

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Anthony Field CBE – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Harris

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Theatre Producer, Theatre Project consultant, former Finance Director of the Arts Council. Arts Administration; the Arts Council; Arts Council Funding 1957-1983; audiences; A View from the Bridge; Binkie Beaumont; Cameron Mackintosh; Cat on a Hot Tin Roof; Cats; censorship; The Comedy Theatre, club theatres, H.M. Tennent's; the Lord Chamberlain; My Fair Lady; The New Watergate Theatre; new writing; Oklahoma!; regional theatre; Tea and Sympathy; Theatre Workshop.

KH: I'd just like to start with when you first started working in the theatre, as an actor, could you tell me a little bit about how you went into the theatre?

TF: Well my father was a musician - a violinist - and my mother was a soprano, so I had a background of a family in show-business, and I'd always - from the early 1930s - been interested in theatre, drama, musicals, opera, dance, and when I left University at Sheffield the first thing I wanted to do was go into show-business, and I thought then I wanted to be an actor: Obviously I was not a very good actor, and within a year I'd proved it to myself. Although I got some very good jobs at Liverpool Playhouse and Farnham Repertory Company, I convinced myself then that I would always be a third rate actor and decided I should perhaps follow my parents' advice and get a professional qualification. I trained to be an accountant, and once I qualified as a chartered accountant, the first thing I wanted to do as an accountant was get back into show-business. So I went to work for a very successful businessman, Harold Wingate - who has since died, and his son, Roger Wingate is still in showbusiness, owns theatres etc - and apart from all his business enterprises, Harold Wingate had built and run the Curzon Cinema which showed French and Italian films, and then he bought the Comedy Theatre and I suddenly found, as a young inexperienced accountant, I was left to run the Comedy Theatre! I don't know if you want to go into all that...?

KH: Yes, so what was the Comedy Theatre producing at that point?

TF: Well, we spent about a million pounds refurbishing the theatre, which was in a very bad state, and I think we were the first enterprise in London and in New York to rebuild the whole backstage with offices above it so that we could let them at a lucrative financial return to help subsidise the theatre, and in a way that needs to be done even today more and more, with theatres that possibly have space at the back - like Drury Lane Theatre - that could be exploited and help to pay for running the theatre. We did it at the Comedy Theatre in the late forties, early fifties and I then suddenly found myself

running this theatre and I did one or two shows there... I reopened the theatre with a lovely American play called *Morning's at Seven*, and then did a transfer of the *Threepenny Opera* from the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, and did the transfer of *The Quare Fellow* by Brendan Behan.

KH: Oh wow! OK...

TF: Which was at the...

KH: Stratford East.

TF: Stratford East, yes, because a cousin of mine, Gerry Raffles, was the General Manager there.

KH: He was the Manager, yes.

TF: With Joan Littlewood. Oh you know all this. And I then found people were sending me plays more and more, do you want to go into that?

KH: How did you... Those transfers that you got, did you get those because you knew those people and you were able to do a deal with them?

TF: Well yes, and because *Morning's at Seven* was really not a success at all, it seemed to me to look for plays that had already been tried out at the Royal Court or the Stratford East or one of the subsidised companies: it would be a sounder business proposition to bring in something that was already tried out and might have a showing in the West End. But I was sent a lot of new plays, and this Professor Robert Anderson sent me *Tea and Sympathy*, which then we had to get passed by the Lord Chamberlain and in fact I've still got a number of these scripts with his, you know 'change this', 'change that'.

KH: Pencil marks.

