

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Harry Greene – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Harris

20 September 2007

Actor. Amateur drama; actors; John Bury; George Cooper; critics; ensemble; Equity; lighting; Joan Littlewood; Ewan MacColl, New Theatre, Cardiff; props; productions; realism; The Red Megaphones; Red Roses for Me; rehearsal method; Royal Court Theatre; scenery; the search for a permanent home; Harry Secombe; Swedish tour; television; theatre-going; Theatre Workshop; touring; Uranium 235; wages; West End transfers.

KH: OK, this is an interview on 20th September with Harry Greene. Kate Harris is conducting the interview. Can I just begin by asking you how you came to be interested in theatre, as a boy?

HG: I was brought up in a small mining village in South Wales, a place called Rhymney. Typical of... Dylan Thomas would write about this wouldn't he - grey houses, slag tips, rain. But there's a but, because I now know how lucky I was to have been brought up in a village in the 1930's – [sings] Memories, memories – where there was a hive of artistic activity. And do you know there were only 5,000 inhabitants. So... everybody knew everybody else.

We had artists, poets, writers and musicians, and they all contributed to the wealth of the creativity there. I mean there was Hubert Gilbert, he was an RA. And he saw some talent in people like myself so he gave us free art lessons every Saturday. And I was a soloist in the choir at church, so I got choir practice with bass baritone of Rhymney Valley – Tom Morgan. Oh memories as we say, we had drama classes, but the funny thing was that the producer Abel Evans, always gave his girlfriend the lead. And then readings with the likes of the well-known poet in Wales – and internationally I think – Idris Davies, and the writer Ernest Edwards. But you know, one thing I remember with affection, and that was the winter evenings at the old church hall, learning the skills of the stage with kindly old Win Davies. And do you know what he used to give us as a treat? He'd give us hot Vimto! Every evening he'd make hot Vimto for the kids. But it was more serious than that of course: he taught us to design, to make sets and props, and it might be a cliché, but I just loved that first smell of greasepaint. Then of course, after you got a part, came rehearsals - if you got a part that is. But often you know that excitement made me feel sick. Ah memories. But then in Wales, drama was an essential part of our young lives. And of course we had no television; we had no television to distract us then.

KH: That sounds wonderful. Were you involved in drama as a boy at school as well?

HG: Involved in?

KH: In drama as a boy at school?

HG: Oh yes, yes. You see there was English teacher, Marjorie Sutton, oh what a wonderful lady! She could make Shakespeare come alive, poetry come alive with her readings. I mean, she was a mentor shall I say. Yes, we did plays, and we were studying Shakespeare - we didn't do full Shakespearian plays obviously, but we certainly did do... plays in school. And I was lucky enough to be part of the group that wanted plays and wanted drama. But school life generally was great because, well I mentioned Drama, but then I loved Art, Music, English and Sport. Now they were my passions. I mentioned Marjorie Sutton as a mentor. And there were others.

Funny, you know, Wales has a tradition of turning out teachers. It's true, you go anywhere in the country, and there are teachers in every town, village, all over the country – and abroad too. My niece, at the moment, is a teacher in Hong Kong. So it goes on and on and on. But these teachers were very powerful influences in my choice of direction. You see, academically and socially, each one of those people, played, I suppose a big part in my development. Exam results for example were pretty good, and I won a place at Cardiff College of Art. Mind you, I had to wait until after the war to take it up. I played rugby and all sports. I won various sprint medals, including the Welsh 'Victor Ludorum'... well, my dad and my mum, they were so proud!

KH: Were your parents interested in the arts as well?

HG: Very interested. Yes, at home I was very, very lucky. They were very loving parents with a love of the arts, music, poetry. They encouraged me to draw and illustrate, design and so on. My father, he played various instruments, and he entertained locally for charity. I remember you know... I accompanied him playing clappers. And the clappers were bones that were cleaned off and boiled - from Maddocks the butcher in Rhymney! And sometimes I played the tin whistle.

But then studies were interrupted of course by war service. And I was with the REME on classified tank design. You see, I had begun training actually as an engineering draughtsman at Newport Tech, straight from school. Then after the war, I was able to take up my place at Art College and Cardiff University.

KH: What was college life like for you then, once you got to Cardiff?

