

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Jean Gaffin – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Kate Harris**

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Theatre-worker. Actors; Arts Council grant; Bertolt Brecht; censorship; critics; The Good Soldier Schweik; Howard Goorney; Yootha Joyce; Joan Littlewood; Lord Chamberlain; Ewan MacColl; Mother Courage; Murray Melvin; music; politics; productions; The Quare Fellow; Gerry Raffles; Richard II; Tony Richardson; theatre-going; Theatre Workshop; Kenneth Tynan.

KH: I'd just like to start by asking how you first became involved with Theatre Workshop?

JG: I - apart from the war, when I was evacuated - grew up in West Ham and was addicted to the theatre having being taken to the theatre a lot by my mother. And when, as I was growing up, I used to go to Theatre Royal prior to Theatre Workshop going there, when there was an actor-manager who put on standard repertory kind of fare. Then the theatre went dark, and then we heard, my friends and - two or three of us who used to go into town to see the theatre. I think I would have been about 15, 16 - 16 then, 16 coming on 17 perhaps. Sorry I was 17. And we heard about this theatre group and we kind of tried to find out more about it. And in the end we became volunteers, asking Gerry Raffles, who was there and taking over, 'Was there anything we could do?'. And we were set to clean and paint the theatre. And I remember... I don't know what the theatre colour is now, it was a horrible, horrible dark red. Probably they got a cheap load of paint, I never knew.

Anyway I used to paint and clean and sweep in my spare time, and absolutely loved it. It just felt so important to be in the theatre doing things like that. I said to Gerry one day, 'What shall I do now?' and he said, 'Oh the lavatories need cleaning.' And that seemed to me something I just didn't want to do, so I said, 'Anything else I can do?' And he said, 'Well, what can you do?' and I said, 'Type.' And he said, 'Fine' and he talked to me about my job and within minutes he'd offered me the job as working at Theatre Workshop as the secretary.

Well, I went home and told my parents who were absolutely scandalised. The idea that I should leave my job as secretary to the assistant secretary in the Institution of Production Engineers - which was very safe and secure and sounded posh, and was in Mayfair - was absolutely appalling to them. But I was absolutely determined. Partly because, you know, the excitement of working in the theatre, partly because he offered me £3 10s a week and I was only earning £3. Anyway I went and gave my notice in and my then boss - his name has come back into my head, miraculously! - called Mr Castleton, phoned my parents and said, 'What was all this about?'. And so my mum and dad had another sort of go at me.

Anyway I went there. So I went to work at Theatre Workshop, supposedly as a secretary. And I was at that time earning more than them, because that was the time when they were on social security when they were rehearsing, and sharing the profits when they were working. And there were times when there were fewer people in the theatre than there were on the stage, so their profits were not exactly great! So that was my start.

KH: What were your impressions when you first joined the company? Or first worked as a volunteer?

JG: It was just incredibly exciting. First of all there was the whole sort of political dimension. I belonged to a fairly left-wing, Jewish youth movement called Habonim at the time, and later joined another one. So I was a bit 'Left' and I filled envelopes for local and national elections because I had a Labour councillor living across the road to me. But I wasn't really seriously political. And it was a sort of political environment – you know, the philosophy of sharing everything, which was just mind-blowing. And telegrams. I can't remember... unfortunately my memory won't be able to tell you this, but you may have been told by somebody else, but when something happened politically there were telegrams and people went on demos. And it was just really sort of exciting. So that was the one thing.

But the other thing which was absolutely fantastic is they just did the most amazing theatre. And I can still see... you know, I know, I've got a book now that Murray produced with pictures in it, about things like the black and white of *The Good Soldier Schweik*. And they did a Christmas play once which was *Prince and the Pauper* where they had a sort of vista of Tudor streets. And it was just amazing. And I knew that they were doing this on a shoe-string, that all the sets were recycled, all the clothes were recycled, that Josie and Shirley would go up to Berwick Street market and rummage for remnants to make clothes. So on the one hand I was more aware, probably, than most of the kind of financial issues that were going on in the background, and yet they were just producing miraculous theatre. So it was... so the politics and good theatre, and of course amazing people to work with. ... there was no... one was treated like an equal, it was just fantastic. And I was very young and very naïve so it was lovely.

