

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Josephine Smith – interview transcript

Interviewer: Jacky Hall

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Wardrobe Mistress at Theatre Workshop. Actors; audiences; A Taste of Honey; budgets; John Bury; Harry H. Corbett; costume making; costume maintenance; critics; foreign appreciation; The Good Soldier Schweik; lifestyle; Joan Littlewood; Look Back in Anger; Ewan MacColl; productions; Gerry Raffles; Red Roses for Me; rehearsals; Theatre Royal, Stratford East; Theatre Workshop; touring; Kenneth Tynan; wages.

JH: First of all, if you could just tell me about how you started working in theatre?

JS: Well... well, I was at school with somebody who joined Theatre Workshop. And I heard that she'd joined, and when they came to London with Uranium 235... another friend - I was working doing medical art, which was dead boring, frankly, but there we are - she said, 'Well, go and see them, and see how, you know, what it is'. So I went - she persuaded me to go, and I did and I met up with Doreen [Warburton, the school friend] and said I was interested in theatre. I was interested... it goes back to schooldays, I was interested in costumes: they got me doing costumes for the school plays, and so that's... Doreen knew of my interests and that was that. Joan [Littlewood] said, 'Well, we could probably take you on, but' she said, 'you won't get any money, and you'll have to support yourself, you know, we all have to do our best to, you know, get by'. So the first play I dressed was The Travellers, and that went up to the Edinburgh Festival in 1952, I think, yes, it would be. And there I committed awful crimes! The first crime I committed was to not turn up at the dress rehearsal with the costume - I was still making it! But after that, I don't know, I learnt as I went along, really. Never had time to do much else but just get on with it all. And there we... we stayed on in Scotland, we moved over to Glasgow for a bit, and then Gerry Raffles, the manager, heard that Theatre Work - Theatre Royal - down at Stratford was empty and, you know, he could rent it. So we all came down there. It was very hard - we didn't get much money and worked extremely long hours, as you can imagine and, we had to live pretty rough. A lot of us slept in the theatre - we weren't supposed to. And I've just read in there [Howard Goorney's book] that... somebody remembers it, Harry Corbett remembered it, that if somebody came over the tannoy saying, 'Will Walter Plinge please come down to the rehearsals?' we had to go and hide all the bedding! It meant usually that the fire people who came round were, you know, coming round on an inspection, so we had to pretend we weren't sleeping there. So that was that. And as far as costumes were concerned we had to do it on as little as possible. They had a core collection that they... people must have given them over the years. That was all right for reasonably contemporary stuff, but when it came to period stuff of course it meant making [new costumes] so I seem to remember that we... if we spent twenty pound on a show that was about as much as we dared! We used to go round the junk shops, round the second hand shops, any

cheap shops going selling material and it was really a case of scrounging. The first year I was there on my own without help, everybody in the company helped. And as we got more friends down in Stratford they used... I mean, they used to come and see the play and liked it, and they used to offer to help, so we had quite a lot of help that way. We had an old treadle machine which came down... with us from Glasgow. I don't think we were supposed to bring the machine with us, I think, but you know, never mind, we got that. And after the first year I was joined by Shirley Jones. She had heard of the company 'cause her parents were friends with John Bury's family. And she had just finished her art training and was, you know, not sure what she wanted to do so she came and joined and we worked together. That was a great help, 'cause two people thinking out 'how are we going to manage to dress people in, you know, in what we've got?' helps. And bits of stuff were given to us - a whole bale of material came from Gerry's family, who were manufacturers in Manchester. And so we sat and we used to, in the gods... the top... the Top Bar it was called - it was really the bar for the gods in the theatre at Stratford but it wasn't used, wasn't used as a bar! There was an old sort of old sink, old gas boiler, and there was a stove in there. We used to go and dye material [in there] to use - any sort of pieces of material we were given! One of the most difficult ones [shows] to dress, I should think, was *The Good Soldier Schweik*, 'cause we... the... It was based - the costuming and the set - it was based on... the illustrations to the book [which] were in black and white, you know, they were wood cuts or lino cuts or something - wood cuts, I imagine - and so soldiers - ordinary soldiers like Schweik - were dressed in white with black and all their things [trimmings] marked out in black, and all the officers were dressed in black with everything marked out in white on the uniforms. And it had... the most people in it, you know, characters in it, I think...

JH: Was it a big cast of... fifty-seven or something?