TF: Or, he said, 'No, the whole basis of the play of *Tea and Sympathy* is not acceptable and you can't do it in a public theatre', and amongst hundreds of other plays, I'd read a play by a young American dramatist, Tennessee Williams, called *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* which I also liked very much, and again the Lord Chamberlain said 'that's banned', and a young Arthur Miller, who - well, not so young, but he'd just married Marilyn Monroe - sent me *A View from the Bridge* which I liked very much, and again the Lord Chamberlain said 'no'. I was talking one day with a lady called Muriel Large who was running the Watergate Theatre Club which was the small theatre club under the arches at Charing Cross Station, and there were then, in London, probably 20 or 30 very small theatre clubs, like the Boltons and the New Lindsay, and they of course could do plays

that didn't have to be passed by the Lord Chamberlain because they were a club theatre, and Muriel said to me, 'I'm finding great difficulty finding plays' and I said, 'Gosh, I've got plays that I just can't do', and she said, 'Well, let me have them'. I said, 'Well, I don't know that they're much good to you, because they've got large casts for a small club theatre, they're expensive because of American royalties and I really don't see that you'd be interested in them', and after a while she said to me 'Well why don't we transfer the Watergate Club into the Comedy Theatre'. And I said, 'You're mad! We'll all end up in prison! No-one's ever run an 850 seat West End theatre as a club', and she said, 'Well, why not? Talk to your lawyers and I'll see about it!' and she pestered me for a number of months and what I had rather quickly dismissed as a mad idea slowly fermented in my mind and I talked to a number of people, like Hugh Beaumont, (Binkie Beaumont) and my boss then, Harold Wingate and a number of other people, and we decided in the end to take a chance and we started the New Watergate Theatre Club in the Comedy Theatre.

KH: So different commercial managers were putting money into the New Watergate to put the plays on?

TF: No, no, we ran it ourselves.

KH: Oh, I see.

TF: And we were very strict in that you had to buy a membership for a pound, you couldn't buy tickets until you've been a member for 24 hours, you could then buy a ticket as a member and up to three guests and the police were very vigilant and saw very carefully the box office was behaving itself, otherwise we'd have been shut down overnight. I mean, at the time I didn't think we were doing anything that was a major breakthrough, I wanted to do *Tea and Sympathy*, *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *A View from the Bridge*, that's all I was interested in. I mean, now, when I lecture at various theatre courses, you know, young students say 'Oh, you're the chap who broke the censorship laws', but we didn't set out to break the censorship laws, we set out to produce three plays we had great faith in. The fact that afterwards the Lord Chamberlain's office was abolished and theatre censorship was abolished in a way rode on the back of the fact that we just had broken the mould, but we didn't set out to do that, we set out to produce those three plays.

KH: Can you remember the kind of reaction of people coming to see those plays was at the time?

TF: Well I don't want to be sort of culturally snobbish about this...

KH: I know it's very general...

TF: But they were regular theatre-goers who knew what they were going to see. Most of them had been regular goers to theatre clubs anyhow, so had seen plays that were

possibly even more outrageous to the general public than these. It attracted, of course, an enormous amount of media attention, and particularly with Arthur Miller coming over with Marilyn Monroe. He'd just married, got tremendous coverage, I've got scrapbooks full of the coverage then, and you know, to our amazement - and in a way very gratified - those three plays each ran about eight or nine months each, which everyone thought was remarkable to run a club theatre in a West End - you know, 850 seat theatre - and run for eight months, which was quite something because the public had to learn that they had to become a member and could only take up to three guests, but we made it run very successfully, and after those three plays I did a number of other productions.

KH: Was there any contact from the Lord Chamberlain once those plays were up and running? Did he kind of send spies to monitor them? Because there are the stories of him sending people out to look at clubs...

TF: Well, other than policing that the box office behaved itself, I don't think... I mean, no-one was spiteful about it or anything, they just saw that we were operating legally and within the law, so they shrugged their shoulders about it, and of course the... The major papers, you know, the Sunday Times, Observer etc had all acknowledged that these three plays were very important ones.

KH: What was Binkie Beaumont's involvement in that?

TF: Well he was just one of the directors. I mean, Binkie was an amazing character, as you probably have heard from other people. I don't know... he ran H.M. Tennent Ltd, he probably was the most successful West End impresario we've had since Charles Cochrane, and he ran Tennent Productions Ltd and H.M. Tennent Ltd, which were two companies.