KH: Obviously, you were working for Gerry Raffles once you'd got the job. What were your impressions of Gerry when you first kind of met him?

JG: Well I think I probably fell in love with him, because he was very good looking and lovely. And I just did whatever he asked. And so that meant the typing... and if you want I can tell you a little bit about how the office worked.

KH: Yes that would be really interesting.

JG: But I also... Apart from the typing I just did everything that was needed to be done. So sometimes I would be the usherette in the evening, stay on and tear the tickets up. Sometimes I'd serve behind the bar, sometimes I'd get the refreshments ready,

sometimes I'd see the alcohol into the cellar of the bar. So it wasn't straightforward typing, although obviously there was that.

Well, I was on my own in the office for most of the time, but I didn't do the bookkeeping. And I can remember a couple of the people who did do the bookkeeping. One was Tom Dryburgh's wife - which may surprise some people, because Tom Dryburgh was a notorious... a very seriously gay Labour MP who wrote quite shocking memoirs! But he was married... I can't remember her Christian name, she had been in the Land Army. I found her slightly posh because I think they were rather rich. And she did the books at one stage.

And another interesting person who did the books was an actress called Yootha Joyce, who was great fun to work with. And Joan said that she put Yootha in the office because she wasn't good enough to act in the company. And she went on to be one of the most famous ex-Theatre Workshop actresses and do brilliantly. But that was at that phase when she was very young - she didn't sort of please Joan greatly.

I typed on a manual typewriter, and when I typed scripts for plays I typed them on a skin thing where the typewriter made holes in the skin. I wasn't the best of typists - I'd gone to a secretarial college, but I made quite a lot of mistakes. Unlike nowadays where you kind of just kind of do it automatically, you had a red liquid so everybody could see immediately how many mistakes you made because you had red blotches on it. And then I would duplicate it on the Gestetner machine. I can't remember all the plays I typed. The one that really, really... I found very moving and just loved doing was I typed the first production in England of a Brecht play, because we did *Mother Courage*.

KH: That's extraordinary.

JG: That's right. And nobody had told me about 'Alienation', and I cried a lot because I thought it was so sad. And there were a lot of problems over that production because Brecht... the Brecht estate were very fussy and Joan cast an actress and they wanted Joan to play the part. And all sorts of difficulties before it was produced, details of which I forget. But it was a very tricky sort of period.

The other thing was the perennial battle for money and so trying to get money out of West Ham council, trying to get money out of the Arts Council. And we did get some money. I don't know, again, whether people have talked to you about the small grant we got from the Arts Council?

KH: No, not really at all.

JG: Well the idea was that we would get money if there were coach parties from deprived areas. And we just used to falsify the figures, because we were desperate for the money but people weren't coming in the way that the Arts Council had determined! So there was... I thought it was terrible because I was extremely moralistic of course, then as now. But I mean, that's what Gerry wanted to do.

The other thing that shocked me rather - talking about working for Gerry - was that he just did everything for Joan. And I was kind of very shocked, because he'd do things like buy sanitary towels, which to me was dreadful for a man to buy sanitary towels. And he was really, really devoted to her in an incredible sort of way. So that was fun.

KH: Did you have much experience of working with Joan in your role as secretary?

JG: No I didn't. And I don't know whether, in retrospect, I was not allowed or I thought it was inappropriate. But if ever I needed to go from one side of the theatre to the other when they were rehearsing, for example, I would go up the stairs and cross right at the top, and down as quietly as I could. Because it seemed wrong to interrupt that process. In retrospect of course I regret it, because I would love to have seen her rehearse. But I just... you know, I was 16, I was very shy and nobody ever asked me to go.

And it's... Again, Gerry... Everybody's name was in the programme, and I used to send the programme to the printers, and it was years - well not years, months - before I felt confident enough to put my name down. So I'm not in as many programmes as I should be, because although I was responsible and I could put myself in from the first go, I kind of... I just felt too embarrassed to do it. And I think Gerry once noticed it wasn't in and said, 'Why not?', and so then I felt legitimate in doing it.

