertory company. And I think they did a whole season that year, that would have been about 1962 I should think, I did that. I don't remember anything in particular, except that there was a lot... I became aware at that time of a lot of kind of internal theatre politics. not a grave matter but politics of the sort where the director and the leading lady would be at loggerheads, and the leading lady would be lobbying some of the other actors to get them on her side, and the director would be doing the same, and there was a situation actually which came to a head after I had left where the leading lady actually managed to get the director sacked, so one became aware that such things were possible; became aware of the antagonism that existed between certain individuals, which up to that point I'd not come across before.

After Hull, of course having been at RADA and lived in London one developed over two years a taste for London and got to know London, and so rather than keep going back to Birmingham, my old home where my brothers and sisters and family and father were, you go back to London because that's where the agents were and it was the ambition, one's early ambition is to try and find an agent you see. Some actors at RADA if they won, there were a certain amount of prizes available at RADA and if you were fortunate

enough to have won one of those prizes you would get recommended to a big theatre, so one or two actors and actresses, they were given these places in big theatres right from the start. Ironically of course I had done the same thing by chance, just by writing I'd got into one of the big...

I remember the late, and much lamented, John Thaw, he and I were at RADA together. He was the man who played... was it Frost? [Corrected by interviewee: Morse] He did all these big serials on television.

KM: Yes, I know who you mean.

TR: John was given a place to play very big parts at Liverpool, that was his prize. And Tom Courtenay - who has more recently become Sir Tom Courtenay - he was in my class and he was given a part at the Old Vic in a Chekhov play, so they had kind of cushier starts than some of the other actors but because they'd won prizes or they were special people.

You see, what most actors did, mainly they were based in London in some way and they'd go off to a regional theatre for a short period of time or a long period of time and then come back, and in the meantime while they were in the regional theatres they would write letters to London managements and London agents to encourage them to come up to Liverpool or Birmingham or Nottingham or Manchester to see them playing Hamlet or to see them playing a big part, in the hope that they would want to put them on their books in London.

KM: Was there a definite feeling that London was the place to be or was the repertory around the country thought of as highly or was London...?

TR: The repertory of the ones I've mentioned to you were very, very highly thought of and were the places that you could seduce managements up to see you occasionally with the help of circumstances. But mostly the agents or the managements, (the agents are agents and the management are people who actually put money into shows and make shows) they're much more likely to go out to Bromley or to Greenwich or to Windsor because they live in London and it's just down the road really for them for an evening and back, whereas if they go to Liverpool, Manchester, all these places maybe they stay in a hotel and it becomes a whole package.

But the point is, what did actors do when they were in-between regional jobs? And there was a whole group of people like myself who were doing good work and who eventually, in time, became well known as serious actors and we had no agents, so the opportunity of getting film work or television work - which was starting to become quite big in the sixties, not so before. We used to go to these very tiny, tiny agents who used to do walk-ons, so you could do walk-on, be a crowd artist for a day or two days, and get like £2.50 a day, which in that time was quite a lot of money - keep you going for two or three days. Incidentally, my salary at Birmingham Rep was £12 [and a half: deleted by interviewee] which was very, very, very good in 1961. Twelve pounds was a lot of money.

So, as I was saying, there was a whole group who would stay in London and do these what we used to call 'Noddys' that was the term which was created by an actor called Alan Lake who was married subsequently to Diana Dors, I don't know if you know these

names but they are both very famous people in British theatre history, he invented that phrase 'doing a Noddy' which meant, it explained exactly what you did. You would be in a scene with other actors, now, if the other actor looked at you or said anything to you as he was passing you weren't allowed to say anything, so you would go [he nods]

KM: You'd nod! [Laughs]

TR: So they called it a 'Noddy', [Laughs] because if you spoke the television company would have to pay you money.

KM: Oh I see, you weren't allowed to.

TR: So just before the take the man would say, 'All right, all right you extras, no talking.'! [Laughter]

KM: What did you prefer doing, did you prefer the theatre or did you prefer being on television and in films?

TR: Well of course, one was learning from doing these 'Noddys' quite a little bit, quite a lot about television, but you weren't allowed to do it because you couldn't get the part.