KH: There were two separate ones.

TF: Do you want to go into all that?

KH: One was educational because of the entertainment tax?

TF: Yes, because of the entertainment tax.

KH: Yes.

TF: And he had a monopoly of all the stars and the producers and the designers, and towards the end of his career - but that wasn't necessarily then - anything that happened in the theatre, in a way people were quite pleased to bring in someone like Binkie Beaumont, he obviously came into certain things because he wanted to know what was happening. I mean, a lot of us as producers, were Prince Littler, Michael

Codron, Cameron Mackintosh, David Pugh etc, we often invest in each others' shows, partly because we like to see the figures of other people's shows and how they're doing at the box office! And Binkie, of course, was on the National Theatre Board, and anything big that came up - like the New Watergate - he would want to have a hand in, because even if he wasn't going to be in control of it, he would know what was happening and like to be, a) seen to be involved and b) to be involved.

KH: That's quite interesting, because from an academic point of view, Binkie Beaumont's really associated with sort of a different generation of theatre and not the kind of new social realism of Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller and things that were sort of breaking the boundaries in terms of censorship, so it's really interesting to me.

TF: Yes, someone that was an impresario like Binkie would be sensitive to the fact that however much he loved doing the great old plays with John Gielgud and Edith Evans and Sybil Thorndike, he also was sensitive to the new movements as they came along, and whether he hated the plays of John Osborne and Arthur Miller, he could see where audiences were going and he would capitalise on that, even if he hadn't got his heart in it.

KH: And it was obviously a good investment as well.

TF: Yes.

KH: Because they were so successful.

TF: Absolutely, yes.

KH: So from those plays, where did you go to after that?

TF: Well, I reached the stage in running the Comedy Theatre where although I loved it and although I loved being in the theatre, I felt my career as an accountant might be jeopardised if I stayed too long simply in showbiz and I wasn't doing more financial work in running the Comedy, and I thought possibly I ought to find something that combined my professional career as an accountant with being in show-business, and obviously there weren't many things that brought the two things together and my eye suddenly fell on an advert where the Arts Council of Great Britain was looking for a Finance Director and I thought, 'This is amazing!' because it combines my interest in all cultural and arts activities, with my professional qualification, so I applied for the job and I found that what had happened with the Arts Council since they started... I don't know if you know the whole history?

KH: Yes?

TF: How CEMA...

KH: Yes?

TF: Became the Arts Council. There is... At one of the... their 10th anniversary annual report, called *The First Ten Years*, is a brilliant summary of how the Arts Council came into being, and their first chairman, Sir Kenneth Clarke, and their first Secretary General, Sir William Emrys Williams, who was Bill Williams - he started Penguin Books...

KH: Oh, OK.

TF: ...were just supreme people and they were there when I turned up at the Arts Council, and they had had... I must be careful here, but they'd had a Finance Director who had to leave under a cloud...

KH: OK.

TF: ...and they were desperate for a Finance Director. And there was a brilliant accountant at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, called Douglas Lund, and Sir Kenneth Clarke - the Chairman of the Arts Council - spoke to Lord Drogheda, who was Chairman of Covent Garden, and said, 'We would really like to have someone like Douglas Lund working for us' and they came to an agreement where Douglas Lund would be Finance Director of the Arts Council and also his job as accountant at the Royal Opera House and that prevailed for a few years until the Treasury suddenly said 'Ho ho! This is really not a very good idea, because there's the accountant, the Finance Director of the Arts Council signing a cheque for subsidy to the Royal Opera House, putting it in his pocket, walking over to the Royal Opera House and banking the cheque as accountant of the Royal Opera House', and although nothing was wrong at all...

KH: Yes, it didn't look good on paper!