KH: You mentioned some of the productions a little bit earlier, can you remember what the first thing that you saw them do was?

JG: The first thing I think I saw was... I wonder whether it was... it certainly had sailors in it, so whether it was an O'Neill play I don't know. But it was a sort of absolute flop. I mean... just nobody came! I really can't remember, but I just know that there were sailors on the stage. And whether it was Anna Christie or whether it was another play I don't know. I remember that was an early one.

There was an early Ewan MacColl - Uranium 235 - which I remember not quite understanding because it was a bit avant-garde. And there was also the problems when Ewan came because as you know - I'm sure other people have told you - he had been married to Joan. And it was always slightly uncomfortable, I think, for Gerry when he was around, because they were sort of... it always... I couldn't tell you tangibly what was uncomfortable, but I know I was uncomfortable when he was around.

And of course I was there when Brendan Behan did *The Quare Fellow*, which Joan did a lot of rewrites on. And he was the most amazing... He frightened me, because I wasn't really used to drunk Irishmen. And he was very affable, but he was often very drunk in the office and I didn't really know how to handle him. And I'm Jewish and he wished me to be the mother of the Bishop, which I think was a kind of compliment to him, but was slightly alarming to me.

KH: [Laughing] That's really interesting that you met Brendan Behan and things, can you say maybe a little bit about what it was like having him in the company when he was there working on his plays.

JG: I can only talk about when he used to come into the office. I'm sorry to be so narrow about my experience because...

KH: No that's not narrow at all, that's really, really interesting.

JG: ...that was it. And he would just come and sit and talk. But mostly he was drunk and I just didn't... I didn't know quite how to cope with him. But *The Quare Fellow* was wonderful; it was an amazing play when it was produced. But I suspect it was probably 60% Joan and 40% Brendan.

KH: Really?

JG: Yes. I mean, I might be wrong about that. And I may have exaggerated her role, but my memory is that she did an awful lot of rewriting and shaping it as it went along, you know.

KH: You mentioned going...

JG: He was very big, I remember he was very big. And I suppose I thought he was a bit Dylan Thomas-ish, because I'd read about Dylan Thomas and Dylan Thomas was big and fat as well so... But he was very Irish... very Irish!

KH: You mentioned that production being an amazing production, what was it that for you made it so amazing?

JG: I think the use of music actually. Because... and again you know it's really tricky, I'm going back over 50, 50 odd years.

KH: I know, I understand that.

JG: But my memory is that in the straight theatre then there was much less use of music to... I mean obviously the one that really hit the headlines was *Oh What a Lovely War*, which was after me, the way that they used music. But in *The Quare Fellow*, if you think about the songs that were sung, and jingle jangle and so on it was really... really, you know, innovative. And there was so many things around. I mean *The Good Soldier Schweik* was another one which, you know, you could never forget once you'd seen it – apart from this fantastic performance by George Cooper.

The use of black and white sets. Now, you know, I remember the Zeffirelli *Traviata* at Covent Garden was black and white. You know, it's kind of quite... it's not such an unusual thing. But there was so many things they did then that were kind of new, and I used to get terribly frustrated because of course they wouldn't get notices, that I'd read the posh papers and read reviews of all these things... One of the times we did get noticed and got a bit of publicity was when we put on *Richard II* at the same time as the Old Vic. I don't know if people have told you about that?

KH: Not a great deal, I am aware of it but no, do tell me what you remember.

JG: Yes. And we got a bit of a story out of it because I think... I can't remember whether it was 30 quid or 50 quid, but because of the recycling of sets and costumes, we'd put it on for about 50 quid and the Old Vic had put it on for hundreds and hundreds of thousands of pounds. And we managed to get a little story or two in the paper about that. And I think from memory there were one or two reviews. And I remember Howard Goorney was very good, and there was... I don't remember who played it at the Old Vic. So there was quite a sort of comparative reviews, and that was really important for us.