KM: Because it was harder to get a part?

TR: Yes, and sometimes what would happen is that a director would single you out and he'd say to the floor assistant 'is he a proper actor?' because all sorts of people used to do this extra work, and if it was established that you were a proper actor he might even give you a couple of lines to say and get you to do special business: walk into a room put some papers down say 'There you are sir.' And another man would say 'Oh take those through to Miss Bloggs' and you'd say 'Yeh, all right' so you'd get a little part like that which wouldn't be in the main script, you know.

And obviously there was a little bit more money involved in television if you got enough of these little parts, but they didn't come frequently and so you used to worry; people used to say 'No you mustn't do these walk-ons, because if you do walk-ons you will never get to play parts because they will always think of you as a walk-on, they'll have your name down as a walk-on', so actors used to make up names - pretend they were, say, Bert Smith.

KM: What was yours?

TR: [Pause] I've got no idea! [Laughs] I don't know whether I actually ever did that, but I know some chaps did. That was the general feeling that that was the best thing to do.

KM: Going back to the theatre at the time. As well in being in the repertory, were you going to see much theatre yourself? Was there any particular playwrights or plays at the time that you enjoyed?

TR: [Pause] I did go to the Old Vic and I saw Richard II done by an actor called John Justin which I was very impressed with. I used to occasionally go to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in London to see plays. One was very aware of the up-and-coming writers at the time like Arnold Wesker and maybe John Arden, do I mean John Arden, I'm not sure whether I mean John Arden. He may have been a much earlier writer, I'm not sure, I'm sorry I can't think of that. Arnold Wesker, Harold Pinter, John Osborne, those were all ones that ring in my head as being the modern writers at that time. But I think it would be true to say that I didn't go to the theatre very much. Well, actually you couldn't afford it unless you got a free ticket. You know, there were sometimes free tickets or you used to meet the porters in Covent Garden you know, which is one of the areas where all the actors milled around in that area, Leicester Square, you used to go into these cafes - you know, Joe Lyons, where all the actors used to meet - and there'd be the odd Covent Garden porter, and he somehow used to get hold of tickets, so he'd give you a ticket, a free ticket; but you didn't set out to pay good money, because you hadn't got the money. But somebody would say 'Oh, they're giving out free tickets at the Old Vic' or there was a preview, so you'd all go down there and have a look maybe, if you weren't working, because other jobs you'd used to have to do to try and find jobs to pay your rent, and usually you lived with another actor at least in one room and so between you, you had to make the rent. I had a job at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, clean up tables, you know, and I would do it one night and then my mate - also an actor - he would do it the next night, and then whoever was on would bring back a load of sandwiches, because they used to let you take all the sandwiches at the end of the night. It was quite good, because it was to do with theatre, it was opera and sometimes you saw some opera, sometimes the stage-doorman would give you a ticket. I remember seeing Nureyev and Fonteyn dancing Swan Lake.

KM: And Covent Garden is a really exciting place still.

TR: Yes, yes

KM: I love it.

TR: Yes it's great. And eventually I proved to be so well-liked that I was allowed to run the artists' bar, so that was great too because you meet all the great opera singers and all the ballet dancers, because they used to get so dehydrated they were always at the bar drinking to go back on for the second half, or the third act, or the fourth act-like they have in opera and ballet. But I was always conscious no matter these jobs I had in London these little jobs to keep going that I wanted to get back into the regions to do more work.

At the time one had a bit of a struggle becoming a member of Equity. As far as I recall the system was, it was very difficult to join Equity because in order to join Equity you had to have a contract, and if you hadn't got a contract, but you couldn't get a contract unless you were a member of Equity you see. Anyway, I think they introduced this

provisional thing whereby if you could work for two years on and off, embracing so many weeks of work over two years you could be allowed to have a provisional membership of Equity, and then later you could become a full member you see, but it wasn't until you became a full member that you were technically allowed to work in the West End.