JS: Well, we hadn't got - the company was rarely [more] than about fourteen or fifteen so you can imagine there were [was a lot of] doubling and trebling up! I even stumped Joan that time [with the production of *Schweik*] because I was saying, 'Well, if George leaves the boots at... on the off [side]... there, for somebody else - whoever - to pick up, then he can leave them there and George can get them back'. Even she gave up! She said, 'You know what you're doing'. And that was very unusual for Joan, she used to be... she knew everything that was going on normally, you know. She had a quality which I think was pretty good, she could... she'd be working on... she'd be rehearsing a play during the daytime, she'd watch the current play in the evening quite often and at home we knew she was preparing the next one that was coming up, 'cause we were doing... We started doing fortnightly [productions] and then it extended it a bit later to three weekly, but I've never knew a person who can sort of, who can compartmentalise herself like that. With the play she was working on, that was it... in the evening she switched that off and she was watching the play that was in production. I mean, it takes...

JH: Did she ever sleep?!

JS: Not very much, I don't think. But I've never met somebody who can sort of switch from one thing quite cleanly like that, you know, switch off and take on something else, you know. Anyway. Yes, she did work hard and she worked everybody hard and that was it, she expected results, and she... she got them. Swore like a trooper. Yes, and she

could tell you what she thought of you quite firmly! One time I'd had to be in the play - I got sort of pushed into doing sort of crowd scenes and that sort of thing; very hard if you're doing the costumes as well. And you have to do it and she turned around and looked at me and went, 'Oh well, we had to scrape you off the floor this time, didn't we?' But she did, she did work everybody hard and we were all working for, well, for the play.

JH: What kind of wages were you on? To start with?

JS: Two, three pound a week. And as I didn't smoke, which was handy, the ones who smoked - Harry Corbett for one and Avis [Bunnage] was another - they used to sub off me to buy cigarettes. We were very lucky where we were situated because in the theatre, in Angel Lane that went past the theatre there was a street market, and there was... which meant there were stalls where we could buy food reasonably cheaply, and there was a café down there and they took to us for some reason or other - Bert and Mays for lunch: it was always Bert and Mays, you know, and they used to cook their own pieces of... great sides of ham or beef and it... they always had chips going there, chips and peas. It was very basic but...

JH: ...but very welcome...

JS: But very welcome. And they used to help us out no end: they used to feed us up, and you always knew that if you were stuck you could get a meal on tick there and pay for it when you had the money.

JH: That's good. It's a very important part of theatre, the food and the tea. Tea and coffee.

JS: Tea and coffee, drunk by the gallon!

JH: And do you know what's happened to the costumes today, that you worked on? Are they in an archive, or...?

JS: I don't quite know, I suppose they might be... I'd have to ask Murray. Murray Melvin is the archivist now, he's got all my, all the stuff I collected, like photographs and suchlike, he's got all that up there [in the Theatre Royal archive]. That's one thing I went to war with him about over, that book! [Murray Melvin's book on Theatre Workshop] Well, I didn't really, because there's a picture [of me] in there but I didn't get invited to that [exhibition opening at the National Theatre]. He said I was, which I'm accepting that I was for the exhibition that was on, because it was just prior to Christmas and it's quite likely that it went astray in the post, so I'm assuming that's what happened. But I thought [at the time] 'why didn't he ask me if he's using a photograph of me in there?'

JH: I did see you in there.

JS: So anyway. He wrote and apologised and said that I had been but obviously it went adrift. That set me thinking, 'Hmm! Better have my say about that!' [i.e. the Theatre Workshop]. He's had his say, far as I know... Howard [Goorney] had his say earlier on [in his book], the only one who hasn't had a say as far as I know is George Cooper. He's a bit further down - lives down in Petersfield. And he was the other, one of the other mainstays who'd been there for a long time. He and Harry Corbett were the big... the main young actors. I've run out of steam!

JH: How was it working with Joan Littlewood, could you tell me a bit more about that? She's such a famous theatre practitioner.

JS: She was... she had very definite ideas. We didn't come into [weren't involved in] developing productions in] quite the same way as the actors and so on, but she had ideas about what she wanted: she had certain costumes she was very attached to, and you had to know what they were. And I remember Shirley and I sort of thinking 'now which one does she mean this time?' A reefer jacket came out at every opportunity she could get that to be used - she loved that jacket. And, actually, I think it got worn out in the end and we had to tell her! But, no, she... [mainly] left us to produce the costumes. We never had much chance to do designs, 'cause we were too busy just putting things together. Only if you worked on the historical ones, you perhaps did a quick sketch and said, 'Look, we want to dress him something like that' and she said, 'Right, fair enough, go ahead.'. She didn't question what we were doing very much, she left us do the design quite freely. So that was good. And then we had to build up stock. Another thing we had very few of were tights. Somebody... She [Joan] brought in Polly Binder once - Pearl Binder - to give us ideas for costumes we thought 'done it all, we know what we're doing with costumes, we know what we've got'. And there's Polly saying, 'for this Shakespeare play you should have them [the tights] par-coloured' - you know, one blue leg and a red leg, that sort of thing. And we said, quite seriously, 'We can't. We haven't got the tights, and we dare not destroy the ones we've got. It's something we cannot do'. We had to be tough about that.