KH: Did you go and see both of those productions?

JG: Did I go and see it at the Old Vic? I just can't remember! [Laughs] I can't remember. I think I probably... I mean, it was a very busy job because... and I sometimes obviously went in on a Saturday to do things in the theatre. So I suspect I went to the theatre less in that period. I still went to the Opera a lot, but I think I went to the theatre less because I'd kind of got my fill of theatre at work.

KH: It sounds like it was quite consuming.

JG: Yes, it was, it was.

KH: I was interested in... you mentioned the sets for Schweik, I just wondered if you could say a little bit about them from what you remember.

JG: Just that they were... I remember the colours, that they were black and white. And I think mostly on the screen... on flats. Because there weren't many people working there... There was Harry Smith who eventually married Josie Smith, who made the costumes with Shirley, who married George Cooper. So there were those sorts of alliances around, and a lot more than that of course. And they just... And the creative person there was absolutely fantastic – John Bury who we all called Camel... I never knew why, but we called him Camel. I'm trying to think who his wife was. I've forgotten... Maggie something. And he just was a genius, as was proved when he went on to do the RSC. And he went off to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and became one of the great designers of his age. But he started at Theatre Workshop; you know, sharing the profits and being on social security and just being extremely innovative. Because it was every three to four weeks that there was a new play and new sets.

KH: That's incredible. Other people have talked to me about... a bit about productions like Richard II, and said that they found them very different to maybe what other theatres were doing. Was that your experience or not really?

JG: It was all the energy that went into it. It was different, it was somehow... I'm not... it's not relaxed, not more relaxed, not more informal, they're the wrong words to use. But they just felt different somehow. They sort of addressed audiences and you just felt involved in the production. But it's hard for me to judge, because I was part of it and I was willing everything to be wonderful. And I think everything was wonderful! I can't

remember anything that I didn't like that we did around that time. And I don't... I mean there are lots of things I don't know. I don't know who planned the planned the programmes for example, I just worked on each one as it came around, but wasn't any part of the planning of it. So there was just all this... First of all, people were very young and enthusiastic and kind of hungry for success, and hungry to be noticed. And probably hungry hungry some of the time, because when I first went there, there were a few of them living in the dressing rooms. So it was kind of pretty... it was an odd place to work because you'd see, you know, the other people were living there as well as working there. I mean totally illegally of course! And so there was a kind of an excitement, it just felt that they were doing something different. But if you asked me to define the difference, I can't. I can't... I haven't got the language for it I'm afraid.

KH: You mentioned trying to get audiences to come and that kind of thing. How were you involved in your job in trying to do that? Were you writing letters to people?

JG: Yes, we tried to get the council involved; we'd leaflet schools if we thought it was a sort of thing... But the best... the basic thing was trying to get reviews. And audiences... Once Kenneth Tynan sort of noticed us and started to write reviews, then it sort of did pick up. But initially it was very much a local audience. There was a friend's organisation run by somebody called Peggy... Peggy Soulsby? Someone of that name... Peggy...

KH: I'm not sure.

JG: And so people tried to drum up support that way. You know, through trying to get more people to join as friends and so on. But the detail of what we did... to be honest I can't remember. I just remember him badgering... Gerry trying to get at the council which in those days was a very, very Old Labour... you know West Ham was solid Labour and very old Labour. And I don't think the theatre was high on their list of priorities. I can't remember getting anything from West Ham Council actually, but I could be wrong, but my memory was that we didn't.

KH: I was really interested that you said the typed the script - the Brecht script - which is just amazing. Was that the first time you'd come across any Brecht?

JG: Absolutely, yes, yes.

KH: What did you think of it when you first read it?

JG: Well I just thought it was the most fantastic play. Because first of all it was a sort of anti-war play and there was a lot of, sort of pacifism, and it was post war and so on. And so that - as I say I hadn't heard about this concept of alienation and I just found it incredibly moving. And you know when the girl gets up on the tin roof, and the idea of losing your children and all these relationships. I just thought it was fantastic. And in fact I became very interested in Brecht and went to see anything that was put on in London - subsequently I went. But I don't think it got the publicity and the attention that it

deserved really. And I don't know whether that was part of sort of cold war politics, it's difficult to know – because you know, 'Brecht had gone to East Germany and East Germany are the enemies and...'. You know, it's really difficult to unpick the politics. I'm sure that you're able to do that if you want to, but I couldn't do it.