After about '62 I heard about, I went to an agent's office, sometimes there were some small agents' offices where they didn't mind if total strangers walked in and asked about jobs, they weren't top flight of agents, they were middle agents, there was one in Cambridge Circus, a man called Smithy, Smithy and Diana... I can't remember her second name. And I walked in there one day and they said 'Well, there's this job going up in Keswick, they want somebody to take over from this other actor who was leaving the company and they are a kind of touring theatre but at the moment they are in Keswick' and there were six plays, and four of them I think, four or three, were already on, and they used to work in repertory like, Monday night they'd do *She Stoops to Conquer*, Tuesday night they'd do *Twelfth Night*, Thursday they'd do...

KM: And would these be all the same actors?

TR: Yes, yes.

KM: That's so different than today.

TR: Yeah, yeah so they were somehow able to say 'Yeah, OK, you suit the parts, you go'. And that was like another £12 pounds a week job so I had to take a night train up to Keswick, I think it was an overnight train as a matter of fact, and I was met by some, no I wasn't met by anybody, I found my way to Keswick. In those days you went to Carlisle, then you got a little, tiny, tiny, tiny train, which I don't think exists any more. Anyway, I got to Keswick and I discovered that this wasn't just a regular theatre, it was a travelling theatre and you had... it was all made out of caravans, so you had like a caravan and then another trailer there and there and then they would open it all up like a Meccano set and it would make the shape of a theatre. Then around the theatre were smaller caravans right round and you'd have a big generator which created light for the theatre and also created light for all these other caravans which is where the actors lived, and each caravan was divided into two so you'd go up the steps and you'd have one little room there and one little room there and that's where you lived. So that was really different.

KM: I can imagine that would be really fun.

TR: Yeah, and also they erected a big marquee and they had a bar there so that people coming to the theatre could go into the bar, and all that sort of thing. This was the brain-child of a man called John Ridley who was a kind of, almost a scientist, a mechanic. He had built this theatre and it was his brain-child for many, many, many years and he ran it for many years. But the interesting thing about it was that when it was first designed and used, it would only stop for one week in any place and then it

would go on the road like gypsies, going round up to Preston and Doncaster... all these places. Mainly in Lancashire.

KM: And what sort of audiences did you have?

TR: Well I seem to think that you could get about 160 into this theatre, which isn't a lot bigger than some of the smaller theatres. I was only ever at Keswick, because the idea of it touring round it wasn't working somehow, maybe they'd fallen on hard times and there wasn't the revenue coming in. So this year they decided to stop at Keswick for a whole season, like, three months. And it was so successful that they just stayed there: it became economically viable to stay in Keswick and it remained in Keswick. I never went back there, I finished in like, September, and I went into these four plays. I had to learn the parts very quickly because this actor had left.

KM: So what did you do, did you learn one at a time or did you try to learn all four at the same time?

TR: Well, like, I arrived there and they'd say, 'Well, Twelfth Night is Sunday night, there's no performance tomorrow, but Twelfth Night start', I think every actor had one play out, something like that, so they'd say 'Right, you have to be ready by Tuesday to do the part of Antonio in Twelfth Night, the Shakespeare, you know'. So you'd start to learn Antonio, then you had a little rehearsal, they'd show you when you came on, when you came off, what you did and then, a lot of the directors, there were at least two directors, one, Joan Knight - very important name, Joan Knight - she was like the resident director who was like, on site all the time; other directors like Abraham Assayo, he would go back to London, you know, do his production then go back to London, but Joan Knight and the stage managers, particularly the director, used to spend extra time with you, going over the lines, going over the lines. It was a one-off situation to have an actor who had seven plays already going suddenly take off, he went to America actually, this guy, to do a special show so everybody was very anxious to help you to learn.

KM: You must have been chained to your script!

TR: Yes.

KM: It never left your sight?

TR: Yes and then of course they would be rehearsing yet another new play you've got four going as part of the season and you'd be rehearsing a fifth one, and I think there were six, if not seven, I can't remember now. So I was also in the next play, so you'd play out and then do the next play, all these plays would be turning over all the time like this every other night.

KM: It's brilliant for the audience.

TR: Yes, of course it was mainly holidaymakers who would go up to Keswick. It means that every night they could see a different show, it was wonderful, if you were interested.

