

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Julia Jones – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Helen Temple**

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Actress, playwright and theatre-goer. Alice in Wonderland; auditioning; Harry H. Corbett; digs; The Dutch Courtesan; lighting; Joan Littlewood; Look Back in Anger; Ewan MacColl; National Theatre; The Other Animals; RADA; repertory; Richard II; Ralph Richardson; RSC; David Scase; Shakespeare; Theatre Workshop; touring to Czechoslovakia and Sweden.

HT: Just for the recording, if I could just check that we have your permission to record this interview and have it transcribed and housed at the British Library?

JJ: Oh yes, that is fine, absolutely fine.

HT: Thank you. OK, would you like to begin by telling me how you got involved in the theatre in the first place?

JJ: OK, well, it was a long, long time ago, and I was in the army coming up for demob - early 1946 - and I was interested in the theatre. I thought I might be an actress you know, but I wasn't awfully worried anyway. Alexander Korda - he was one of the big British film producers then - gave a large sum of money to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art to form ten scholarships for ex-service people. And I saw this on a little information pamphlet that was handed round in the forces, you know: "Jobs you might do", and I thought, 'Well, I'll have a try at that!'. I thought, 'If I get it, then I know I am good enough to go on and be a professional'. And I got one! And that was a wonderful scholarship, because it not only paid for one's tuition for two years (which was the course) but also for one's keep. So, no problems for two years, and I went to RADA when I came out of the forces in the summer of 1946 - the new term started in the October. So that is how I started.

HT: How did you find RADA?

JJ: Well I was rather disappointed actually. It wasn't really what I thought it would be, it still had a feeling of the pre-war - young women went there as a sort of finishing school thing. But you know, very good people were also there, like Michael Redgrave. But I just was a bit disappointed in it. However I stuck it out for two years, which was very good; it was very good training in many, many ways and then I left there at the end of the two

years, and I didn't really know what I wanted to do. I wasn't sure if I wanted to go into the professional theatre, I thought 'I don't know really if it is my cup of tea'. However, I went into RADA one day [after I'd left] with a friend just to see if they knew of any work which was going on - it was about two months after I had left - and the Registrar, a Miss Brown then, said, 'Oh, I have a letter here which I think would interest you, Julia'. It was a letter from Joan Littlewood - you know Joan Littlewood?

HT: I do indeed, yes.

JJ: It said 'Would any of the pupils who are leaving that year be interested in joining her company, because they were going on a tour of Czechoslovakia and Sweden?'. This was in 1948, and I said, 'Oh yes, that's me!' And I went... I rang up Joan Littlewood; they were based in Manchester, and went up there, had an audition and I joined the company, which was marvellous. Now Czechoslovakia, by the time that we got there, had had a change over to communism, and that was something fresh. We were there for a month touring. It was a wonderful experience, it really was. It was quite out of this world! I remember just before I left my father said to me 'You can't go there, it's full of Russians!'. There wasn't a Russian anywhere in sight. So we did that and then went on to Sweden, which was entirely different because Sweden had not been in the war - they had been neutral - and therefore we went. Are you interested in this?

HT: Yes, very interested.

JJ: Czechoslovakia had literally nothing - the Germans had occupied it from before the war started, they had swept the country bare of all dairy produce, they [people] had no cows, they had nothing - they had pigs, that was all. We had pork most of the time we were there, but they had [virtually] nothing. They had no coffee - they had acorn coffee - they had no tea. We took tea and coffee with us, because we knew this. No milk, no eggs. We went up to the mountains for two days for a holiday and stayed in a nunnery where the nuns had hens, so we had eggs. That was incredible, and they were so kind and so good. We went to all these theatres [toured many theatres] and met theatrical people. We had the red carpet down in Prague for us at the main theatre [when we arrived], and then we get to Sweden where they have not been in the war and the first thing that we saw, we went into one of the big theatres, in the green room - an enormous room - and right down the centre was this colossal table laden with things like milk, and cheese and ham. Things we hadn't seen in any quantity in England for years! You know, we had been so heavily rationed, and they just had all this, and I think we ate everything! Then we toured Sweden for a year, and then came back to England. The first thing we did when we got back was prepare... it was the second year of the Edinburgh Festival, and we prepared a show to take to the Edinburgh Festival and we went there, with great success. We never had any money of course - Theatre Workshop was always on the bread-line, more or less! We did that, and then [pause] '49... I can't remember all the details, but I stayed with them until 1950. We toured - we worked in Manchester Library, we opened in Manchester Library with a show by Ewan MacColl, who was then writing - the folk singer, I don't know if you know that?

HT: Yes, hasn't he written a book about Workers Theatre Movement?

JJ: Yes that's right he has, and Joan Littlewood has written an enormous volume, have you read that?

HT: No, but I do have a book with me, I'll show you.

JJ: Theatre Workshop, Joan Littlewood. Oh yes, yes, I haven't read this, Oh yes, I remember all this - it's fascinating. She was an absolute genius. Anyway I was in two or three of Ewan MacColl's plays we toured.

HT: Did he just write them, or did he have a lot to do with the direction?

JJ: He sat in on directing, but Joan was the director. And he had a lot to say, you know, and he in fact appeared in them as well. But he wasn't a director, no, but he would have something to say as a writer. I am trying to think what the first play was - I should have made notes about this, and I have forgotten, but I'll think of it in a moment, I think it's probably got a picture of it there in that book [The Other Animals]. But then he wrote a little comedy - which was unusual for him - which we did in Manchester. We did a lot of American plays - The Gentle People we took on tour, which is a wonderful play by an American author, all with a left wing bias, a revolutionary bias. She really did start the big revolution in the theatre, and she was doing things like Look Back in Anger long before Look Back in Anger was written - about working people, you know. The theatre was very much a middle class affair, you know: 'Anyone for tennis?' and things like that! But Joan changed it, and she really was marvellous to work with - quite extraordinary! I mean, you would go and rehearse with her, Joan could have thirty ideas in the space of an hour or so that most people would have in a lifetime. She was terrific to work with - very unusual woman indeed. So I think I was very lucky to have that opportunity, right at the beginning of my career. It really opened my eyes to a great many things, especially after the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art which was very, very conventional.