TF: It didn't look good on paper, as you say, and so they said, 'You should get yourself a Finance Director' and they advertised for a Finance Director, I applied and I don't know how I got it but I was appointed Finance Director of the Arts Council and I took over from Douglas Lund.

KH: That was 1957, is that right?

TF: Yes.

KH: What was your remit when you got there? What were you brought in to do on a sort of day to day basis?

TF: Well, I think the grant from the Treasury was £665,000 when I joined the Arts Council, and I always remember going to bed and thinking one day, 'Please God, I'll have a million pounds a year and all my troubles will be over!'. We had a very, very informal relationship with the Treasury: I would wander over with the Secretary General once or twice a year, speak to a junior civil servant at the Treasury - I always remember her name, Molly Loughnane - and we'd say, 'We want some more money' and she'd say, 'How much?' And we'd say '£850,000' and she'd say OK, or not OK.

KH: That's amazing!

TF: And it was very, very informal, and when the grant moved over a million we were then brought into the Treasury, and they said, 'Look, until now you've had, as it were, crumbs off the table and the Cabinet Office just say 'Oh yes, the Arts Council' [and] it was waved through. Now you're over a million pounds, we want to know, a) are you publicly accountable for the money? Are all your organisations you subsidise publicly accountable for the money? And b) why do you need more than the current rate of inflation?'

KH: OK.

TF: And it was at that stage that I went to the Council and said 'Look, we're in trouble, because if I ring the Birmingham Repertory Company or the Halle Orchestra and say 'I'd like to know how much you spend on publicity and marketing in relation to your box office returns', or something like that, they'll say 'Well look, we have an out of work actor who comes in once a week and does the wages and salaries, we spend every penny we've got on the stage or on the concert platform or on the art gallery walls, and we don't have an administrator or a Finance Director, we can't afford them', and at that stage I said to the Arts Council, 'We must start training Arts Managers and Administrators' and that's how the first courses came about at the City University.

KH: So when was this? What kind of, what year was this?

TF: This must have been 1959/60.

KH: OK.

TF: And I had to be able to go to the Treasury and with statistics and say, 'Look, the cost of building sets and costumes and everything else is much higher, going up higher than the rate of inflation, and also we have artificially pegged box office prices, so that we need more than the rate of inflation' and I have to start proving statistically why we needed more money, and I also had to be satisfied myself that when we gave a grant to the Halle Orchestra or Birmingham Rep. that they were publicly accountable for the money. So that's when we had to strengthen the whole operation.

KH: And presumably that must have come as a massive shock to theatres who'd not, who didn't have anyone administering or financing?

TF: Well, yes. I mean, the good thing in a way was that we started the first courses on training Arts Managers, the bad thing is that after years and years of training these people, we were training more and more and more of them and we set out to train people to run the 1200 organisations we were then subsidising, we then trained so many that they all became consultants and goodness knows what, and in a way we started a sort of ogre that grew and grew and grew far beyond what I ever initially thought was possible. But also at that stage we got a new chairman, Lord Goodman - Arnold Goodman - and the first Minister for the Arts, Jenny Lee and the Prime Minister was then Harold Wilson, and Jenny and Harold and Arnold Goodman were great personal friends, and suddenly the Arts Council Grant that if you show... I've got it upstairs, the graph that it went slowly, slowly up, it suddenly went like that, and we went from one million to five, to 10, to 40, to 80...! When I left it was a 110 million and it was simply unbelievable: the rise was so enormous and so steep and so rapid and we were able then to expand in all sorts of ways. I mean, looking back I don't know... I must have been the most precocious, presumptuous, stupid Finance Director the arts had ever had, but I mean... I would go out and lean on the Music Department to take on jazz, which they rebelled about, but I'd always loved jazz myself and I thought 'It's monstrous! We should be supporting jazz'. I leant on the Art Department to start photography and filmmaking, which again they rebelled about, but as Finance Director I exercised power way beyond whatever a Finance Director should do to encourage this sort of expansion, and we started regional arts associations, we started a Literature Department which we'd never had. So not only were we giving more money to all the subsidised organisations that were there: the orchestras, the opera and dance companies, the drama companies, but we were also expanding into other fields and so when I'd gone there on a three year contract I stayed there 27 years because they were the most amazingly wonderful years, it was very exciting and we were doing more and more work.