KM: Definitely. Do you think it's a shame that it's not really done any more?

TR: Well of course yes, of course it's a shame. I suppose that it's kind of economics. I know that eventually, eventually that theatre, it was called the Century Theatre... the Keswick Century Theatre, it decided to stay there as I think I said, and eventually they built a permanent theatre there and that old theatre is like a museum now and I think it's in Keswick or near Keswick or somewhere in that area, because occasionally I get a postcard saying it's an anniversary of the founding of this and will you come to the party or something. I've never been able to go, never chose to go. I think that Bob Hoskins was there as well. There must have been dozens of actors who were there over the years I think. After that season finished I went back to London of course, because that was what one did, you never thought of going on holiday, you never somehow amassed enough money.

KM: Just enough to get you by each day.

TR: Yes that's right, yes. I said I was paid £12, yes Keswick was £12, and they would give you your rail ticket to get to Keswick and back to London or whatever.

And I went back to London and I got - some of this may be chronologically not on the ball! I got myself a room... Oh, yes! I was living in Islington somehow, living in Islington on everybody's couch and kitchen tables and all sorts. The way you used to live was crazy, you get back to London and you get to Euston and you wouldn't know where, where to start. So you go down to a particular pub in the West End and hope to see some of your mates still floating around because they could have gone off.

KM: And say, 'Do you have a bed?'

TR: Yes, 'Is there a chance to staying for a night?'. They'd say 'Well, yeah, one night then, alright, one night.' So you breathe a sigh of relief and everybody gets kind of a little drunk and you know where you're going to stay for one night; and the next day comes and you've got to go, and you're dragging your suitcase around. It really was living on your wits.

KM: It sounds an amazing life.

TR: Yeah. [Pause] Oh and then almost immediately, well, not too long afterwards, I heard they were doing a Shakespeare play at Carlisle, Julius Caesar, and I think it was John Malcolm again had put me on to that. That's right, John Malcolm was living in

Islington with a lady-friend and he allowed me to stay, he persuaded the lady-friend to let me stay in one of the rooms for a few nights, and he told me about this job that they were doing, this big Shakespeare in Carlisle, and he got the number somehow for me and I rang this bloke up and I said 'I'm this sort of age and I'm this tall and I've played that part and that part and that part' and he said 'Right, fine, you can play this part and that part, we start on Monday!' [Laughs]

It was a big company in Julius Caesar, there were about 17 male roles and two ladies: the wife of Caesar and the wife of Brutus. I got there, couldn't believe it, everybody, all the 17 people were gay, they were all gay with the exception of one guy turned up a bit late and I thought 'Thank God for that, he wasn't gay!' and he'd actually been in my class at RADA. Maybe there was one other guy that wasn't gay, but they were gay! Good actors, and I didn't have any problems and it was quite a nice production, Julius Caesar. There was a young man in it, it was very early in his career, Giles Havergal, who went on to become a famous director up in Scotland, ran the Citizens or one of those eminent Scottish theatres. He was in this Julius Caesar but that just lasted for two weeks, three weeks and back you go to London. Oh, Carlisle, coldest place in the world!

KM: It's freezing!

TR: Coldest place in the world, before I went to North America it was the coldest place. I'm sure it could even vie with America as well. You know it?

KM: Yeah, I know Carlisle. I think Scotland's colder; Edinburgh's freezing.

TR: Yes.

KM: I'm originally from Scotland so...

TR: Are you? Oh right.

KM: But Carlisle, great place!

TR: I remember being fascinated by the pubs in Carlisle because, I don't know what goes on now but at that time the pubs were run by the state, by the city, they weren't independently owned.

KM: They were all run by the state?

TR: Yes, and they had tiled walls and big aspidistras, I mean, anything to make you feel 'Oh, this isn't a very nice place to be in'.

KM: Not very comfortable.

TR: No, I mean that's really true, I mean, that is true if you ask or research it, and maybe at some point it changed, but that's what was going on in the mid sixties up in Carlisle. It wasn't a nice thing to go into a pub, they used to try and keep people from stopping drinking.