HG: [sings] Memories. [Laughs] Wonderful memories! It was idyllic. And of course I enjoyed studying theatre design. I did architecture and Bannister Fletcher – you see how I recall these things – Bannister Fletcher was the bible of all aspiring architects. I did illustration as well, and I worked part time for Olson and Hannon, in the Castle Arcade in Cardiff – designing and illustrating. And often they did... interestingly they did programs – theatre programs – for the local theatres, which I had a hand in obviously.

But let me tell you about the weekends. They were even better, because I got a job as a stagehand at the New Theatre in Cardiff. And when I think of the people, it was really a joy to observe their professionalism: I hadn't seen this before, only amateurs you see. Of Ivor Novello, Donald Wolfitt and then in variety Tommy Trinder and Vera Lynn - of course, she'd been right through the war, and was a great name in English Theatre - Ted Ray, one of my favourites: all great performers. There were others of course who toured after their war service. I learned lots – lots and lots.

KH: And outside of college you continued your interest in theatre as well, by becoming involved in Unity Theatre.

HG: I think I was more interested in theatre outside college than I was in studying. Yes, I joined Unity Theatre, got some good parts. That was in the... they were based in the YMCA, where I was staying actually. So that was dead easy. And then I acted in university plays, and I became art director for the Cardiff Amateur Film Society. We won a prize in the top ten, yes.

As I say, I lived at the YMCA, which was next door... This is an interesting story: the YMCA was next door to the Cory Hall, opposite Queen Street Station. And that's where a lady called Mae Jones, who was the producer at BBC radio, rehearsed a weekly radio show with Eynon Evans - a great name in Wales. And somehow (but with a lot of Welsh guile!) I sort of got in the back door and made myself useful. And isn't it funny how everybody thinks that you're somebody else's friend, you know, when that sort of thing happens. So I was an unpaid assistant for two years. A coup I felt, being able to work with Harry Secombe in 1945.

KH: That's fantastic.

HG: It was. And he was as great when he was performing as he was in, you know in ordinary life. He was a wonderful, wonderful, big, rotund, robust, healthy looking, giving – you know he was one of these people who gave. When you worked with him he gave a lot.

But then using my skills, and not a little charm, to get with the radio crew, was I thought then, 'grist to the mill'. But one thing that surprised me was that I found those intelligent people so easily taken in. And I discovered that most professionals, especially Harry Secombe and the people who worked with him, they were all flattered to be asked for advice. And of course I was a quick learner.

KH: So when did you first come across Theatre Workshop? How did your involvement with them happen?

HG: Well, after I'd left Cardiff, my first job was Art and Drama teacher at Tredegar Grammar School, which was only three miles from Rhymney where my home was – at the head of the valley. Rhymney was where mining met farming. And Tredegar was the head of another valley only three miles away. And I was Art and Drama teacher there, that was my first job. But I first met Joan Littlewood in the Rhymney Church Hall, and that was in 1950. You see, the company were touring South Wales. And I'd actually

taken my class to see their production of Uranium 235. And we'd never seen anything like it of course! It's hard to describe the excitement. We were all enthralled. And I asked the kids to stay behind afterwards to help load their lorry, because they were on one night stands.

But we were in this big hall, the audience had gone, and my producer was - the amateur producer - was talking with Joan Littlewood. And suddenly this voice - a Welsh voice - boomed out round the hall, 'He's your man, Miss Littlewood. Harry Greene can do all that. Just ask him!'. That was him, the grocer and comic, Abel Evans, selling his protégé to the scion of British stage - well, imagine!

What she wanted actually was a young Welshman to play Shakespeare's Owen Glendower, and Taffy in Ewan MacColl's Paradise Street. But here was the crux, the same actor had to be able to design, construct sets - often on the pavements she said - drive the lorry and stage-manage the shows. And guess what, before the company had trundled off, I'd signed for a month's trial. And of course the next day when I gave my notice in to the headmaster, I got a [right riposte]: 'You'll live to regret it Greene. Foolishness!' Little did I know though that my month's probation was to turn into five extraordinary years!

KH: That's extraordinary. What were your first impressions when you first joined the company?

HG: Well before I went I knew that I was in for something very exciting. Oh incidentally we'd celebrated that night - the night after I'd agreed to go with them. And I invited all my friends, and the teaching staff, and all local people. And one of them said, 'Harry, this is an epiphany. This will change your life forever!'. Because he'd been at the show that night, and he'd seen what was going on.