HT: So you noticed a contrast between working with the two companies [the commercial set-up]?

JJ: Yes I did. I had read an article in Picture Post about Theatre Workshop whilst I was still a student, and I thought, 'I would love to work with that company'. It sounded so exciting, and I thought 'oh, I will never get a chance to do that', but in fact it worked out - it was so really marvellous. And then I left there. I was spotted! We were doing something in London, with the Theatre Workshop, and a repertory company had a new play written and asked me if I would come and play the part, and it was called Angels Don't Wear Wedding Rings, it was quite a good comedy. I said 'OK, it would be nice to have a change'. I went to rehearsals, but I had been working so hard I had a kind of breakdown - I never actually got on stage for it. I stayed with them - they were taking out a tour of a Lancashire play, a beautiful little play. It is about a young woman, a mill worker and you know, the mill workers always went on holiday at the same time and most of them went to Blackpool, so she was going on holiday to Blackpool where she met the son of the mill owner, and they have a sort of affair in Blackpool and when they

come back there is a big hoo ha because, you know, the mill owner was appalled with his son, and the mother of the girl, Fanny - Fanny Hawthorne - wants her to sort of grab him and say he's got to marry her. She listens to all this and in the last act she says she has no intention of marrying him at all! 'I don't want to' she says, 'I shan't! It was a nice bit of fun but that is all', so that was Fanny Hawthorne. I am trying to think where did I go from there... I then had time in repertory, Liverpool Playhouse. I was with them for a few plays and then toured. Not a hugely long theatrical career - I did have my first child, Thea, in 1955. Oh, I did the first season of rep at Canterbury! That's it, with David Chivers who you have already interviewed, and that was lovely. A very, very good season of all sorts of different plays, classics and ordinary comedies; a really very good season, and I enjoyed it very much. Then I went up on another tour, I think, and then finally had Thea. That really was my theatrical career [as actress], because then I started writing. I wrote my first play for television - which was an enormous success - and went on from there.

HT: Fantastic, did you continue to write dramatic works?

JJ: Yes. Right up until I was 79.

HT: Was the majority of the work for television?

JJ: Most of it was television, but I did write four plays for the theatre, I wrote one called The Garden, which went on at Hammersmith Theatre Club, and another one called Country Ways which was done at Bristol Old Vic, and another one was at Bury St Edmonds. Just four plays, and none of them came into the West End. But I did come into the West End [as an actress] with a play by Alan Owen who started writing for television first. A beautiful writer, and he wrote a play called Progress to the Park which was done on television, I was in it and then he wrote it for the theatre and I was in that. On tour and then we opened in London for a short season. I had forgotten about that, but Alan really was a very good writer. He went off to Hollywood and then came back and sort of faded away - it was rather sad. Actually a short theatrical career in a way. I did some radio: I have done radio, I have done film, I've done television, I have done some theatre and I have also been on the radio reading poetry and things.

HT: You say about your theatrical career, did it leave you much time to see theatre as well?

JJ: Yes it did, and not a great deal of time because I wasn't in London a lot. I did see the first production of Look Back in Anger and I do remember - I went with Joan and some other members of the company, and Joan just said, 'What an awful play!' - I mean, Joan had been doing this sort of stuff... I thought it was interesting, I didn't get carried away by it. You see, Joan was not interested in the West End or anything like that - she wanted a Peoples' Theatre and that was what she was working towards. Of course she would be a bit scathing of Look Back in Anger - it was to be expected of her! You know, I enjoyed it; I don't really remember an awful lot about it. I kept thinking to myself 'well, what is he going on about?'. But I can see why it was so important because suddenly he was writing about different people - he was writing about these working people, that

sort of thing, and not the usual West End stuff. So it was a landmark in British Theatre. [But Osborne was writing in the conventional way. Joan was breaking all the old rules].

HT: Didn't Terence Rattigan leave the theatre claiming that John Osborne was saying 'Look Ma, I'm not Terence Rattigan?' because it was so contrasting to his plays.

JJ: Yes, yes, that's true, but Rattigan is a great playwright - he is writing about very real people I think. Now I really like to go and see Shakespeare now, in my old age, I like to go to Stratford, I haven't done it in a little while, but I like that. I am very interested in that sort of thing. I must say that the last two years have been so hectic for me that I haven't done much theatre-going at all. My husband was with the Royal Shakespeare, [my first husband] he was with them for about a year, which was great because we went to live in Stratford for that time.

HT: Oh! When would that have been?

JJ: [Pause] The sixties, and he was in the Peter Brook's King Lear.

HT: Who did he play?

JJ: Oh it wasn't a big part in that particular play - it was one of the murderers, and something else - but I have forgotten now. You know, they alternated quite a lot with the plays. But anyway, he was in that and then he was with the National for a while. He was in Galileo playing the... what was he called? The sort of, Major Domo sort of part. The best voice I ever heard in the Olivier, because it is a terrible theatre for sound. Something which is astonishing to people like me is the way people are now using microphones! Nobody seems to know how to speak on the stage now. We learnt to project: we learned how to whisper on the stage and it still go to the gallery. But you know these little voices...

HT: Yes, you see it very often today, actors using microphones in auditoriums so the audience can hear.

JJ: Yes! That I think is very bad - it is very sad what television has done.

HT: You mentioned that your husband was in plays at the National, how did you feel about the birth of the National Theatre of Great Britain?