JH: Because this was a time when there was rationing still?

JS: [pause] Well, no, it was literally our shortage of money, because they'd been a touring company. Actually I'd just joined them when they finished their touring, when they came down to the theatre and became almost a repertory company. Up until that they'd been touring round in the lorry and things. I only went to one or two places where they'd toured, you know, went up in the lorry. So I didn't get all that struggle. But once they were in the theatre, course if you didn't have the audience then you didn't have the money. And the audiences weren't big to start with - that was a theatre out...

JH: ...in the East End...

JS: ...in the East End, on a bit of a limb, you know. Mostly it had to be local people coming in or, until the... until other people heard about us, then we used to get quite a few [non-locals] sort of coming down... to productions. But it was never... we were never well off. Never, ever. And the week of the coronation was... I think we got two pound that week! Well, nobody was going to be coming to the theatre that week, they were all getting ready for their street celebrations and all that sort of thing. But there you are. That was the way it was.

JH: And within the company were people looking at the reviews coming in, from famous critics of the time like Harold Hobson?

JS: We had... the one I remember of course was Ken Tynan. Ken Tynan, 'cause he was so long and lanky - he used to sit in the front row of the stalls and you used to be able to have a look over the gods and see him there. Well in the linen room [used as the costume room] we were up in the top of the building there: if we came out of the linen room, down a short staircase, there was a very smelly gents toilet there, but to the left there was a door into the gods. Sometimes if we wanted to see what was going on we'd have a look there and you could see when he [Tynan] was there. He always wore beige-coloured suits, and he used to... you could see him 'cause his legs, long legs sticking out! He was very good to us, by and large - think he liked what we were doing. Harold Hobson I can't... I think, yes, I think he a bit of... he used to like Avis and her acting, and he always wrote nice things about her. Can't remember any of the others. My parents kept cuttings from some of the papers that they took and I... we kept ones ourselves, you know, of the reviews. But other than that... I suppose local people came in to see - for the local paper, but I don't... can't remember now. That's past history, that's gone out of my mind. The one night when it was really interesting in the audience was when we put on *The Quare Fellow* by Brendan Behan. And we had a lot of Irish in. And I think... I'm not sure that I'm right about this, but I think we did play the Irish National Anthem that night and they all stood up. But yes, it brought a lot of Irish in, did that.

JH: Quite a rowdy night.

JS: He was quite a rowdy character anyway.

JH: Did you work with him closely?

JS: Not closely, we... he was with Joan most of the time. We saw... yes, we saw him when we were down there on stage, but half the time he was drunk anyway.

JH: I've read that he was a great storyteller and drinker.

JS: Oh, he was. Yes, a bit of both. Made quite an impression on Angel Lane, I think, in the pubs! And all up and down the lane. But I wasn't there with the second play - I'd left by then. The first one - *The Quare Fellow* - I was given it to read and I wasn't very

impressed, but apparently Joan saw something in it, so she... that brought in... that brought in some names. Richard Harris was one of the young fellows in that. That was the first time we met him. He was all right, he was a bit of a noisy character too. Used to sing everywhere. Actually, there was quite a lot of singing going on [when I first joined the theatre], 'cause Ewan MacColl who I said was... was always singing round the place. And then we used to have, on Sundays, the folk concerts used to go on, and then a lot of people used to... I think they sung all along 'cause you imagine with Ewan being there and the others. So one got used to them, everybody singing.

JH: And did you travel to Germany?

JS: No. [the tour to Germany was before I joined] I'd left... I arrived before and I didn't get on tours, didn't go on the tours, no. My cutting out scissors did, and they came back!

JH: That was lucky!

JS: They went all the way to Sweden and back. But no, because I wasn't so much an actor you see. I wasn't acting, and they [the actors] could look after their costumes. All I had to do was pack the skips for the costumes in and make sure they'd got all... everything they wanted, tell the girl what she had to do to keep them in order, whoever took them over... One of the girls playing an extra part, you know, who could probably do that as well. So I didn't get to travel. The only time I... I went to Paris with them when they took *The Good Soldier Schweik*, to the... it isn't called the Sarah Bernhart now, is it? I've forgotten what it's called now, but that theatre. That... that was a fascinating place in itself. But again we didn't have... I just didn't want to, didn't have to do any more than just look after the costumes, so I just helped them if they wanted me to help with the dressing and that was that.