KH: Yes sure. Did you see the product... you obviously saw the production?

JG: Yes, yes, yes. And I just remember... I mean I knew it very well by then having sort of typed it, and I just thought it was wonderful. You know, a wonderful play, and wonderfully done really. And there was never... You know, I go to the theatre a lot now and I often come and think, 'Well 'x' was good, but why did they cast 'x', you know 'y' and 'z'?', and I never remember anybody being bad at Theatre Workshop. There was a real striving to be good, and I'm sure that that was because everybody was terrified of Joan, rather than anything else! But she did seem to get this energy level up in people, which I think was part of the success when it came.

KH: That's something that I was going to ask you about, because I've asked you about, you know, your impressions of Gerry. What did you think when you first met Joan?

JG: I found her very scary. I found her really scary all the time. I worked for about a year and then I went away, and then I came back and I went back for a few months and I did something really terrible. I forgot a crucial appointment that Gerry had. I just forgot to remind him to go to see someone... I can't remember where it was, maybe it was Newham, maybe it was the Arts Council, but it was very important and I... it was in the diary and I just forgot to tell him. And so I was really upset... she was very angry. He was very angry with me. And Gerry developed diabetes around that time, and she once came into the office and harangued me, and said it was all my fault and it was because I was so incompetent that Gerry had got diabetes. And I was just absolutely flattened by it, you know in a way that... You know, at 70 I wouldn't be, but at 16, 17 I was absolutely... So, you know, she could be very nice and warm and friendly, but somehow or other I'd... you know, I worked for Gerry, and I worked for the company but somehow or other I didn't have a relationship with Joan that was anything but scary for me.

KH: How do you think the rest of the company reacted to Gerry?

JG: I think most people were fond of him. He was... there was a side of Gerry that was slightly wide-boyish. You know the story of trying to get, sort of, some money, but he was very open and he had a fairly rich father – I don't know if you know? So sometimes his father... he got his father to bail out the company when it would have just folded. So really without Gerry it wouldn't have kept going. I mean, I'm quite convinced... In the year that I was there, if Gerry hadn't had access to a bit of money from his dad I think it would have all gone pear-shaped, because it was very, very near the bone. I mean, I'm amazed in retrospect I got paid every week. I didn't even do the wages but I think that was, you know a sort of stroke of luck really.

KH: We talked a little bit about productions and things that you saw, are there other things that you've not mentioned that kind of stay in your mind that you remember?

JG: And I've talked a bit about the politics - you know, the ferment and the telegrams that went off. I think it was very hard work working in office then. You know, because if you had to type something ten times, you had to type it twice or do it on a Gestetner machine. So it was really quite hard physical work and I... I've always been possibly sort of a bit of a work-alcoholic, so I kind of worked very hard. But also because I was, I suspect, in love with Gerry - or 'had a crush on Gerry' rather than being 'in love' is the right word to use - I wanted to please him. So I would do absolutely anything he asked me to do in the theatre way, as I think now a secretary would not want to - sort of superintend and spend their evenings ushering. So I would do you know, things like that. And I thought it was a privilege, I mean it was just the most fascinating job...

In those days - I went to university subsequently - but in those days I'd left school at 16 and went to secretarial college which was all what all nice middle-class Jewish girls did. And a lot of people I knew were doing very boring jobs for solicitors and here was I working in the most exciting environment you could... I mean, I can't even... I'm finding it really difficult to convey to you how exciting it was because I remember it as a whole as being the most wonderful year of my life really. And yet it's difficult...

KH: Yes, it's hard to recreate that feeling isn't it, yes.