KM: Not like London, very different sort of pubs.

TR: Yes. Well, pleasant places to, kind of be in really, and convivial. So back we come again to London, it's always back to London! I found myself, by this time I was living in Caledonia Road with another actor, in one room and we were back again on the Royal Opera House cleaning the tables and washing up and all that. Because I knew the people down there and they knew I would go away for so long and then come back, and when it was convenient I would go back. Myself and this other actor we were painting a lady's house inside to make some money, and I found out from an organisation called Spotlight - by that time, and most young actors used to do this, they would get their picture and put it in a magazine which you had to pay called Spotlight, it's still going now, it's a wonderful organisation. It's a big book all men, big book all ladies; leading man section, younger man section, character actor section, all that sort of thing.

KM: And if they want a character they go through it?

TR: Yes it's quite advanced now, internets and all sorts of things, but it's still this big book. You could ring up Spotlight and say 'Are there any interviews?' Because directors used to come into town and take a room in Spotlight and interview actors for a season of plays they were doing wherever you like, Great Yarmouth, Shrewsbury, Birmingham, wherever. They said, 'There's a man been on the phone from Dublin, he's looking for a man who's recently played Sir Toby Belch in Twelfth Night' and it so happened that I... I kind of missed a bit out, you see, because in the meantime I had been to Sunderland to the Empire Theatre to appear in the first North Eastern Shakespeare Festival in the Sunderland Empire. There was a man in Sunderland by the name of Len Harper who was a councillor and he was dynamite! Dynamite! He cared about the theatre and he wanted that theatre working, he wanted to get things going there really well - it kept blowing hot and cold in Sunderland theatre-wise. Anyway, so I'd been up there and I'd played Sir Toby Belch and that was with director George Harland who I later worked for in Farnham.

So, coming back to London after that, I had spoken to Spotlight and they had said there was this man in London [ed ?Dublin] looking for someone to play Sir Toby Belch because his Toby Belch walked out and they opened next Wednesday. So I was given this number to ring, I rang this man in London he said 'You've played the part yes? Marvellous. Well let's see what time is it now? Take the 10 o'clock flight from Heathrow and I'll meet you at Dublin airport, and spend the night with myself and my family and tomorrow morning we'll audition you on the stage' Audition me on the stage? I don't know about that, but it was open air. So I did that I flew to Dublin, I had to borrow £15 off the lady whose flat I was painting, she happened to be OK, she had a few bob, Maria, bless her. So I flew to Dublin and I was met and spent the night on the floor of this man's house, he had lots and lots of children. Next morning we went down to the

Open Air Theatre at Blackrock, Dublin, just outside Dublin and I did a few speeches for him and he said 'That's it, that's it, they're fine, and they're fine.' So we started to rehearse straight away having had a bit of breakfast and the rest of the cast came drifting in. They hadn't opened yet but this was maybe Friday or Saturday and they were opening on the Wednesday, so there was the whole thing to do. And, as it happened I knew the role you see, because I'd played it in Sunderland, so it wasn't difficult to slip into it.

I stayed on that occasion with an Aunty figure - my own mother was Irish, she had friends in Dublin, and there was this lady that had a big house and lots of people lived in it, and we used to call her Aunty; she wasn't really an aunty, she was just a friend of a friend of a friend. So I stayed there and was well looked after by her in my little room. After the first week we realised something was going wrong, yes it was £12 the airfare - this £12 keeps coming up doesn't it! - it was £12 to fly to Dublin in those days, and the man gave me a cheque for the £12 and I put it in the bank and after a few days it bounced, so I thought 'Oh my goodness, what's going on here? The man's cheques are bouncing! Are we safe, will we get paid?'. We got paid the first week, and then we were told that there was some difficulty about whether or not we'd be paid. There were some rumours going around that the man had run out of money and cheques were bouncing here there and everywhere; he used to take us out for meals and we always went to a different restaurant. It was open air and it used to rain a lot, of course when it really rained you couldn't do the show, and there was a train that ran past right by the side of it, it was on a lake, beautiful spot, Blackrock park, but when the train went past we'd freeze until the train had gone, then start again. Anyway, sure enough, the company went broke. The poor man, he tried to burn down the marquee where all the costumes were in the hope of getting a big insurance deal. but the marquee was so wet it wouldn't burn, it just burned a little bit up it. So I was marooned in Dublin, because every pound meant something, so if you were working for someone who couldn't pay you...