But you asked the question, what was it like when I first joined the company? Well it was awful, in a word. Because when I got to Manchester, on the train, I asked for 177a Oxford Road. And eventually, after a long walk from the station, I got down to this main highway, Oxford Road, and saw this secondhand car showroom - 177 Oxford Road. I had to go round the side to the door, where a sign said, 177a Oxford Road. And I looked up, it was grim! When I got inside it was different of course - there was a kitchen to the right, and from this emanated the sounds of singing and jollity, and the smell of cooking. John Bury was cooking a stew, it was great. But my... when I was shown around, my studio-room and workshop was, however, in a cold windowless cellar. But I was young, I was ambitious, perhaps foolish.

Immediately though I was thrown into the TW way of life - often working a full 20 hours a day. It was intense Kate. The training; voice, movement, improvisation, learning skills, developing my talents, really enjoying every challenge. And they threw a lot at me. The very first week I had to make, for a street scene a lamp - a Victorian lamp - which I did. I made this out of ply - cut strips of ply - stuck it all together. Used plasticine, I remember, to make it look old, and then fixed in a light fitting, so that Camel could use whatever he wanted in the way of gel and so on, for colouring. And they were... well I think this sold me to them.

But I loved the life you see, despite being often hungry, cold and tired. It was, as I say, artistically very satisfying. You know it's funny really thinking back... But I didn't mind - no home comforts any more: from £20 a week and a teacher's life of relative ease, to this. And in the first couple of weeks, £2 a week dole money. When I told a friend of

mine that I was sleeping on a palliasse in a room with five others, you can imagine his reaction - I won't repeat what he said, it's not printable!

But I was in this company of skilled people: Harry Corbett, George Cooper, Joby Blanshard, Barbara Young, Bill Ormond, Gerry and Joan, John Bury. Oh, and it goes on and on, and there was a wit and wisdom everywhere! But of course what I haven't mentioned is the inspirational motivator – Joan Littlewood. So you see surroundings, building, didn't really matter. I found that we actors/artists, we enjoyed working and playing together.

And a thought just strikes me, there was a trust that grew up from this teamwork. I mean it grew out of this teamwork. And that became the essence of Joan's approach to theatre work, to production, to acting. And it took her – now I quote her words – it took her years of training the same group to produce, what she called, 'a theatrical synthesis'. That's what she called it. And the other thing she said was, there was never to be compromise.

KH: You've mentioned to me in the past on the phone and things, about Ewan MacColl and the Red Megaphones.

HG: Yes.

KH: Did you feel that had much of an impact on what you were doing with Theatre Workshop?

HG: Yes. Yes. The Red Megaphones of course, that was the beginning of Theatre Workshop's history. But that was in the thirties. And then right throughout the forties this ambitious – which I've just talked about – this ambitious production style, that emerged - or began to emerge – during the forties. It was a political group really, led by Ewan MacColl and Joan, and they evolved this sort of nucleus of an idea. But then again, through the fifties, I mean at the beginning of the fifties, we'd begun to finesse that style and develop it somewhat.

Interestingly - with Joan's help you know - I also developed a realistic approach to staging. When I mentioned Uranium 235 and the black velvet drape surround, that gave a setting for the public to be involved, not just in listening or communicating, but in their imagination as well, because they imagined a scene. If it was a scene of scientists, highlighted [by lighting] then as the scientist was talking – Max [Niels] Bohr or one of those people, he was then either in his laboratory or declaiming something to a meeting of scientists in a hall – the imagination had to be brought in. However, now Joan wanted, not just realism on the stage, but she wanted realism in settings.

And the first one that I did was Paradise Street, yes, and that was in 1953 [1951]. So we were developing this idea of what Ewan and Joan had done with the Red Megaphones. Mind, they often had to work on a play on – flat top, flat deck lorries. I've seen pictures of them, often Ewan gave us talks on all that. But this staging that I was talking about, I introduced a light aggregate cement coating to the sets in street scenes.

So [at] Theatre Royal, Stratford, great vast stage, the back wall of the stage was brickwork. Nobody had ever used it. So I said to Joan... Joan give me a little sketch,

which I've still got: I'll show you later, my notebooks, and her little sketches of things in the notebook.