JJ: Well I thought it was wonderful. To be almost the only country in Europe without a National Theatre was awful! I think it is amazing what our theatre does when it has no subsidy at all. You think what the theatres in Germany get, and we do marvellous things. No, no I was very pleased with all of that, very excited about the whole thing. I thought it was great, I can't imagine anybody wouldn't be, but I suppose there were people.

HT: But as you said, to be one of the only countries in Europe...

JJ: A disgrace, when you think of the playwrights we've got.

HT: Exactly, the country that gave the world Shakespeare, and we didn't have a National Theatre!

JJ: But we have one now, which is good. That was a wonderful thing to happen. It is so strange looking back on all the years and years that have gone by, all the developments one has seen and things that have happened. Actually Joan was living in Paris for a while a few years ago before she died; in fact she had a flat there for a long time. She said 'Come over and see me, I have a bathroom you can sleep in.' - typical Joan! Anyway, so I said I would love to come and I wrote to her and said that I would very much like to see Peter Brook's work, at this space that he had, and she was furious that I wanted to see Peter Brook!

HT: So you kept in touch with Joan after you finished working with Theatre Workshop?

JJ: Oh yes I did. I have quite a few of her letters and things, I have been wondering quite what I should do with them - yes, I did keep in touch. I saw her quite often. But she was a very strange lady in many ways! I started writing of course, and then when she was having a book-signing of this massive volume that she had written about Theatre Workshop I went along to see her, and what's his name - the chap that took over Stratford East? [Philip Hedley] - was sitting next to her as she was signing autographs, and he said 'Do you mind if I just go to the loo? Will you sit by Joan?' so I said 'Surely!' So I sat by Joan, she turned round and looked at me - she had lost sight in one eye - she came very close and she said, 'Oh! It's Julie isn't it? I would have known those eyes anywhere!' and then she looked at me again and said, 'You were a wonderful actress until you went all intellectual!' I said, 'Intellectual? Me?! How can you say such a thing?'. I'd forgotten that I was there [with the company] for the first time they appeared at Stratford East. I was in the company because we had done a production of Alice in Wonderland and we were on tour with it. I must tell you about that! We played the Theatre Royal at Stratford East - that was when Joan decided that they would try to get hold of that theatre and make a base there. Alice in Wonderland was a very beautiful production by Joan. We went up to open in Barnsley, in Yorks, which is a mining town! It was quite incredible! Because on Boxing Day we opened, and the theatre was packed with miners and their families. What they were there for was a leg show. They were not there for a very beautiful production of Alice in Wonderland and that is what we gave them! It was most extraordinary. They clapped slowly, and they joined in, it was so amazing. Howard Goorney was playing the Dame. They were throwing coins at him on the stage, and he was getting so cross he began to throw them back! It was an amazing, amazing couple of nights!

HT: Not the reaction you were expecting?

JJ: Well, we ought to have known! However, the local parson came to see it, and was very impressed. He wrote about it and said, 'Everyone should be taking their children to see Alice in Wonderland' and so they did, and we finished up you know, with wonderful audiences. But the first two were gruelling!

HT: Do you think it was just not what they were expecting?

JJ: No! They wanted some sort of leg show! With girls dancing like this!

HT: It's not what they got!

JJ: We had a sort of chess ballet in it, which was very beautifully done by Jean Newlove who was in charge of movement. She was a Laban teacher. But that they cheered! The pawns had little short dresses. It was a wonderful experience, it really was.

HT: So it was quite a mixture of plays then, that Theatre Workshop would tour?

JJ: Yes it was. It was a good mixture. There was one particular production that we took abroad, a play by Lorca. Its full title was 'The Love of Don Perlimplin for Belisa in his garden. That was its full Spanish title, but we just referred to it as Don Perlimplin. It was a short play of four big scenes. It was about this old man who marries this beautiful young girl [Belisa]. You know, about seventeen or eighteen, and what happens to them in the most poetic and wonderful way. Get hold of it and read it. Very unusual play. I was very fortunate because I played the girl, all that time ago. Joan did a marvellous production, visually as well as verbally. One of her ideas that I must remember to say, she thought to bring theatre more interesting, more alive, to give it a filmic quality - to do on the stage with lighting and movement that they do on film. This was very exciting and she had, as her lighting and scene designer, John Bury, who then became very, very famous. He went to the Royal Shakespeare Company and then on to the National and then he was going everywhere. His lighting was out of this world. And this particular play, the scenery was a big oval - an iron sort of oval. There were curtains hanging from it, straight down to the stage: white curtains, red curtains and green curtains. They were moved according to the scenes: white curtains for the bride in the first bedroom scenes, the green were for the garden, the red were for passion. But it was so fascinating, and the company that were not in the play would be waiting to rush on stage and change the curtains on the oval that they were running on, and make them hang like pillars. So they looked like pillars from the front. Very, very interesting idea: it was quite beautiful. No ordinary scenery: the bed was just a black disc raised on one end and sloping down, and there was this great big garden seat out of perspective - nothing was normal.

HT: You said that for Theatre Workshop the theatre was about bringing theatre to the people, that it should be a people's theatre. From your experience do you feel that there was a political message in all of the plays? Or that for the company what was important was to bring beautiful pieces of theatre to people?

JJ: I think it was a bit of both. Ewan's writing was a sort of political message. Before I joined the company they did Uranium 235 which was about the atom bomb, and toured that very successfully. That was definitely a political message. Then *The Other Animals* - which was the name I was trying to remember - was again a sort of political message, and a short play he wrote, [Johnny Noble] - my goodness! Why didn't I look this up before you arrived? - was about the unemployment in the thirties, severe, terrible unemployment. And that was a beautiful short play with songs - folk songs - and movement, a lot of movement in Joan's plays. Lots of Laban movement, and so on, which Ewan used a great deal in his plays. I am trying to remember various things; I don't know why I didn't make some notes of this. Never mind, I'll remember as we go along! But it was certainly all very interesting. We opened in Edinburgh Festival, in 1948 it must have been and played this *Perlimplin* play there, it was a great success. Especially the night when my nightdress fell off! I went into the dressing room, and having recovered myself, and Joan said to me, 'I think we'll keep that in!' and I said 'If you keep that in, Joan, you can play it!'