JG: It's hard to recreate, and it's certainly hard to kind of verbalise it and talk about tangible things. But things like you know... fascinating theatre, meeting interesting people, people coming and going from the theatre, trying to encourage the critics, being nice to the people from the Stratford Express, you know, it was all kind of good stuff really. And doing the... making sure the printing was correct and so on. We had a very interesting photographer, I can't remember his name. I don't know whether he would be alive, but he would have some interesting stories - the one who photographed the productions - if he's still alive. So I worked with him. And it was very hard work. And I haven't told you about the police and the Lord Chamberlain, or have you got all that from another...

KH: Oh no, that would be very interesting, do tell me about that.

JG: Well the letters were all... I wish I'd kept the letters from the Lord Chamberlain because I now can't recall... But some of the things that the Lord Chamberlain wanted out were just absolutely amazing. There were even amazing to a naïve 16 year old like me, what they would seem like. I don't know if that's an archive that's open. So we had endless correspondence, because you had to get plays approved by the Lord Chamberlain. And what the Lord Chamberlain hated more than anything was improvisation and of course there was a feeling that they wanted to improvise.

And we did a play - and I can't remember the name, it may be in the book but I've just gone blank on it - which was about working on a... people on a building site, and there was some improvisation around the conversation. And that was absolutely anathema to the Lord Chamberlain. They were really, really, really dreadful. So that's a file I wish I'd

stolen! But it's probably in the archives - it should be, I mean certainly I had a file for it when there was the correspondence...

The other thing was the actions of the police, and there was a time when a young actor was caught in some kind of compromising homosexual act – possibly those were the days when police used to watch public lavatories in order to catch people out – and they came to arrest him during the performance. And Gerry managed to sort of hold it back 'til the end. And I don't quite know what happened to the guy, but he was certainly arrested for this offence. I can't remember the details of what followed. But it was just horrendous because, you know, the idea that you come into the theatre and expect to stop a performance to arrest somebody was sort of anathema.

KH: That must have been terrible.

JG: Yes.

KH: Yes that's not...

JG: So some people went off as you know to sort of famous things and other people didn't. Do you know about the time... I mean it's probably not part of Theatre Workshop, but was certainly fascinating for me, when one summer we let the theatre to a young company? Do you know about that?

KH: No, do tell me about that.

JG: And a young unknown man called Tony Richardson came and directed a play. And it was around... it was called *The Country Wife*, it was a Restoration Comedy.

KH: Was it Wycherley?

JG: That's right. And there was one review which said... which is sort of a phrase that you never forget, which said something like 'the play displayed a new kind of bowdlerisation, it took out anything that was clean'. And the theatre was hired out and I genuinely don't remember the names, I just remember that Tony Richardson was a fascinating man, again very good looking. I was 16, you get a lot of crushes on people.

KH: [Laughs] Yes.

JG: And Tony Richardson directed it and then afterwards obviously he became famous, but I'd remembered the name and what he looked like. And it was put on by a man who was quite rich, who wanted his wife or mistress or partner - whoever it was - to star in a play. So it was a kind of a rich man's sort of thing. And that was an interesting thing, because obviously I stayed on and... I don't know what I did for them, but I was there in

that period. But that was about trying to get a bit of money as much as anything else, and giving people a holiday.

KH: Why did you eventually leave the first time?

JG: I think I left that time because... I can't remember which it was... I can't remember whether I went... My sister was in Israel, and I can't remember whether I wanted to go and see my sister and stayed there, or whether it was because I started to think that I would like to teach and I got a job in a school. I just can't remember enough about that period. So it was either that or the other. And I suspect it wasn't a job you could do forever. I think it actually was going to Israel... That's right, it was going to Israel, and when I came back from Israel – which was about 9 months or 10 months later – I went back and I think they had a vacancy and I did it. I remember less of that period, things had moved on in that year. They had begun to be famous, didn't they? In about '54, '55 things happened. And the other thing that happened in my period which I'm sure you've got from other people, was of course they went to Paris.

KH: The Paris Festival.

JG: Yes, and it was just so ironic that we were struggling to have anybody notice us in Stratford, and yet they went to Paris to be féted. And that was sort of one of the many ironies of... and the frustrations really of not being recognised.