JH: What do you think your favourite production that you worked on was?

JS: Well, I liked the period ones. I was very fond of *Arden of Faversham*. And I've always meant to do... a sort of... [pictures of scenes from the play] I like built-up pictures. And sewing. I paint and draw as well as all these things and I've always thought it would make an interesting built-up picture, rather like a montage with appliqué and things. I've never done it though. [Laughs] Bit late now. Yes, that was a particularly nice set in which we had... there's a scene where they're walking through a wood, or forest you could say, and *Camel* [John Bury] built large trunks, nothing else but these large trunks going on, and quite dark lighting. People sort of winding through them. It was really effective. There was another effective set was the one we did for *Red Roses For Me* - that's the *O'Casey* - in which they'd been out, presumably in the middle of the night and brought some quite large, almost near-trees you know, from Epping Forest. They brought them in and they were in bud, they hadn't come out that yet... Over the fortnight they were in the theatre - and I think they were kept in buckets to keep them fresh-looking - they came into leaf. It was really fascinating. That was a lovely set, that one, I mean it gave it a realistic look which is rather nice. The sets... I liked the simple sets though 'cause they were... essential, basics, basic things. If you had a house you didn't necessarily have all

the walls, you just had a corner of the you know [mimes outline of a house], things like that, and perhaps just curtaining off here, instead of having a very elaborate set it was just parts of it. And that Red Roses, one set it was just a wall and people came on either from the back of the wall or at the sides of it and these trees coming out...

JH: And you were married to John Bury?

JS: I was married to Harry Smith...

JH: Sorry!

JS: ...and he helped there [he worked with John Bury]. John Bury was... when I knew him he was married to Margaret... yes, Margaret Bury. But he's... subsequently they separated and he... his later wife, Eileen [Elizabeth], I didn't even meet her. There's... he met her when he was working with at Stratford on Avon. So. And I was followed in the costume department by Una Collins, who was quite well known as a costume designer and I think, yep, she took over from me. I used to go and see how she... I used to go and see her a bit until I moved out of London. And she actually, yes, she used to come down and stay with us. But then she moved abroad and she worked quite a bit abroad, she worked in Iceland and in Germany, I think, and I sort of lost contact with her, unfortunately. As far as I know the only person who... did make costumes before me is somebody Joan used to talk about. Ruth Brand, I think her name was. Or Ruth Brands? She made the costumes for... what was it called... not Amphitron... can't remember now [Lysistrata]. Anyway, when we did a revival I was supposed to find all these costumes! That was another one where I had to find the right costumes, find the people and, you know, put them on. They were just buried in the others and I found them all in the end, thank goodness, with the help of somebody who'd been there longer and knew them. But... I've seen the new costume room [in the Theatre Royal, Statford] which is absolutely fabulous now, 'cause of the alterations they've done. 'Cause we... they've got washing machines, which we didn't have. No, if any washing had to be done we used to have to use, as I say, the gas boiler in the Top Bar, boil up some water and wash by hand. And I think they can... I don't know, I think they've even got a dry cleaner there, 'cause if anything wanted dry cleaning we either used to have to frankly...

JH: Hope for the best!

JS: Yes, hope for the best. And if we could afford it, we'd get it done, but normally it wasn't. [Laughs] So... proper... we just had the one ironing board. Most people looked after their own costumes, frankly, that was the way they got round it, and if you had tights and things you washed them yourself and that sort of thing. We didn't do... except when they came back to us - we probably washed them up before they were put away. The... no, they maintained their own costumes did the actors and actresses.

JH: What was it like after you left to see some of the people you worked with, like Harry Corbett, continue to be... be successful beyond Theatre Workshop?

JS: Well, he went into Steptoe, didn't he? Think he cursed that, 'cause he never, couldn't get past being Harold Steptoe after that. That was a bit of a, you know... Yes, he went into that. George Cooper... there used to be a program on the TV, it was a children's program, a school program, [Grange Hill] I've forgotten what it was and... a children's program and he was on that, about the schools and the kids - he was the... he got the part of the caretaker in that. Forgotten what it was. And so he got a part there. They made the odd film, bit of film work they got. Harry Green went on to do do-it-yourself programmes on the telly for a time. Marjorie Laurence, she... yes, she was in quite a few plays and things. I think Avis... I think Avis did some local rep work, I think, but she didn't leave Theatre Workshop, she stayed on for quite a long time. And then there's all the famous ones who made it, like Barbara Windsor and things - everybody knows about them, don't they? Oh, Murphy... Brian Murphy, he did quite well 'cause he's had television parts. I always thought it was a bit sad that A Taste of Honey...