HT: It didn't stay in then!

JJ: Of course not! She had a programme of a one act Molière and a one act Chekhov, and with these she used to do this Johnny Noble, which was Ewan's one. They were great fun those two plays, the Chekhov and the Molière - absolutely beautifully done, with music and everything. Wonderful productions! [Howard Goorney excelled in them]

HT: Were they re-writings of Chekhov and Molière?

JJ: No, no! The Molière was *The Flying Doctor*, and the Chekhov was... I have forgotten the name, [The Proposal] a one act play, you never see it, you never see it normally. And Howard Goorney played in both of them. He was the most wonderful clown. He is just fading away now I am afraid - you would have loved to speak to him. He was with Theatre Workshop before the war, when they were street theatre.

HT: Yes.

JJ: So you have read about that? Howard was with them then. So what a shame. He's just not there any more.

HT: Did you find that the company of Theatre Workshop was quite a mixture of different people from different backgrounds? Or were the majority of people classically trained?

JJ: There weren't many classically trained. I mean, I was one of the few that had been at RADA. [pause] As time went on, more people went. What a shame some of them have gone now. What about Victor Spinetti, is he still around? He was with them later, and did a lot work with Joan when she was really hugely successful. Others I know have gone - passed on as you might say. Nigel Hawthorne was with them. Nigel Hawthorne



came over from South Africa, and did one or two things, and auditioned with Joan and then joined the company for a while. A lot of people were with her. George A Cooper was with her - I think George is still alive - and he stayed on a long time after I did when they were doing big things. Harry H. Corbett of course has gone, who did the comedy thing about the two... what was it called? The two men with the rag and bone business.

HT: Steptoe and Son.

JJ: Well he was in that - he was the son. Harry Corbett was a great actor, a wonderful actor. I saw his Richard II he did with Joan.

HT: I remember that we read Kenneth Tynan's review of that production at University. Did you see it?

JJ: No, I didn't see his review.

HT: Did you see the play?

JJ: I did. I thought it was wonderful.

HT: Did he play Richard II?

JJ: He did.

HT: How did he approach the role?

JJ: He had a lot of majesty in it; he also... one knew about his homosexual side, and I can just see him on the stage, he was just wonderful. In fact I went into it for a while, because Margaret Bury, who was in it, broke her ankle. And Joan rang me up and said, 'Will you come and play Margaret's part? It's only two tiny parts.' - there was nothing much for women anyway. So I went along and took over the Page who is in the prison with him, and also the Queen, and played those. I'd forgotten that! Which was great - I enjoyed it very much. And George A Cooper was Bolingbroke. I'd forgotten what Tynan had said about it.

HT: I can't remember now, I just remember seeing the review.

JJ: He was a great fan of Harry Corbett actually.

HT: Really?

JJ: Yes, he was. Harry was finally stolen from Theatre Workshop by the RSC - he went to play the gravedigger, in Hamlet. I saw him play that, he was very good. But you know he was wafted away by television in Steptoe and Son - he should never have done it, because he just never played any of the big parts again. He was a wonderful actor, it was very, very sad indeed.

HT: After Steptoe and Son, did he go on to do anything else? If my memory serves me correctly, he died very young?

JJ: Yes, he was quite young. He hated Steptoe and Son; he didn't enjoy it at all and he couldn't stand the other actor - it was ridiculous that he went on with it, I don't know why he did! He was a bit lazy I think, partly. A bit lazy and it was easy money. But Harry was a great actor, I think. I saw him do some wonderful things with Theatre Workshop. In fact I played opposite him in an Ibsen play... I can't remember the name now - was it The Master Builder? - and I played opposite him as his wife. I always have thought it was rather sad that he didn't leave Steptoe to go on to other things.

HT: You said that TV perhaps offered an easier lifestyle for actors, but did you also notice a contrast between working with Theatre Workshop and other forms such as rep?

JJ: Oh yes! Yes! I didn't stay permanently with Liverpool Playhouse but I did work there and that was fine, we did some nice things, but there wasn't the passion, you know. I enjoyed a lot of rep, it was fun and a wonderful training ground. Actually a marvellous training ground for actors to do weekly rep, but you didn't want to be in it too long, it becomes facile then. Yes, there was a kind of passion in the things that you did with Theatre Workshop, you felt you were doing them for a reason; there was quite a passion there. And Joan's approach was different, completely different to normal theatre in those days, but a lot of what Joan did is used now, when people are acting - a great deal of what she was doing is now used by directors. I am constantly meeting people who are fascinated when they find out that I knew Joan in the early days. Mike Leigh - very impressed with Joan, and has taken a lot of Joan's ideas into his own work.

HT: Is this sort of the ideas during a rehearsal process? What did you find different rehearsing for a Theatre Workshop play, as opposed to something in rep?