KH: That's so interesting. In terms of... in terms of the theatre particularly, what were... When you first started, what were the criteria on which you were assessing this, and whether they got grants?

TF: Well a number of us evolved this over my early years, and if an organisation applied to us for a grant and say it was a drama company presenting Agatha Christie plays on the end of pier at Blackpool, it would go to the Drama Department, and the Drama Department would say, you know, 'We're not interested: Agatha Christie plays, end of the pier, you know, that should pay for itself', so it would never come to our Finance Department at all; but Liverpool Repertory Company, that had been in existence for very many years without subsidy and the thought that they would have Arts Council funding was horrific to them because they thought 'We're going to have all those forms to fill in and we'd have to you know bow to their precedent and all that sort of thing, we'd rather not go down that road', they reached a stage where they said, 'We can't exist without Arts Council Funding', added to which their Liverpool local authority would say 'Unless you get that Arts Council funding, we won't subsidise you', and the Arts Council were saying, 'They should get local authority funding, we won't subsidise you', but they want hand in hand. So if Liverpool, well as it happened Liverpool Repertory Company

came to us and said, 'We want subsidy' and the Drama Department said, 'All right, they do a three weekly rep, they do a good standard of production, they do interesting plays and we should subsidise them', at that stage it would come to the Finance Department and I would look at the last three years' accounts, I'd look at the budget for next year and say, 'OK, if you want to subsidise this company, in the light of their box office, in the light of the local authority interest, in the light of their costings, they could do with say 20,000 a year, grant and say 5,000 a year guarantee against loss', and so on. But there were two distinct decisions to be made, one was the Drama Department and the drama panel assessing the quality of the work, and the other was the Finance Department assessing what sort of subsidy would be required.

KH: This period is traditionally seen as a period in which new writing really came to the fore, and there was an explosion of new writing. Was that something that the Arts Council was particularly keen to...?

TF: Well yes, if you look at... I mean, I say to anybody entering the arts field, you should look at the first, if not 50 years' annual reports from the Arts Council, certainly the first 20, which are full of wonderful essays by Emrys Williams and Kenneth Clarke and people like that. And what I did in conjunction with the Drama Department, I said, 'OK, you can give say Sheffield Rep in those days, before the Crucible was built, or Birmingham Rep or Bristol Old Vic, you give them a basic grant to see that they're established, you give them a guarantee against loss that they could take some risks, you then can give them a new drama guarantee, so if they do a play for the very first time, they get an additional guarantee to pay for the extra rehearsals that might be needed, you can even then give them a guarantee for the second production of a play that might have been done at Exeter and they want to do' - because quite often playwrights would say, 'Well, I get my first production done, no-one ever sees it again', so you give them a second one - 'you give them a Young Persons' grant to do young people's theatre work, you can give them a transport subsidy to help bring in people from outlying regions who can't pay for the transport' - it was a sort of bus subsidy and a train subsidy, that if you had a party of over eight, you could have it subsidised - so if you look at the Arts Council reports in those days, you could be giving one drama company eight or ten different sorts of subsidy to help bring out the various things you want to done, like new plays and neglected plays, young people's theatre work, transport subsidy, so there's a whole art in subsidy, which unfortunately has gone by the wayside now and I don't think the Arts Council, as they are now, constructed work in the way we did so successfully in those days.

KH: When do you think that change came about?