JH: Shelagh Delaney?

JS: Yep - they didn't keep the actors that played the parts on the stage [for the film].

JH: Oh, I didn't realise.

JS: You see, now, though, the only one that kept his part was Murray Melvin, as the young student. Avis was replaced by... can't remember now... and Frances Chuka who played the girl was replaced by Rita Tushingham in the film. I suppose you have to use names, I suppose, they had these better who were better know and things.

JH: That is a shame, from having worked on it and developed it.

JS: Yes, it is a shame, they just lost the chance somehow.

JH: You mention working long hours, and not much money, difficult conditions. But what was it that made you feel so dedicated to Theatre Workshop?

JS: I don't know... as far as I can make out we were a happy lot, we enjoyed what we were doing. And... it was difficult without the money, but I think... we must have been completely... we enjoyed what we were doing with so much, I think it really was. It was a satisfactory occupation for us, you know, we were doing things we felt were worthwhile and that... I didn't get involved in any of the politics of it and that, but we used to have management [meetings] every now and again, you know, discuss what could be done and what couldn't be done. But it must have been extremely hard for the likes of Gerry, who was the manager. He had the worst job of all, I should think, when you think about it, trying to find...

JH: Control of the purse strings...

JS: Yes, try and find the money and try and find the support and try and find the things like that. I think... I don't know, well... He'd been there for years, and he lived with Joan anyway so I mean he and Joan were... a pair... so... he did it for her I suppose. Yes, she must have brought out a lot of loyalty in people, because we all did it for her.

JH: Was she a very charismatic woman?

JS: Oh she was, yes. Extraordinary woman. You wouldn't call her good-looking, particularly, to look at her, but it was an extraordinary face that could light up and be, you know, something. But we used to watch Joan to see what hat she was wearing. Whichever one she was wearing, and what sort of way she was wearing it, you could tell what mood she was in. [Laughs] When she came in...

JH: That's quite helpful!

JS: ...'What hat's she got on today?', 'Oh heck, then we're in for a hard time!'

JH: What was her angry hat then?

JS: One she used to put on very straight. If it was at a bit of an angle you knew we were all right, but if it was pulled down straight, you thought 'Right, we're going to be... we're going to have a hard time'. That's more the actors than us. But still, we could [hear from]... our room, our linen room where we - sewing room rather - had access to the gods, and the flying gallery, but because we didn't use it very much because... except sometimes when we wanted to see where they'd got to in rehearsals, if they wanted anything or were likely to want any. Sometimes they use to shout for us. We had tannoys around the place. But it was quite interesting to walk out there and sometimes listen to what was going on and sometimes hear her either bawling them out or telling them they were doing all right. We could get across [above the stage], right across the catwalk at the top but we... left it to the people who were doing the... [scene changes]

JH: I would as well!

JS: Yes, it's a long way down! Very nice... it was a very well set-up theatre, for a small theatre, but I don't know... I think the shape of the theatre made it good for sound almost everywhere. Have you been into it?

JH: No, I haven't actually.

JS: And it had a deep and high stage set. And the other thing it had was a galley [scene dock] - we were more or less over that galley, gallery, at the side where you could paint sets which there aren't... that many of them haven't got those, apparently. I know

Murray [Melvin] is working, at the moment. He's bringing the history, the history of Theatre Workshop to Theatre Royal, you know, the actual theatre, up to date. One Oscar Tapper, who was married to John Bury's sister, he had started on writing up the history of the theatre, he got it up to... the 1950s, I think. And I think Murray's taken over.

JH: It's quite a job.

JS: Yes, I should think it is. It's 'cause it's had quite a... mixed up history. We all understood that it was the Music Hall theatre because there was another one further down Stratford, nearer, further down, which was the straight theatre. And we were - this was the Music Hall. That's what we were told but... maybe they both put straight plays on, I don't know, maybe they switched around. But... I don't know... I think even though it was fairly... and, oh, we did it up [the Theatre Royal] but we painted it up one summer - came back early from our break. Summer we didn't do an awful lot because... there was not much point putting on things in the summer when people are away on holiday and they couldn't get very big audiences, so that was when we used to have our, our break as well.

JH: Did you go off and work somewhere else or have a nice holiday?