JJ: Well in rep you would only really have time to learn your lines and you would go into rehearsal, and you would get your moves, and all these sorts of things; there was no time - if you wanted to go deeply into something you were doing then you did it yourself. If you had a good director then you could try things out and he would say, 'No, it doesn't need that' or, 'That's too much' or, 'That's too little', but with Joan you were doing that all the time - you had longer rehearsals. I do remember once when we were rehearsing a play - it was this comedy that Ewan wrote - we were rehearsing and then she suddenly said that one of the actresses was, 'Too tense! Far too tense!' she said. Joan had this dark brown look and she looked at you like that, and said, 'We'll all stop and relax!', so we all stopped and laid down on the floor - like this you know - and

relaxed! And she came round and lifted up our hands to see if we were relaxed enough! It really was very funny sometimes. So then we got up to start again, and I was playing a little maid in this with a chap who was playing the butler... gosh what was his name? Peter Smallwood! He went on to be a director in one of the big reps, I think it was Birmingham. Peter had the most enormous sense of humour, and we started off and he said, 'Oh, I can't do a thing now! I'm too tense!' and this is after we had been on the floor! He was very, very funny Peter, I'm afraid he's dead now too. He played Edward II for her later on.

We had a lot of fun as well as working. We worked terribly hard - my goodness me! The actors were helping to make the set, the women were helping with costume: we never stopped, we worked and worked and worked, and lost weight, and I collapsed, and it did get too much. But you learnt and it was a marvellous experience. Have you met any of the later people? Like... well, you can't meet Nigel Hawthorne! But you might be able to meet Victor Spinetti who did a lot of work with Joan - you know he was in *Oh What a Lovely War!*. Avis Bunnage is gone, sadly, she was great Avis. George A. Cooper might still be alive. I might still have his phone number, if you wanted to get in touch with him?

HT: Yes that would be fantastic for the project.

JJ: Not Howard [Gorney], his mind has gone. I will think about that, Helen, but I certainly have got a phone number for George, if he hasn't moved, he was going to move because he lost his wife. His wife was the Wardrobe Mistress, and she has died. George was in a lot of the later productions that I wasn't in - I had left by then.

HT: Did you continue to watch Theatre Workshop after that?

JJ: Oh of course I went! I saw *The Hostage* and I saw *Oh What a Lovely War!* when it was still at Stratford East, yes, a lot of them before they moved. But then I was working very hard, so I didn't get there so often. But I did go to see them and to see Joan always. We did some schools tours when we were out of work one summer and we sort of said 'Well, why don't we do some Shakespeare for schools?'. We did a kind of potted version of *Twelfth Night* and took it around all the schools in Lancashire. And then we did *As You Like It* and Joan got wind of what we were doing and she decided that she would direct.

HT: So Joan was not originally involved in the first Shakespeare in Schools project?

JJ: No, not at all, but then she realised what we were doing and she said she would come and direct the *As You Like It*, and it was great fun! She was wonderful at Shakespeare, she really was! And the other one was the *Arden* play. I have forgotten what it was called.

HT: *As You Like It*?

JJ: No, another one of the classics she did that I saw, I have forgotten the title for a moment but that was good. But I had an interesting experience when I went to see one of her plays. I was watching, and very often she would have people in her productions who were not professional actors. Joan had a theory that she could make anyone act, and you can't. So she would often have people who weren't very good, but she could get something out of them, a kind of nervous tension, and I did see this play, and I can't remember which one it was now and I was sitting watching it and thinking 'Why am I so tremendously moved by this? Because the people in it aren't very good' - their acting was not very good, and I suddenly realised that it was the lighting, her lighting with John Bury was always marvellous. It was the lighting that was giving this wonderful emotional quality to the thing and helping the actors along. So that was interesting - it's all coming back to me, bits and pieces are flying back into my head.

HT: Did you see A Taste of Honey?

JJ: Yes. First production I saw of that, it was fine. I didn't really think that it was a marvellous play, but it was very interesting. Joan made a marvellous job of it, she really made it, she made the play. Some things I am not really sure that I ought to say here, but I do remember Avis Bunnage telling me that they were on stage with... I think it was the second play that, what's her name, what was her name?

HT: Shelagh Delaney.

JJ: Yes, that's it! Her second play, and I didn't see that - I didn't have anything to do with it at all - but Avis said that they put it on, and she was in her dressing room and Joan came into her room and said, 'Well that was a marvellous play that we wrote together Avis!' You'd better cut that out! That's a very secret thing.

HT: So there was a furore about who it was who wrote the play. Is that right?

JJ: There may have been, but that is what she said to Avis. Joan quite liked to get things that were a bit raw and then she could do enormous things with them. How long have you been doing the theatre course?

HT: Well I did English Literature as an undergraduate and my Head of Department specialises in post war British Theatre, I did those modules as an undergraduate and now I am doing the MA, and now we're learning about theatre historiography.

JJ: Oh how lovely!

HT: It is really fascinating I have really enjoyed it.

JJ: It is a wonderful thing the theatre, and I am very lucky because I have had the best of television when I was first writing: absolutely the best of television, and I have had a marvellous time doing that. I love writing. I have missed acting because I like acting too, and I have missed it, but I just love writing. I don't do much now, television has just changed so much, you know, there is just nothing there.

HT: There is hardly any drama on the television any more, it's all reality TV.

JJ: Radio is getting better for drama. I am just writing a radio play at the moment, I thought I'd have a go and see if they like it. So I am just doing that quietly at the moment. No, but those days of Theatre Workshop were quite remarkable. I think I was so lucky to have got into that company at that time, it was a wonderful thing to have done. Especially to have done this tour right at the beginning of my career: to have gone to Czechoslovakia when it had just changed from one political thing to another, to have had that and we were treated so well - we were welcomed everywhere! It was quite extraordinary.

HT: What plays did you take to Czechoslovakia and Sweden?