TF: Well I don't want to be... I mean, in no way am I bitter about it. I left the Arts Council after 27 years feeling I'd done everything I could possibly do and I wanted to get back into the coalface and be a producer again, but after I left there was a whole range of people who then were appointed as Chairman, Secretary General, Finance Director, new people who came in and somehow or other did not want to look back, they wanted a clean slate and to look forward. In my days we would often - two or three times a year - have a lunch or a tea party, where we'd bring in people who'd retired as Drama Director, Art Director or Literature Director and say, 'Look, we've got this problem with the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre...' and

they'd say, 'Oh yes, that's gone on for years! We did this, we did that'. From the day I left the Arts Council, I vowed I would not go back into those offices again, not because we separated with any acrimony at all but I didn't want them to feel I was breathing down their necks.

KH: Sure.

TF: But on the other hand, I was never... never once invited back again, and in a way I thought it was a pity that I could see them possibly floundering in one or two directions where I might have been able to help talk them through a problem. They never wanted to go back, they wanted to go forward and I've never been back.

KH: You've mentioned regional theatres and supporting new ventures in regional theatre; what about London theatre in that period?

TF: Well...

KH: Because there's always this kind of debate about Theatre Workshop and the Royal Court and the funding situation.

TF: Well, yes, there are a number of aspects of that, it's very shrewd of you to ask. I mean, first of all, one of the things I always try to rebel against was the separation of what was known as 'commercial theatre' - if you like 'independent theatre' - and 'subsidised theatre'. I thought it was monstrous that they should be so separated, and also the fact that the West End was looked on as a glitzy, glamorous West End and regional theatre was something different, so I always wanted to encourage the integration of these, and I think I helped. I mean, the first real breakthrough was when Bristol Old Vic did *Salad Days* - the new musical - and I think it was Michael Codron, who bought it for London and brought it into London, and in the end I capitalised on that and you'll see it in various annual reports, a list of 20 or 30 regional productions that were then bought by West End producers and brought into London, and the regional theatres then benefited by getting a percentage of the profits of the London run.

KH: So that was something you were specifically encouraging?

TF: Absolutely! Very much so, and encouraged it in a number of ways. First of all I started the Theatre Investment Fund with Lord Goodman, and we discussed it carefully. He was my Chairman, he was an amazing man who seemed to be able to tap into funds which hitherto we'd never been able to get hold of, and I said, 'Look, we should have a Theatre Investment Fund, because young producers might be able to raise £80,000 to put on a play, but the last £20,000 they couldn't find and if we had an investment fund that topped up what they found, it could be used as an investment in that production' and we started... I think the Arts Council put £150,000 in and Lord Goodman found £100,000 money from somewhere, and with a quarter of a million we started the

Theatre Investment Fund, which helped put on new plays by new young producers, just topping up the money they got. The second thing was I'd gone to New York and seen the ticket booth in New York (Times Square) and I came back and started the SWET ticket booth in Leicester Square.

KH: Oh, OK.