KH: I thought it was interesting actually what you've just said about when you went back and how you felt it was different. Do you know what it was... could you kind of say what it was that made it different?

JG: Well I think there were two things. I think it was the company was better known and had started... things had started to transfer to town. I can't remember whether it... what had transferred, whether that was Fings or Oh! What a Lovely War, even The Quare Fellow, but something had transferred to town. So there was a sort of different sort of... you know, there wasn't the kind of... not quite the stockade but... at the beginning there was a sort of feeling of 'us against the world' almost. You know, 'The world should be taking notice of and they weren't, what shall we do to make the world take notice of us?'. And there was just a slight difference when the world did start to take notice. Plus the fact I was a year older, you see, so all the kind of wonder that one has at 16 is not quite the same as when you're 18. So it's probably me changing a bit as well as the company changing. And again it's really hard to be tangible about things so long ago. It was just a sort of feeling.

KH: Yes. Were there other members of the company who made a particular impression on you?

JG: Well, Howard Goorney was fiercely sort of an intellectual person who... Very cynical, I'd never met anybody kind of cynical before. He and Gerry used to have big rows about things. I don't know whether they were artistic or personal or what, but they were rows. And of course he... you know, Gerry, Howard, Camel you know had been in right from

the beginning, and so there were both strong bonds but also possibly cause for argument. So I loved it when Howard was around.

I adored George Cooper because he was just so funny, and very friendly and easy to get on with. I liked Harry Corbett a lot, I just thought he was such a fine actor because he was able to do comedy, and then when he was in *Richard II* and I couldn't imagine how good he was... he was going to be. So I kind of... I liked him a lot. I liked Avis Bunnage because she was very sort of friendly, and also one of the early ones and very experienced and interesting to talk to. And just people would come in and out. There was a Canadian called George Luscombe who I liked, who went back to Canada I think.

And there were the young ones who came in, like Stephen Dartnell and like Murray Melvyn who were kind of much nearer to my age, and so it was a slightly more sort of... different sort of friendlier kind of badinage or chat. Certainly, not being part of the creative process, I didn't have the relationships with them that they would have with each other.

KH: Sure, sure. Do you remember when Murray joined the company?

JG: Yes Murray joined the company... I don't know whether we made any money out of Murray. Knowing Gerry, we may have done! But he was being... yes we probably did, because he was being funded by the London Co-op, and because of the cooperative nature of the company... And he was just so lovely - I really, really liked him. Very friendly, very open, and very anxious to sort of develop and get on - he was a sweetie, yes, I remember him well.

KH: After you'd gone back for the brief period and things had changed a bit, you then left again didn't you?

JG: Yes, I think that's when I decided I wanted to be a teacher. And in those days you could teach totally unqualified if you intended to be a teacher. So I taught for a year in a primary school, and then in the end didn't go to teacher training course because my parents had to fill in a means test form and they refused to do it. And I taught again in Plaistow... I taught first of all in a primary school, I had a class all by myself with eight 'O' Levels behind me! I mean it's incredible now - I was just given the curriculum and got on with it. And then I taught shorthand and typing in a very rough secondary modern school, very near the theatre in Stratford - again for a year.

And during that period of course, I went to everything the Theatre Workshop did. But you see what is really interesting was though I can remember a lot of the productions that I saw in my year, I cannot remember a thing except *Oh! What a Lovely War* and maybe *The Hostage* - i.e. the famous ones - that I saw in that period. Now it's never occurred to me that I can't remember them but I can't, isn't that interesting? So those where I worked kind of... because I saw them develop and heard them talked about and perhaps knew that they were getting actors and actresses from outside or what have you. You know, there were admin-y things to do with every new show, like the programme and so on. I can remember them more, so I'm afraid that's a long way of saying I haven't got a clue!

KH: No, that's fine.

JG: I mean, I remember going and I remember always being very proud that I knew my way round the theatre. So if for any reason I wanted to go back stage and see anybody, I knew the stairs to go up and see people in. I remember doing that in fact, you know, going to say 'hello' to people but I cannot remember what I saw.