JJ: We took that Don Perlimplin I have just mentioned, we took the Chekhov and the Molière, and Ewan's play - the one I just mentioned, the short one, and his Other Animals. Yes, because we did the Don Perlimplin with his short play - I can't remember what that was called now [Johnny Noble] - about the unemployed before the war. If I can find my list of plays I will tell you what that was. Those were the ones we took, we didn't take any others and we played them in different places, sometimes in places we would play The Other Animals as that was a full length play, all about somebody in a cell, during the war being interrogated. A rather dreary play. Well, it was all right, but one of the things they said in Prague, we opened with that and then we met the people afterwards and one of the sort of theatre people, producer sort of thing said, 'Well we were actually doing this sort of thing in the 1920's!' So that was a bit of a take-down, but you know, it was an interesting play to do, and the lighting was very good in many, many ways. It had dance in it - wonderful dance - and music: it used a lot of lovely music.

HT: Did Joan go on the tour with you?

JJ: Oh she did yes. When I joined the company I took over from her, I took over her part in that [The Other Animals]. Later we did a production of Red Roses for Me and that was quite a lovely production, I wasn't playing a huge part in... I was one of a group of three women in it, and Joan was one of the three women. I think I had a few lines and she had one line. And we all came in with black shawls, an Irish sort of thing with flowers, and so on. Joan would always be in the gallery taking notes - terrifying business, she used to put you off terribly. Knowing she was there you would get quite nervous. Anyway she was up there and I was just waiting [in our dressing room] to go on for this particular scene - I think it was our first scene - when Shirley the Wardrobe Mistress came rushing over to me and said, 'Do you know where Joan is?' and I said, 'No I don't. She's not here'. Shirley said, 'She usually comes to me for her costume and she's not

been' - this was only about two minutes before we went on stage! - I said, 'What are we going to do?' and Shirley said, 'Well, I'll put the costume on - she's only got one line!' So we went on with Shirley in this costume, who said the line. When I came back into the dressing room Joan was sitting there as white as a sheet. She said, 'I've just had the most terrible shock! I was sitting in the gallery taking notes and I saw myself come onto the stage!' She'd forgotten! Totally forgotten! Very Joan that! Very dramatic! That was a very good season, we did *The Dutch Courtesan* as well, and that was interesting because they'd had a lot of transfers to the West End and we were asked to transfer this to the West End. The company was still Theatre Workshop in which everyone was supposed to have a say. There was a sort of meeting held to decide if we would do this. It was decided by the company not to go to the West End, because every time they did this, they took the company away and had to get another company for Stratford East. It was killing the local theatre - this wasn't what we were here for! We were here for the business of creating a theatre for the local people, and they were coming - in droves, and of course they do come to see the same people, in those repertory theatres. So we voted against it, but I am afraid that didn't go down very well at all. People who had been active in that were sacked.

HT: Really? The people who had voted not to go to the West End?

JJ: Yes, Joan wrote to me and said... I don't know what excuse she made, she said not to go back for the next season; and Howard, I don't know whether she told him not to go back, and he'd been there since before the war! It was a sort of revolution in a way, and it did away with the idea of Theatre Workshop - the decisions were supposed to be taken by the entire company.

HT: How do you think Joan really felt about that, because as you say, she wasn't a fan of big West End productions...

JJ: No she wasn't, but you see the then business manager Gerry Raffles, as far as he was concerned it made money for the company. He wanted to do it - he was the one that was instrumental in getting these transfers done.

HT: Would the plays then go to another production company?

JJ: Well they would put something else in. I don't know, it was just that they saw the show [*The Dutch Courtesan*] and thought it was very good and would like to transfer it. It was a very good production actually.

HT: So did it end up in the West End?

JJ: No. [The company voted against the transfer.]

JJ: Well I went and did some rep then anyway. I was sorry, but I went and did a season of rep. I earned some money, because you didn't earn any money with Theatre Workshop. We earned a pittance - people used to sleep in the theatre! Absolutely against all the rules. Harry Corbett had a divan in his dressing room; he was living in there with Avis Bunnage! They had this divan in their dressing room and slept there at night! Oh, a lot of people did it!

HT: Really? Was this at Stratford East?

JJ: Yes.

HT: Well, I suppose it's a very cheap way of surviving...

JJ: Well it was either that or pay for digs, and nobody could afford to do that on Theatre Workshop money!

HT: ...considering that the hours were just so demanding. Also, you couldn't have had a second job or anything.

JJ: No! No! A second job?! We didn't have anything like that! You do it for love of theatre and love of what you are doing, which was lovely. And we were all young and we had energy.

HT: Did you ever read the reviews of your plays?

JJ: Yes, but Joan didn't like us to read them!

HT: She didn't read them?

JJ: No, no. She was terrible to me at one occasion when we were abroad. I have forgotten what she said to me, something like I was letting the company down, or something in my performance. I didn't know what she was talking about and she didn't seem to know what she was talking about either. But I said something to David Scase - I asked, 'What's Joan doing?' and he said 'Don't you know? You have been having very good notices!' I didn't [know] because it was in Czech! But David knew everything, David... he directed at Manchester Library for years and I think he directed the play Sleuth when it was in London. David... [Scase] I can't think of his other name for a moment - I am getting old aren't I! But he is dead, so there is no chance of that. I think his wife Rosalie probably is too, because I haven't heard from her in a long time. It is a shame, because David had been there [with the company] for a long time. He was in the Merchant Navy, and joined Theatre Workshop almost when he left I think. He was deaf in one ear [from shelling] so you had to... get on the side with the ear that he could hear out of! He used to manage it very well.

HT: So do you feel that you were persuaded to ignore the reviews?

JJ: I read some... No, I don't think that I read many at all - I didn't ever seem to get them. I suppose I never had time to go and buy a paper. Yes I think that was it, Helen - I didn't have time for the paper! I am not being much use to you am I?

HT: You have been a wonderful source of information! Really very much so.

JJ: Oh! That's good. Well I don't suppose you have had anyone from the early Theatre Workshop have you?

HT: No, I have done one other interview with a lady who was in ENSA.

JJ: Oh yes! The troops!

HT: Yes, so really different, really different from this, and she had gone on after the war, to a seaside resort where she put on review and pantomime.