TF: And that's another long story, and it's all detailed in the Arts Council Annual Report, but these were all things we did to try and encourage the coming together of commercial and subsidised theatre which now are very much more integrated. I mean, a commercial producer will go to Bristol Old Vic and say, 'I've got this play, I'm not sure whether it would go in London but if I give you an extra amount of money would you do it in Bristol, take a risk, and if it's good we'll bring it to London and I'll give you a share of it?' And the big breakthrough came when one day at the Arts Council a young whippersnapper 19 year old, Cameron Mackintosh, came into my office and I said, 'What can we possibly do for you? because you tour dreadful productions of Agatha Christie plays for a couple of hundred pounds, shoddy productions and we're not interested.', and he said, 'Well, I've heard that one of your theatres in Leicester, the Haymarket Theatre's doing My Fair Lady for Christmas' and he'd done his homework, he said, 'Look, if I give them some extra money with some stars that they couldn't normally afford, we could do a major production of My Fair Lady at Leicester.' and I know the Arts Council has stuck its neck and out and promised the regional big theatres - that they were worried would close down because Bristol Hippodrome, Birmingham Hippodrome, Manchester Opera House, and Palace, Edinburgh, etc, could manage with a Christmas show and a summer show, or pantomime and one or two things but you can't put on touring Agatha Christie plays into Birmingham Hippodrome and what they really wanted were big musicals and there were none available - and Cameron said, 'If you help me put on a major musical at Leicester, we could then tour My Fair Lady'. He brought in Liz Robertson and Tony Britton, and James Hayter as the dustman, and we did a major production there. Now, I went to the Arts Council and the council meetings were on the last Wednesday of every month and there were people like Bridget Riley and Henry Moore, people like that, who'd never really - with all due respect to them! - heard of My Fair Lady, and I went in and I said 'I've got this new young producer, Cameron Mackintosh, who would like to do Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion set to music', and they'd heard of Bernard Shaw, they knew Pygmalion and they said 'all right'. So Cameron and I set up a deal whereby My Fair Lady at Leicester was produced with Arts Council guarantees and Cameron Mackintosh monies, and it then toured and in the end Cameron said 'Let's bring it into London'. We played at the Adelphi, and the Arts Council hadn't spent a penny on it and got a good rake off, the Haymarket Leicester got enormous funds from it and Cameron made his first million pounds, and at the end of the year he said to me, 'Let's do it again', and I said, 'Cameron, don't be silly, we got away with that because of George Bernard Shaw and Pygmalion, we can't do it again' and he said, 'Well, I'd like to do The Sound of Music' and I said, 'You're crazy, I can't sell that to the Arts Council, the singing nuns!', so he said 'What's your favourite musical?' So I said, 'Well, don't hold me to it, but actually I love Oklahoma!', so he said 'OK, let's do Oklahoma!', so I said 'I can't sell that to the Arts Council', he said, 'Look, you sold them My Fair Lady! You deal with the Arts Council, I'll go to Leicester and we'll set up Oklahoma!', so I gritted my teeth and went to a Council meeting, 'Last year this young Cameron Mackintosh did George Bernard Shaw's Pygmalion set to music, and this year he wants to do an American folk opera', so they said, 'OK, fine'. So we did Oklahoma!, and that toured, came into London, ran eight months I think at the Palace and Cameron

was then set, and he then came in the third year and I said, 'No Cameron, there's the door, go out', and as he went out he said to me 'You'll regret it', and I said 'Why?' and he said 'Because the Arts Council should be involved in new musicals, and I'm going to do a new British musical', and I said, 'Well, we got away with it for two years running, what is it?' And he said, 'Well, it's based on T.S. Eliot's cat poems' and I said, 'You're crazy, go out and shut the door', and threw him out. So we weren't involved with Cats, but I mean, you know, a lot of what I did in the theatre, the regional theatre work was to bring in, as you say, the commercial and the subsidised together and try and make the whole thing work, and we were quite successful in it I think.

KH: Yes, that's amazing, I didn't realise the link was so strong between those musicals and the Arts Council, that's really, really interesting.

TF: Yes, you'll see in the... if you look in the early Arts Council Annual Reports, that the Arts Council got profit from Oklahoma! and from My Fair Lady.

KH: Why do you think it was that certain companies like Theatre Workshop lost out on Arts Council funding in the earlier years?