Harry's drawing of Richard II set

Harry's drawing of reusable set blocks

Anyway, she said [as she sketched] – 'these are the acting areas, those are lighting areas, now I want a set.' So for this particular play, all I did was one flat, as we call it, in perspective. From the proscenium arch, you had this one flat at an angle from the proscenium arch, at about 30 degrees back to the back wall. So you saw part of the back wall, but this flat was probably about 15 feet high at the proscenium arch end, and going back to about 10 feet. Built, as it were in perspective, which gave the effect from the stalls, or from the auditorium, that you were looking at a long street. And then I cut into the flat doorways – all in perspective – and one window each. And then we laid the flat on stage, painted it with what was then called Unibond, which is a very strong adhesive, and then sprinkled sand on it, and then aggregate – like pebbles. So we created what looked like a real wall. That was allowed to dry over night, and propped up and then braces on the back. And it looked, with the lighting on it, like a real street, similar to the back wall of the theatre. And with Camel's lighting...[wow]! Camel as we called him - John Bury, you might have heard him being called Camel?

KH: Yes, a few people have said that to me.

HG: Oh yes. Then with his clever lighting – oh, we used the lamp that I'd made in Manchester incidentally, in the street scene. There's a photograph of that street scene with my lamp in it, and with the set. And immediately we began to get people interested. People like Harold Hobson and so on, critics who came, right from the beginning. They were enamoured of it, but they couldn't help us to get damned audiences, you know! We weren't getting what Joan had planned all her life. You know, working class people, ordinary people, who didn't have a chance to go to the theatre... or the theatre wasn't taken them, or it wasn't presented in an acceptable way to them. But we were getting the bourgeoisie I suppose. Anyway, they were appreciative and there were reviews of ... not just the play but of my sets that I began to get. And this was quite exciting.

Another thing I did - a story about Epping Forest, I'll tell you later. Went to Epping Forest to get trees, dug up the roots – we were lucky we weren't caught! - but one particular time we were, and I'll tell you later about that.

KH: OK.

HG: Anyway, yes we dug up these trees, and then got some barrels from the local brewery, and filled them with earth, and put the trees in with the roots and watered them everyday, so we had live trees for the whole of a particular production.

KH: How amazing!

HG: So Red Roses for Me for example, if you've seen any photographs of it, you'll see when the photographs were taken first day, or forty days later, the trees were beautifully in leaf right throughout. And then I hid the barrels behind low walls, which I designed and built and constructed. So I worked not only closely with Joan - who did little sketches first of all - also with John Bury. And then, funnily enough Joan... Joan knew art; she'd studied art as you probably know, she exploited her knowledge of art by referring to classical paintings for costumes and ideas for stage settings.

Funny you know, I used to stare at this funny, old, little lady, clamping around sometimes in something like bedroom slippers, and I wondered at this gifted woman. And I wondered to myself often, 'why the hell aren't you inspired to dress better?!'. [Laughter] I thought to myself, 'you look like a bag woman, or like an old tramp with that stupid, sailor's battered cap on!'. But you see, it didn't matter, because often she'd wear that comic hat, and waddle in and say, 'Hey, ho, my hearties.' and come in as a character - she was a comic, she really was a comic at heart.

KH: You mentioned working alongside John Bury, did you have any other help backstage?

HG: No, no, no. No, a short answer to that is no! Everybody, you see, did two or three jobs. And they were - or became - experts. Can you imagine Harry Corbett coming as a prop boy? You know, Steptoe guy. He was a prop boy. And George Cooper assisted John Bury incidentally with lighting. And the lovely Frank Elliott - a very, very clever actor - he assisted me on design and the practical side of things. And then there was the lovely Barbara Young - she's on television a lot isn't she, lately, Barbara Young. And Margaret Bury who started E15 Theatre. They were great at props, acquisitions, and arranging hospitality for us when we were on tour. And then Howard Goorney, he assisted Gerry in the office work and administration. Shirley Jones - the late Shirley Jones now - Mrs George Cooper, a wonderful designer... she trained as a designer, and in art. And Josephine, Josephine Wilkinson - I still see her. They did wonders in the wardrobe department. And then the wonderful David Scase, you know that great name at the Library Theatre, Manchester. I assisted him as well. But then everybody you see, because it was a group theatre, everybody appeared on stage. All directed by Joan, who devised, wrote, edited and in inverted commas, 'produced'. That was it. She was the boss! [Laughs]

KH: Could I just ask what Ewan MacColl's role was in the company, because he obviously wrote quite a few of the plays?