JJ: Oh yes, what is her name?

HT: Mavis Whyte.

JJ: No, I didn't know her.

HT: She worked on the North West coast and did pantomime and comedy for years. It is just so completely different to something like Theatre Workshop.

JJ: Oh, yes! Completely different, yes. It was amazing with Joan though, because she could turn her hand to anything - this production of Alice in Wonderland was absolutely beautiful, visually and in every way. It was a splendid production. I had a lovely time. I was an oyster, and the dormouse of course. Oh and I played a pawn, in the pawn ballet. We did three shows a day, so I never knew which costume to wear!

HT: Three shows a day! That's a lot!

JJ: Yes, it was hard work!

HT: So would that have been a matinée and two evening performances?



JJ: Yes, it must have been an early matinée... or was it that we sometimes did a morning show? I can't remember now, but I know three shows a day, very often for that week. After that it was just two shows a day. But I know in Barnsley it seemed to go to three.

HT: That would have been in the Christmas period, so people were off work and able to see plays.

JJ: That was quite exciting because half of the company had no digs! Some people went on ahead to look after the scenery, and they had digs provided, but we couldn't get digs for all of us. A lot of us turned up having hitched to Barnsley from Manchester, because we couldn't afford the train fare, and then we had to search for somewhere to stay. Benny and I had the most awful place [that was my first husband] where they were all miners! They had said in the local pub, 'Go and try Mrs. Whatsit across the road, she might have something for you, she takes people in'. So we went along and she looked at me and said, 'I don't take women'. We couldn't get a meal, but she let us stay for dinner, so we went in for dinner with all these miners. It was really extraordinary! They were quite overawed - they just stared at us the entire time! She had masses of food on the table, all the birds you can imagine, and potatoes. Then she said, 'Well, I'll take you in for the week'. So we went back at two o'clock in the morning, only to find that the place was all locked up! We had been setting up: we used to set up and do everything - madness! The door was eventually opened by her daughter in a long white nightie who said, 'We didn't think you were coming back.'. She took us in and put us in the sitting room for half an hour, we didn't know what was going on. We were ushered up to a tiny little room with a single bed. We were so tired we didn't care, we got into this single bed, woke up in the morning to find that the sheet only came half way up! A miner's boots were underneath one chair and his cap. She had obviously turned a miner out of that little room and put us in it! We stayed there for about half the week, but it was all we could manage. They only had a loo in the yard - to get to the loo you had to go through the kitchen with all these miners having breakfast! So I used to wait until I got to the theatre - it was absolutely awful! It was quite an adventure. Then we did find another place.

HT: So were the headquarters still in Manchester?

JJ: Yes. I must have been nearly two years in Manchester. The job I took after that was the [first] season of rep in Canterbury. By that time we had got a room with my aunt in London as a base. She had a little flat in her house and eventually we took that over. So we had a base in London, which you really needed in those days if you were working in the theatre. Nowadays you seem to be able to live anywhere. But in those days you really needed a London base. It was very important that, and a phone, to be on the spot, you know. What extraordinary memories! David Scase his name was, it's just come back to me. I would have to look up diaries to get the records of the plays, with Theatre Workshop. I can't put my hands on those just now. I have all my writing things. It is great fun writing for theatre, of course, it is so different. The first thing I wrote was a little one act for a thing with a number of plays, different people had written for, including Alan Ayckbourn. We all wrote a little play of 20 minutes. And I do remember

sitting, it went on first at the Hampstead, and I do remember sitting in the audience with my knees knocking because I was so nervous.

HT: Do you find as a writer that once something is written it is then out of your hands?

JJ: Oh no, not usually, no. You usually are there, there for casting, and talking about casting. You can veto someone if you think. It's very difficult to veto someone if the director really wants them but you can do it. Then you do go into rehearsals and some directors like you there all the time if you can be there. Some directors don't. They just like you to go along now and again, and see it, but they don't want you there all the time. I have found that it is the directors that really know what they are doing that quite like you around. You can't always do that because you are working anyway. And you can make suggestions and talk about it and so on. Certainly if you are very well known, a sort of David Hare, well he directs his own stuff now, doesn't he. No, you have quite a say.

HT: That's quite positive then; I always imagined that you give it away to somebody and don't see it until opening night!

JJ: No! No, you have to go to the run-throughs, and then you might get a call, certainly with television. I can't remember it happening in the theatre, but with television I do remember being called, 'Can you come in, we have line changes going on?'. The actors were changing the lines. They said, 'Could you come in, Julia?' I said, 'OK' and I went in and sorted it out, got it back to what had been written.

HT: Do you often find that actors and directors are keen to change what has been written?

JJ: No I didn't - it simply wasn't done when I first started writing. And I never had that happen at all. What usually happened when I was writing drama was that the director would come with the play and go through it with you, line by line, to make sure that he understood everything. If there was anything that he would have doubts about he would say, 'I don't quite follow' and you would discuss it. No, I personally never had that, but I do know that a lot of it goes on now. Particularly with the long-running things because the actors have very clear ideas about what they are and what they are doing: if they get a different writer whose got some other idea they'll say, 'I can't say this, my character wouldn't say this!' but this didn't happen to me.

When that [Richard II] was on at Stratford East and I saw it, I also went to the Old Vic to see a production there with John Neville playing Richard II. It was a sumptuous production: sumptuous sets and costumes - marvellous things. And I must say that the better of the two productions was the Theatre Workshop one, with just black drapes and black rostrums. The contrast was immense. I also saw Alec Guinness playing Richard II. Now that was a very strange performance, because he had a funny sort of idea about mediaeval movement. He decided that when they moved, they moved the same arm and leg at the same time! That was how he was walking on the stage. That's all I can remember about it. Well no, I do remember that was when Sir Ralph Richardson died

up. He was playing John of Gaunt, and he was standing centre stage and during one of his long speeches he suddenly dried. It didn't faze him at all, he just looked around - I don't think the audience would have generally known, but I knew - he walked calmly to the wings and got his prompt, and walked back again and carried on.