TF: I'm not sure why. There was always a slight problem. The Drama Panel and we in the Finance Department would say, 'OK, whether it's Sheffield or Birmingham Rep or Bristol Old Vic, they are servicing an area', and there was always a worry... although the English Stage Company got itself well established from the early years as a sort of purveyor of new plays, there was always a slight worry with Guildford, Leatherhead, Hornchurch, Theatre Royal, Stratford, that they were so near the London conurbation they weren't necessarily servicing a region in the way that, say, Birmingham Rep was or Bristol Old Vic.. And I think in a way they lost out by being on the fringe of the whole of the West End, in a way, and there was always this worry about 'Are we in fact subsidising a theatre company servicing a region or in those days of course we were also subsidising Hazel Vincent Wallace at Leatherhead, David Poulson at Bromley, but should we be subsidising Joan Littlewood or the Theatre Royal Stratford Company?'. And there was always this worry as to whether we were subsidising a charismatic person or a theatre. There were so many things involved, I mean, people now, when I look back, I mean they would criticise the money we gave perhaps to Liverpool Rep as distinct from say Manchester Royal Exchange, but we used to have meetings every year with a range of local authorities. If we went to Liverpool, Merseyside, they would say, 'Look we have a tremendous tradition of music here, you know, we're near North Wales, the Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra will always have a 100% support from us so you don't actually need to find that much money for Liverpool Phil., but the Playhouse and the Everyman Theatre, and the Royal Court and the Empire, you need to help us get drama across in Merseyside'. Then we'd go to Manchester and Manchester would say, 'Look we've got the most wonderful support for drama in this region, there's Bolton Octagon Theatre, there's Oldham Coliseum, there's Manchester Royal Exchange, they're all wonderful, but the Halle Orchestra is not really accepted in the way that Liverpool is, so if you give more money to the orchestra, we'll look after the drama companies'. And then critics would come along and say, 'Why have you given Liverpool Phil that and the Halle that?'. But it was part of a deal we'd necessarily done in the region.

KH: Yes, with the whole borough.

TF: Yes. So it was very difficult just to look through Arts Council figures and try to make sense of them in isolation from the bigger picture.

KH: That's interesting. So over the period, obviously regional theatre changed enormously. From when television came in, would you say more funding was needed to support regional theatre after that, or not really?

TF: I've never really thought about the impact of television. I mean, there'd been the impact of radio and then talkies and then television, and in the end the theatre rode through a lot of that, didn't they? I'm not saying it's because I've left the Arts Council, but after I left the Arts Council the funding for regional theatre slowly drifted down, and I think the Arts Council seemed to lose their interest in supporting major regional theatres, and I think it's very, very, very sad that Leatherhead's closed, the Mermaid Theatre's closed and Farnham closed, I mean, when I looked down 60 or 70 major regional theatres, there are now what? About 10 or 12 left? It's very sad, but I think to a certain extent Arts Council policy drifted away from that, and the London theatre scene has suffered enormously because the productions aren't available to bring into London, but also the whole training that actors, designers, directors, technicians got in regional theatres, no longer there - very sad.

KH: Lots of people that we interview talk about that, how they've had such a good training in repertory and then.

TF: Absolutely.

KH: When they...

TF: Very sad.

KH: It just doesn't exist any more.

TF: I think the Arts Council in the last ten years has really let the industry down enormously.

KH: I think those were most of my questions in the areas that I wanted to cover in the interview. I don't know whether you've got anything you'd like to add about the period, or your impressions of changes over that time maybe?

TF: Well I think one of... To me personally - and this is only a personal point of view - I was never interested in the social background, like the composition of audiences. You

know, there was this tremendous move in the 1990s to drama in prisons, drama in hospitals, drama in schools, getting the age of the audience down, getting ethnic audiences in. I never saw that as an Arts Council job, you know - I think drama in prisons is very important - it's the Arts Council's job to support creativity, to get the new plays on and to get the people trained to do work in drama. If prisons want to buy into that, the Prison Service should buy it, if hospitals think it's good to have art on their walls, they should buy into it, if schools want to have drama in schools they should buy into it: I don't think it's the Arts Council's job to spend its money pushing into schools, hospitals, prisons, it's the Arts Council's job to support creativity and other people to buy the results of that creativity. I don't see it's the Arts Council's job to see that there's sufficient black audiences or audiences under 18 in Sheffield Crucible, it's the local authority's job and Social Services' job to do it, not the Arts Council's - it's the Arts Council's job to support the Crucible Theatre 100% and ensure it's there, and that's it.

KH: Thank you very much, that's great.

TF: OK.

KH: Yes, that's absolutely fantastic.