KH: What do you think it was... This is quite a general question, but what do you think it was that made Theatre Workshop so different from other things that were going on in the theatre at the time?

JG: I think the whole atmosphere. I don't think an actor or actress would have gone to Theatre Workshop because they thought it was a good career move. There had to be some sort of commitment to the kind of political philosophy of cooperative working, and to innovation and doing things differently and the excitement of working with somebody like Joan. I suspect of going to a... in those days there were loads of rep theatres and I'm sure that people more cautious and thinking more clearly about their CV would have gone to rep. So it had that sort of atmosphere. And there was a sort of pioneering spirit, you know pioneering different ways of working, pioneering working in a rough - in a working class area, because Stratford was a working class area. And I think the attempt to build up a local audience was very difficult. It was a working class and lower middle class area, Stratford, Ilford and Bow and so on. And they did build up a very loyal following, but I suspect amongst sort of middle class people like me rather than the working class people. But the audiences were small particularly at the beginning, really, really small.

KH: You mentioned political commitment, a bit earlier you mentioned a little bit about that and I was wondering, in your role as secretary, whether there was... did you ever see much communication between the Theatre Workshop and the Communist Party at all?

JG: No, no. I think there were individuals involved who were in the Communist Party. But no, it was much more about, you know they... helping to send off a telegram here or a telegram there or petition... you know a letter, the odd letter, I can't remember the details - I don't even remember, it's awful but I can't remember - what the political issues were, because I'm sure it was well before things... But they were, in the Cold War they were very much... they would be very much on the side of the Left rather than the West - East rather than West sort of general feeling. But whether there were really strong CP links I don't know.

And certainly Tom Dryburgh, who was very influential and helpful was a Labour MP. And also Janie Buchan[?] who did a lot for them. I think she lost her seat and became an MEP but I could be wrong about that. But Janie was straight Labour, so I don't think there much... it was just sort of general sort of Left.

KH: I was interested... This goes right back to the beginning of what you were saying when you first were... when you first became a volunteer. I was interested in how you'd heard about the theatre.

JG: Yes, I think I heard about it from my friend Coral. Coral lived in Stratford... Coral, who I was at school with – primary school with – and subsequently died, who did also work for them a bit. And it was she that left me - when she died - her stuff that she had, which was far more than I had. You know, she collected much more (which I passed on to the Theatre Museum). I think Coral probably heard about it, knew about it. It was probably things written about it in the local paper. And because my parents had taken me to the previous theatre, I sort of knew about it and took an interest, and was sorry when it was dark, because it's really nice to go to a theatre that's a bus ride away rather than going into town and so on. So I probably heard about it through Coral, who as I say lived in Stratford and therefore was, you know, five minutes walk from the theatre. And... but we went as a sort of gang, Heather – who's now living in Israel – Coral, who died, and me. And we... there must have been other youngsters, but we went together. And of course they were both very jealous of me when I went to work there! [Laughs]

But it was not... It was frowned upon by my parents, they were really, really didn't like it at all. But once we... in those days there weren't... Sorry, in the days that I'm talking about - in the early fifties - not everybody had a television, and we had a television and I remember... I think it was Gerry came over once and watched television for some reason and charmed them silly. So it was all right after that! Because in those days you lived at home and that was it, you know. It was a different sort of relationship.

KH: I think those are all my questions that I was going to ask you, but I don't know whether you've got anything else that you'd like to mention?

JG: I think you've covered most of the sort of... you've brought out most of the memories that I've had. I think I mentioned the excitement when Kenneth Tynan came and how we were all so careful to sort of be nice to him, and watch his reactions and then - obviously - to read The Observer. And that did make a significant difference, it was really important that he recognised the value of what Joan was doing and the... you know, the quality of the productions that the company did. So that was very important. Otherwise, I think you have covered everything, and it's been lovely to remember things that meant so much to me at the time.

KH: Yes, well it's been fascinating for me to listen to someone else's side of the story, from such a different perspective. So thank you very much for agreeing to do the interview.

JG: No, thank you.