KM: You couldn't afford the flight back.

TR: Especially since the cheque they'd given me had bounced, although he probably gave me the £12 with an apology I'm sure, but now it was £15 I'm earning - it had gone up to £15 now - didn't materialise at the end of the second week, so I was kind of stranded at my auntie's, not that she would worry. By chance someone heard that there was an English actor in town, and they were looking for an English actor to do a Liverpoolian part in a new play there in Dublin with all these Irish actors, and one thing led to another and I auditioned: the man came round to my auntie's one morning and asked me to come in, and was very impressed with the way I read the part. He and his brother gave me the part, they were called the Dowling brothers; Jack Dowling and Vincent Dowling, and Vincent Dowling later became very important in my life in America. And I think I got paid £25!

KM: A lot more than £12!

TR: Yes and a lot more than £15! So I recovered my situation, and it was a great success. There was a chance that it might transfer to London, which would have been wonderful, but it didn't happen. And another little snippet: while I was over there in Dublin there

was a director called Frank Dermody, well known Irish director, wanted me to join the Abbey Theatre to come to England in an Irish play to play the English corporal The Plough and the Stars. But the head of the Abbey Theatre wouldn't hear of me doing it because I wasn't properly Irish, although my mother was from Dublin.

KM: Did you mention that?

TR: Oh I'm sure I did, yeah, because it was in the papers. But it was just as well, because there were 59 in the cast and I was just the sole non-Irish person and I had this great big leading role, the fact that my mother was Irish forgave me everything so I got on well with them, everything was alright. So eventually I had the boat fare back to London because of this new show. So, we're back in London now.

KM: What year do you think we're in now?

TR: We're definitely in '63 because that play was called, the Irish play, the new one it was called Let Freedom Ring and it was by Donagh MacDonagh who was a Justice of the Peace, and it was a celebration of the founding of the Trades Union movement in Ireland. And the character I played was Jim Larkin who was the founder, who used to go out onto the streets and scream and shout at the workers but who was actually from Liverpool, Liverpool-Irish, that's why they wanted someone with an English kind of sound, from Liverpool. So that was 1963.

One thing I have missed out somewhere along the way was that there was a tour set up from London to go around the country for six months, and I got a part in that it was a sort of musical play originally directed by Joan Littlewood, Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be by Frank Norman and music by Lionel Bart.

KM: Do you sing as well?

TR: Yeah I had to sing a bit in that but then we all has to a bit not posh singing but chorus. We did that we went to Bournemouth, Blackpool, Birmingham, Coventry, Bath, Bristol, all over the place for six months, and that was basically changing every week, so you'd finish on Saturday night, and early Sunday morning you'd be packing your bag and be out down the railway station and going off to Blackpool from Bournemouth, arrive in Blackpool 4 o'clock in the afternoon, straight down the theatre, get your dressing room, wash your socks out, wash your this out and that out...it was quite hectic but it was a nice company we kind of got on well.

Funnily enough, there was just one odd thing that happened to me when I was on tour with Fings Ain't Wot They Used T'Be, and that was I went to see a production of Swan Lake in Blackpool because the Royal Ballet were going through, the touring version. So we were able to see them and they were able to see us because the matinees were different days, and I took a great kind of liking to the idea, I decided that acting wasn't really all that important, a much higher kind of art was dancing - of course I was much younger in those days - so for a while I carried with me the idea that I was going to

throw the acting in and start taking dance lessons, a silly pipe dream but it lasted for a while.

[Here the tape cut out.]

TR: OK, well, we are back from Dublin. What's the next step? I will hop about.