JS: Well I used to come down and stay with my parents who lived... well, here [in Surrey]. One year - the first year I came back - they did, my father just found me something to do outside because I was just so... I was so wound up from a hard year's work I just couldn't relax. But others went home or some took temporary work on or anything like that. Then we used to... two years running we used to go out to... we stayed out, camping in the grounds of Tom Driberg's [the MP] home. He lived out at... out in Essex and he was a great supporter of Theatre Workshop. And he let us camp out there and things like that so we were rehearsing and when I first joined them [Theatre Workshop] that's where I joined them because they were out there rehearsing The Travellers there, so that's, you know, in the out buildings. But they did, they were... well, they had to because they didn't have anything, we lived on a lot of [other people's] hospitality. People putting you up and things. I wasn't very successful at it, but if you were a good scrounger you did very well. And some people were much better at scrounging than others. And it's... that's the way they got round it because they had to sort of beg, borrow and, well, I don't think they stole, but begged, borrowed and scrounged to get anything to work with at all. Anywhere to live, anywhere to stay.

JH: You mentioned that you didn't really get involved with the politics, but what are your memories of that? Because Theatre Workshop is always written about as very politically motivated.

JS: They were. Pretty, pretty... yes, most of them were, well, several of them [the theatre company] were [Communist] party members anyway. And they did... they did well when they went abroad. They did much better abroad than they ever did in England - it's ridiculous that when you think about it: got terrific write ups abroad. Terrific write-ups from when they went to Paris. Two or three times they went there.

Very good write-ups in Scandinavia. They went to Russia, they'd been to Poland, they were... I mean they'd been well appreciated over there. And, I think the... people from reading the books and listening to them, you know, listening to people talking about them at the theatre. A lot of the basic people [the critics] like... [pause] were continental, some of them were [Communist] Party anyway, I don't know, or left-wing sort of thing. I don't where [Rudolf] Laban fits in, but Laban was the person they used for movement and things. They got a lot of their original ideas from other theatre people, people abroad. So that I mean... it wasn't just 'cause it was Party; it was just that a lot of the ideas were abroad.

JH: Because Ewan and Joan were involved in the Worker's Theatre Movement which was very European based?

JS: Yes, exactly, yes.

JH: Do you remember whether the East End audiences who came to Stratford East whether... what sort of effect it had on them? Was it political, or a good night out?

JS: I think it was basically more of a good night out for a lot of them. We did, yes, because when I did find lodgings, it was with again Party people. Party people would obviously would support them if they lived in the area. And well, West Ham was always a Labour constituency wasn't it? Anyway. So that I think some of that came through a bit, that they [local people] were supporting them for that reason maybe. But certainly the people I lived with supported it because they liked what they saw and they liked the politics probably as well.

JH: Maybe they were preaching to the converted a little bit?

JS: In that respect, yes. A bit. But we would, I don't know... I don't know that we got so many people in from the street next to theatre. I doubt that many of them came in. It was, they were... the people who were a bit further away [who came] and things. Yes. One or two of the people who worked on the railways, they used to come in, 'cause there's a big railway yards at Stratford. We used to see them in Bert and Mays - the café, they'd found that that was a good place to go and eat. And I think some of them came to see us. I would say, yes, a lot of the people that came in were probably Labour, sort of, supporters.

JH: This is something I've been looking at with my whole degree, whether theatre can actually be political and whether that's worthwhile.

JS: Yes, it is something that's... it's very difficult that, isn't it, because if you, you can be political but you've got to be broad with it. Not too dogmatic. Because the other thing that was coming up the same time as us was over at the Royal Court, with the... that side [i.e. theatre in west London]. Yes, 'cause Look Back in Anger [by John Osborne] was on...

JH: '56, wasn't it?

JS: Yes, I was going to say, it was much the same time. Yet we didn't... some of our people went over to see the plays over there. Whether they came to see us I don't know. [Laughs] That I couldn't tell you.

JH: Did you ever go to any of the West End...?

JS: [pause] No. Now why didn't I go? Probably money, again. Half of it was money.

JH: It's very expensive these days as well.

JS: But no, I haven't been to the theatre very much since, either. I've found perhaps it did sort of... I got so used to the way we did things there, and I go into other theatres and think 'For Heaven's sake, loosen up a bit!'. They look rather... conventional.

JH: Have you seen any productions since that were influenced by Theatre Workshop?

JS: Have I? Don't know, don't know... 'cause first of all I lived in... After the theatre I lived in Barnet for a bit and then we moved round down, and I've moved out in the country. You don't see so many plays anyway there. Things happening there. I've been to one or two productions at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre [Guildford] but not very many. But I don't know. They say it's had an effect, you know, filtered through, the influences. Do you go to the theatre much?

JH: Quite a bit, yes.