HT: Really! Do you think the audience would not have noticed if they didn't know the text?

JJ: I don't know; we certainly noticed. I think we heard the prompt, but I am certainly sure that he wasn't a bit fazed, he just walked calmly and still as John of Gaunt to the wings and sort of listened and came back, it was brilliant.

HT: Because that can really fluff things up for some actors.

JJ: Oh yes! It can make you so nervous, particularly in Shakespeare. He was wonderful; he was wonderful, Ralph Richardson. When Benny was with the National Theatre, he arrived - he was just at the stage door, collecting his key from the dressing room - Sir Ralph came in - he used to ride a motorbike, he had a marvellous motorbike. He arrived off his motorbike at the stage door, and he stopped in, looked at his feet and he'd got his slippers on. He said, 'Oh damn! Slippers again!' - he'd forgotten to change his shoes! He was also one of the people who had judged me for my Korda Scholarship. He was there for the audition I did. Yes, he was a young man then and he was working with Alexander Korda, in films and things, he was one of the people. There were three or four people, who were judges; Sir Ralph was one of them.

HT: Was it like a normal audition where you deliver two set pieces?

JJ: I don't know what they do now, but then you wrote in and you paid a guinea for the pleasure of doing the audition. They sent you a little yellow paper and I think somewhere or other I still have it. It had a number of pieces on it, and you had to choose two pieces and then do one of your own. And I chose one [a speech from] *The Taming of the Shrew*. Now I am not a shrew! That is not a part for me at all, but I didn't know that then, I chose this piece to do, and the other piece was from what was then a modern play called *The Rose Without a Thorn*. It was the execution scene when Catherine Howard is viewing the block - she asks to see the block before she had her head cut off. And I chose that, which was something that I could do well. And for my own thing I chose a poem to say. That was quite interesting; I went on [stage] and I started with this *Taming of the Shrew* - awful! When I think of it now, you know, how could I have been so awful? And they said, 'Thank you Miss Jones,' said a terrible bored voice from the depths 'Thank you Miss Jones, just do one more piece', big yawn. So I did *The Rose Without a Thorn*, I did it, walked off the stage. I thought 'That's that'. I had not got to the door, and they called me back and said, 'Would you do another piece'. I did my piece and I was called [back for another audition later]. We were winners out of hundreds of people. I had learned my lesson then - I didn't do *The Taming of the Shrew* again! Awful! I was awful! I did *The Rose Without a Thorn* again and a lovely Cleopatra [speech] from *Caesar and Cleopatra* and a wonderful piece I found by chance in a play. I did that and I got a scholarship - I didn't think I would!

There were so many people and they were all officers and I was a lance corporal! And I went on the stage to do these speeches and I thought 'my goodness me, it was great fun'!

HT: Were you still quite young when you auditioned, or was it a fair few years in the army?

JJ: No, I went into the army when I was 18 and I came out when I was 22, I think. I was quite young and very inexperienced. I'd done some amateur work in the forces and one or two people said, 'Why don't you go into the theatre, because you ought to' and I said, 'I'm not sure if I want to, because I enjoy it now but if I'm being paid to do it I might not enjoy it, it might worry me!'. Anyway that was interesting.

HT: Before you went into the army were you interested in the theatre?

JJ: Yes, I did do one or two things, amateur you know. I don't know how good they were but I certainly discovered that I could act. In fact I discovered at school that I could act. And curiously enough it was reading Richard II in class. I was asked if I could read Richard II and ooh! It was wonderful. Read Shakespeare aloud and it whooshes off the page. If you read it aloud you get it then. It is very, very exciting indeed.

HT: It is such a skill though isn't it to be able to read Shakespeare aloud - I always stumble over it.

JJ: Well, yes, I suppose the words are difficult... I didn't ever find them difficult though, I would have liked to be in one of the big companies, doing Shakespeare. I didn't though, I started writing so I never tried after that.

HT: I have never seen any Shakespeare by the RSC, now you come to mention it.

JJ: I want to see Lear this season - is it Ian McKellen is playing Lear this year? I would really like to go and see that. I had a cousin who lived in Stratford and her niece is still there, a couple of times I suddenly thought I'd go there I didn't want to stay with her because she was getting old I used to stay in a hotel right by the theatre. I'd get up in the morning, go to the theatre and get the standbys. You get them so cheaply, and then [after the show] I'd go to see her, and it was very nice. I haven't done it for a while now; I used to enjoy that - I love Stratford.

HT: It is quite difficult to get to from where I live, so if you were to see an evening performance you wouldn't get home, you'd have to stay really.

JJ: We did it when we were living in Wales: we used to go to a matinée and come back. And I have been from London to a matinée. I had an American friend that used to come [to stay] and we used to go up, have lunch there, see the matinée, and come back.

HT: Have you seen anything at the Globe?

JJ: You know, I haven't, but I have been to the Globe when it was first rebuilt, just before it was finished. I had a friend who was in the Candlemakers Guild. They have annual dinners and they were having one at the Globe, she said, 'would I like to come', so I went and we were shown around. It was wonderful - it was nearly finished, so we had a marvellous view of it.

HT: It is really lovely, that theatre.

JJ: Have you been to a show?

HT: Yes, that's a place I do manage to get to because it is so easy, my dad makes a point about going every summer and taking me to see all the shows.

JJ: Oh, that is lovely.

HT: I've seen some great plays; they have recently swapped directors, as it used to be Mark Rylance.

JJ: That's it, and now it's Dominic Dromgoole.