The way actors received information in those days and heard about job possibilities was to go to Joe Lyons Tea Shop in Piccadilly [corrected by interviewee: actually in Newport Street, off the Charing Cross Road] and sit all day drinking cups of tea and swapping bits and pieces of information. And it was there I picked up news that there was an audition for a musical with Harry Secombe called Pickwick. Off I trotted to the stage door in the Saville Theatre which is now a four house cinema in Shaftesbury Avenue, and did this audition and got this part which involved playing about... well, I played three different roles and understudied about eleven. It was a big musical. So one was either first understudy or second understudy and I think I got paid about £18 a week. That was my first West End Show. But, of course, we are getting away from the regional aspects.

Once again, on this information, this scene, there was a very well known club called the Buckstone Club which is named after a famous actor from some 200 years ago - he used to work in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. And actors used to gather there for drinks and meals and whatever. Royal Shakespeare boys used to come down after their show, and they kept telling me about this part that they were all auditioning for. And the Royal Shakespeare Company could not put their finger on anyone who was exactly right for the part. It turned out to be a Harold Pinter play called The Homecoming, and they described the part to me as a boxer and filled out the details, you know, and... I remember the late Michael Williams, who was married to Dame Judi Dench. He explained all about the role to me, and I rang up Gillian Diamond who was the Head of Casting Department at the RSC. I said to her 'I hear you are having trouble casting this part, which Peter Hall is going to direct, and I think I could do it. Can I come and see you?'

She said 'Yes, of course, can you do some Harold Pinter?' I said: 'No, I've never done a Pinter play. But I tell you what, I have just done a John Osborne play called Epitaph for George Dylan. I will come in and pretend Harold Pinter has written this part. You know, do a speech as if Harold Pinter had written it.' She thought that was very amusing. She agreed to see me and I went along and met her. Then I went in to see Peter Hall and Harold Pinter at the next audition. In fact, I did three or even four auditions in all. I thought it was a genuine knock out competition but we started off with five or six people, and then it was down to three, and the next time it went up to eight. I thought 'this is not on'. I said to them 'Look, I have been here three times, and I am very pleased to have been here, but I would rather not have to come back again'. Harold was very sympathetic and he said 'Peter Hall is going home to read the play again. We will know by Monday one way or other and let you know'.

By Monday, they'd decided they wanted me in the part. That was really good. At the time, I did not really know, to be honest, how important a matter it was, how important Pinter was as a writer, how important it was for my career to be involved in a production of this stature. In effect, I joined the RSC and I had to resign my position in Harry Secombe's musical, which they were not very happy about. I was on a particular contract. I was able to give my notice in. That was alright.

And that led then to very advanced things, like working with actors Paul Rogers and Ian Holm and Vivien Merchant, Michael Bryant and John Normington, all well-established, big names. We rehearsed in Stratford and finally opened - we went straight to the

provinces which is the interesting thing; rather than open in London we opened in Cardiff, the New Theatre in Cardiff. Lots of people walked out of the play in Cardiff, there were plenty of empty seats due to the nature of the play. Then we played Cambridge, Brighton and then we played Sunderland, and then the play was put to sleep, as we say, set aside, whilst other works by the RSC commenced, such as Henry V. But although the reviews of *The Homecoming* were not particularly good - a lot of reviewers did not quite understand the piece, but that was par for the course anyway as far as Pinter was concerned - it was judged to be a success and we went to Broadway, New York. We opened there and received lots of poor reviews. But we won four Tony Awards, so that brought the punters in and we ran for six months before we were replaced by essentially an American cast. I came back to England...We are kind of getting off the regional thing again...

One of the things I was going to say which doesn't happen now, a bit of a lost art, but in earlier times, you had your make-up box. You learned how to make up by trial and error, watching the bloke next to you, watching the old actors make up and you learned how to use this 'Leichner' stuff, and, you know, you took a certain pride in making yourself up into a different character; learning to wear a moustache or a beard or something like that, putting on false eyebrows. Nowadays, of course, the whole lighting systems have changed. They used to always light you from below, the light came up and sparkled off your face. But now they light you from above and a whole different process is adopted. Indeed, in some regional theatres nowadays, leaping forward to present time (which was a gradual process) you would suddenly find that you would have a make up artist who would be in charge of telling you how to make up, even make you up. Then the designers would decide whether you would have a wig or whether you were bald or wear a bald patch. But before, all those years back, up to '68, whatever, you made your own way in that direction and it was really up to you to present something to the director. Incidentally, the director was often mostly called the producer at that time. Not quite sure when the terminology changed. The man who directed the play was always known as the producer. Of course there is a different connotation now, the producer nowadays is someone who collects all the money and makes the show possible.