JS: You do? Ah! I've been down to... I went to something at the Chichester Theatre. What was that? That I went to with Shirley and George. Shirley Jones who worked with me married George Cooper, they sort of moved about it and they ended up down living near Petersfield. Shirley, I'm sorry to say, is no longer with us - she's dead now but... they've carted me over to see different things. A couple of things, I think, at the Chichester. I think George, I think George probably still goes. George has gone into... he's become a bit of a recluse, don't know quite he plays. Hardly ever heard from him, hardly ever see him. He's become, as I say, very reclusive. Keeps himself to himself. The sad one is Howard Goorney who was one of the basics in the theatre who is now in a nursing home and I think he's... don't know if he's got Alzheimer's, but dementia, certainly. Which is very sad. And hard for his wife, of course. His book is worth a read because he tells... it's the one that tells you more about the theatre than any of them, I think. I've read Joan's book which is a bit scatty anyway. We all got a bit cross - at least a lot of us did, we all sort of got in touch, maybe gave us a reason to get in touch, and go 'She didn't get that bit right, did she?', 'No, she didn't!', 'She's got that completely wrong'. And she had me, joining six months later than I actually did. [Laughs] But my

children have read the book and enjoyed it. They're once removed, aren't they? But I've never read any more. Got some bits on tape of Ewan MacColl doing... think Harry sort of recorded him one time or another [off the radio]. Any good?

JH: Oh yes.

JS: Any use?

JH: Definitely! Just wondering also about, you weren't directly involved with the actors of course but...

JS: Well, apart from putting clothes on them [Laughs] and taking them off. Tell you some things there but we won't. One actor was so thin I had to build him padded tights, to wear under the other ones, he was so skinny! That was Maxwell Shaw. Ooh, he was thin. Poor chap. When he was wearing black he nearly disappeared, so I had to build him padded tights. But yes, they were all sort of... they were all pretty good about costumes and costume fittings. They didn't... they knew they had to have them and things. It was a little bit awkward, you couldn't, if you wanted to build something [design a costume], make something too strictly period it didn't always work because Joan had them doing so much, you know, moving about things that... I had one coat which I'd made something which I thought was a rather nice, nice fitted coat, went and split it, didn't he [the actor]? Very soon because I mean he couldn't do the movement he needed to do, so you were... you had to have, they had to be a bit of leeway in, whether you were doing something strictly period or something the actors could move about in. And you always prepared to supply the women with spare long skirts if you were in period pieces because if you haven't worn a long skirt you need to know how to move in a long skirt - you need them on to move in them, so that was something we used to let them borrow skirts for. Some of them used to come and help us with the sewing. Definitely quite happy to come up there. Usually warm up in our room 'cause as you probably know as well as I do, you can't sew if your hands are cold. Incidentals, no... Harry Corbett was awful on firework night. He had quite a bad war, I think. And pops and bangs and things used to give him the jitters. So he used to have to be... used to stay in out the way of fireworks. 'Cause most of them, if they had been through the war... he had. George Cooper got caught up in the tail end of it, didn't seem to bother him too much. Gerry got flung out of the RAF, I think, as a complete hopeless character, couldn't do anything with him. Can't remember anything much about any of the others. But... I've run out of steam now. Can't think of anything else at the minute.

JH: How many hours did you work a week?

JS: As many as I could! I could stay with a friend in Hampstead which meant I didn't get there so early but I had to leave before the end of the show, so much... It was nice to get away from the theatre sometimes. It wasn't always easy. Particularly when there was a show coming up, you when you were coming up to a new show starting. The break down weekend when was always murder anyway. You worked through the night, literally you did, getting things done and the changeover... everybody was in anyway 'cause the set was always being changed and they certainly worked through the night to

get things done. You didn't get actors moving very early in the morning! [Laughs] We had to start a bit earlier than them. But then we could be off... we didn't usually stay until the end of the performance. Unless, we usually stayed doing bits and pieces, or changing people sometimes, we usually had to go and help with changes. So we weren't, as I say, we weren't always there when a show was on, if it wasn't necessary for us.

JH: I think finally just how do you feel now about the reputation now of Theatre Workshop? Looking back. Now it's very well respected.

JS: It is now, isn't it? Well it jolly well deserved to be because they were, I mean, it really was live theatre. The first thing I saw was Uranium 235 and it really sort of hit you, you thought 'Golly, this is interesting!', you know. You were involved, they were telling you something, they were telling you things and they were involving you in it. It is... it's very unusual to go to a play and find yourself that involved. I mean, it's usually something that's happening there [on stage], isn't it? But it seems to be a bit better, the odd things I have seen. Do seem to have come out a bit more to involve [the audience] and... carry you along in it a bit better. So I think some of the, some of it's [the Theatre Workshop] rubbed off a bit, what they were trying to do. But then some people preferred it, sit and watch something without, you know, just watch what's going on.

JH: Just have a night out and watch a play.

JS: I must say I'm glad I did my, I was there. I was there for about four years. Yeah. I'm glad of it. I wouldn't have missed that.

JH: Sounds like it was a fantastic experience.

JS: Yes, it was. But as I say, it was hard work. Couldn't do it now! [pause] Yes... I don't know. This is a sort of general comment, it isn't often, there aren't so many youngsters who seem to be... so involved. Somebody was saying that, they don't seem to be so politically involved or... in things as much now. Sort of, they seem to be much more staid than they used to be. Perhaps I was pretty staid as a student.

JH: Is there anything you'd like to add, or...?

JS: No, I wish... I wish... I'd always said at the time when Howard was writing that book, if he'd got Shirley and I talking together, instead of asking... he asked us for, to write things down about what we thought of it, but if he'd had us talking together and recorded that I think he would have got...

JH: ... a much better book.

JS: A much better sort of comment, certainly from us, about the life there in what we were doing and trying to do and things. And how we scraped and scrimped and you know, sort of things like that. And there's, I noticed Shirley said if you were unpicking costumes you did it very carefully because you may have to put it back together again later to do, to be the original costume. It was... it was a way I learnt to sew. Whenever I make things now I always feel thoroughly frustrated if I've got something out of a piece of material without having to work out things, I'm so used to having to work it out and squeeze things in and patch things up.

JH: Get as much out of the material as possible.

JS: Yeah. So to make it, get something to make out of what you've got. And all the rest of it. Good training in a way. Makes you make the best use of stuff, and you don't waste things. So it was good in that respect. And you could... well, we did... I don't remember... we ate badly but we must've, when we were up in Glasgow we used to be, you always got your own sort of breakfast out of what you could find and things, but the evening meal was usually shared... funnily enough, the men were the better cooks than the women in the company. Gerry was a good cook; Camel was a good cook... And Jobie was a good cook, John Blanshard. The evening meal was usually, it was usually the one that when we all sort of sat round and talked and things like that. And there was a meal that everybody... they put together what they could find, what they could put together for a good meal and usually it was a good-ish meal. But I wasn't a very good cook. I've learnt better, I've learnt since I've gone along. But I got involved, yes, I used to get drawn in then into play-reading. Useful, and interesting, but not everybody's good at it. And some people are much better at reading than others.

JH: It's not the same as reading a novel, is it.

JS: No, you're having to be the character, bring it out, you're reading a character, you have to make something of it.

JH: 'Cause Shelagh Delaney and Brendan Behan, they're the famous examples, but were many scripts sent to Theatre Workshop?

JS: I don't remember that very much, whether they were. Yes, of course Shelagh's was, and Brendan. I think probably, if Joan got the chance [she took it], whether they were as much sent to her or she went chasing people up for scripts or something like that. But... she did, they did do quite a lot of adaptations and... she did that and oh she didn't do the only ones [it wasn't only her that did the adaptations], she used to get other people to do them as well. Maybe they were sent scripts, I don't know. Or maybe some of the people who were in the company could write. Used to try and write things, I think they did try as well. Apart from Ewan. But no, that wasn't something [the selection of scripts] I got very much, you know, as I say, she handed me out scripts to read sometimes, and wanted comments. Ooh she handed them out to anybody to read, I suppose, all of us, see what we said about it. Yes she... plays were analysed [and researched] to see what was, you know what was in it and what would, how it could be worked and all that sort

of thing. I did get involved in some of that. Yes, always the first, perhaps the first read, first rehearsal, we'd be down for that to get, so that we knew...

JH: Get ready for...

JS: ...what was going on and she could hear what we were thinking about costumes and dressing it and things. She did Ted Allen... [talking about plays from American playwrights] yes, we had a play from Ted Allen, and they went to America once, what was the other one... The Fire-Eaters...

JH: Was it Alan Shaw? No...

JS: Yes, I think he may have done. The one, as I say, I didn't, I may have left when some of the other [American plays] ones came along. And oh, yes The Big Rock Candy Mountains, which was Alan Lomax's effort. 'Cause Alan Lomax came via Ewan and the folk song thing. And I remember seeing Shirley Collins [the folk singer] who's quite an established lady now but she was a young slip of a thing, hardly known then.

JH: I think that's everything. Thank you very much.

JS: Well, I hope it's of some interest.