[Bit missed on tape]

TR: I came back home from New York on the Queen Mary and then had thirteen months out of work, having thought I was a great success on Broadway. Then I got this break in television with a leading role. Jimmy Ormerod, Lancashire or Yorkshire gentleman directed, with Gordon Rollings and Nyree Dawn Porter, the famous New Zealand actress, so that was a breakthrough. But unfortunately it went out on ITV when everyone was watching BBC. No one really saw full coverage of my performance which was quite good, I remember thinking. Now, we're almost up to '68, shall I continue?

KM: Yes I'm interested in your other work with Peter Hall and the cross-over period from the lifting of the ban on censorship.

TR: I did not work with Peter Hall [again] for nearly 10 years. There were lots of things in the *Homecoming* that had to be withdrawn, like we could only say the word 'Christ' once, I think they objected to the word 'Christ' altogether, but in the final analysis we were allowed to say 'Christ' once, I think.

KM: Did you, as an actor, notice when they abolished censorship, was there an obvious change?

TR: It was not the sort of thing actors would notice too much, more something for the writers. They would have thought, 'That's great, we can do what we like now', and presumably they did. No it did not, essentially, affect the actors as such.

I don't know whether... No Man's Land was a much later period, 1975. On a personal level that was a great triumph, because working with Sir Ralph Richardson and Sir John Gielgud, together, it was just terrific. I could not really believe - only four of us in the play you know. Harold was undergoing a lot of changes in his private life. His divorce was kind of imminent at that time, he had a new lady in his life, Antonia Fraser. And so Harold was prevented from attending rehearsals because he was being chased by the press, you know, all the time, so we saw very little of him. He did like to attend rehearsals. Of course, once again, it was Peter Hall who was directing the play.

KM: What do you think made Peter Hall such a successful director?

TR: I think one of the great fortés of Peter Hall is initial casting of the piece. I am sure that he knows the depth of each actor and how he commits to a role. He allows the actor a lot of freedom, personal input, into the roles, because he believes in their past, all the roles in which they have built their experience. He knows that eventually they will fall into a kind of creative pattern. Sometimes, just occasionally, that doesn't work. I am sure he would agree with that. I am thinking of a production of *The Cherry Orchard* which we all did, which had so many stars in it, the thing just disappeared. It was all kind of counter-productive, not judged to be a success.

KM: What are the differences between theatre now and then?

TR: I don't think there are essentially any differences once you got the part. I think there are a lot of the younger people, quite rightly coming into the theatre, who are often steeped in Academy, from Universities; they lack a lot of experience. They tend to intellectualise the theatre. I had an occasion not too long ago, I was doing a Pinter play, the director had us all sitting round reading the script for 60% of the time, absolutely abominable set of circumstances, caused me to lose my temper a few times very badly, first time I can remember in my career. Essentially you have to get up on your feet and start to play around, rather than sitting down and deciding what each line means. At least 60% round the table with the script. It wasn't helpful. No point analysing Pinter anyway. He clearly was not of that opinion and he was wrong. [the director]

KM: It's interesting you say 'No point analysing Pinter', as there is a debate between those who feel he should be analysed, and those who don't. Pinter has always famously said his plays shouldn't be over analysed, what do you think?

TR: No point analysing Pinter - the text is there. You work out the text, you say the text, there is no point analysing, no benefit from analysing, you play what's there, play the pauses, you got to play the silences, I recently did *The Birthday Party* in the United States and it was directed by a lady, as it happens, she was just unfortunately so out of touch with the directing of Pinter plays that it was a great failure and, well, it made me very irritable that people can just mess things up, which on this occasion was the case. Don't mess about with Pinter!