HG: Oh he acted as well. Oh yes... First of all he was the inspiration [for Joan]... Ewan was already doing plays, Red Megaphones, writing, playing in them, and was very, very active... he was active in politics. And very, very strong. He was a party member, as Joan became. And he was the catalyst, as one should say, for everything that happened after they met. Because Joan met Ewan of course in 1934... I don't know whether it was Stockton or Manchester, one of those areas any way. And then they worked together, she was working in radio as well, in Manchester. Ewan and she set up... after the war they set up, in 1945 [Theatre Workshop] - oh no, it was before that, it was about 1943/44, because people were coming back from the war, some with injuries and so on. Some hadn't been... Anyway they started the company - Theatre Workshop Company -

and began then in the late forties to use the knowledge that they had, and the stories that they had devised, to portray ordinary human beings in theatrical terms, onstage, doing what ordinary people were doing, but also that they could aspire to – both artistically and politically. I think that sums it up.

KH: That's great, yes. That's really interesting.

HG: And then of course that went on to become the company that toured in South Wales, when I met them, when I first saw them in 1950.

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KH: To come back to your experiences, after you'd done the tour in Sweden – which was obviously a fantastic experience – when you came back was it quite difficult to kind of come back to the audiences in the UK?

HG: Well yes. There was no money. That was the most important thing, because one needed to feed oneself and so on. And keep the company going. You're talking about Manchester now?

KH: Yes, when you came back after Sweden.

HG: Oh yes, yes. Well we went back to Manchester poor of course, then we were preparing for a tour. We were actually doing little local tours to keep us going. We were preparing for this tour of the North East and Scotland. But in the house, it was jolly. And Joan was a great, great motivator. Gerry was a great big, you know, six foot two, lumbering sort of... like a great big bear. And when he hugged you, you really felt it! But he meant it. [sings] 'So you felt it, he meant, it was great...' [Laughs] You can make a song about him, about her. They were a great couple.

Anyway, Joan used to post these rotas in the narrow passageway of 177A Oxford Road, so that members free from her schedule for a short while could go out and shop, and then do the cooking. And they'd shop with a small sum from Gerry. But you know, when I got there I was really staggered, because there was no subsidy, there were no savings. So we had to depend on money taken at the box office – that's a laugh, it was the chair at the door of the church hall or the miners' institute! - but anyway, it was pooled, and that was used for all essentials.

Mind, as a set designer and constructor, there was often nothing left for paint or nails, so I had to go and cadge. Now, living like this could have been a frightening prospect. But I found out you see, when you talk to people, and you're living with them, you found out that your feelings were the same as most of those other recruits, as it were. Then you discovered people like Joby Blanshard who'd lived... they'd travelled... Harry Corbett, had been in the Navy. George Cooper had been in the army in India, and we'd all sort of... we'd lived. So guess what, we were tactically trained. We were expert Kate, at getting whatever was needed to survive. I'd better leave it at that, eh? [Laughter]

KH: There was an instant wasn't there, when you were going up to Glasgow, when you were driving the lorry, which I wondered if you could maybe tell me a little bit about?

HG: Oh yes. I'll tell you about that. I told you about the tough life, but then – and this was in 1951 remember – Joan and Gerry weren't coming with us on this tour. Gerry wasn't well and had to go into hospital. They weren't coming with us on this tour of Scotland. And there was nobody else but me. I had a driving licence, but not for a lorry. So I had to take a driving test. And they persuaded me to pass the driving test and take the company and seven tons of equipment on this tour. And I had... I think it was two days, going round the side streets with Gerry in the lorry. Two days before I had to take the test! Anyway we did it, and I got through it. And then the long drive to Glasgow. I knew then what I was in for when we started the tour. But on arrival at Glasgow I got a bit of a shock. George and I were going to be staying with Norman Buchan - you know, became an MP. And he had a message from Gerry. Gerry had forgotten to tell me that the push-and-pull rod – that's the column, the driving column, with a ball and socket joint at the end that moves the front wheel, to guide the lorry, or any vehicle - he told Norman to tell me that I ought to get the push-and-pull rod repaired. He also told Norman that it wasn't serious. But that damned rod held the steering together.

KH: Oh no!

HG: Yes, and it was deadly serious. Now all the company – or God bless them, the few that are left, like George and Jean and people like this – they'll testify to all this that I'm telling you. So after unloading at the miner's hall in Stoneyburn, I was driving everybody, everybody in the back of an empty lorry, I was driving them down for fish and chips down to Bathgate. And this Bathgate was on the Edinburgh - or just off - the main Edinburgh - Glasgow highway, the road, the main road. On that road, yes, it failed.

KH: Oh gosh!

HG: Yes, yes. So I lost control of the lorry. I had no power over the steering.

KH: That must have been terrifying.

HG: I could not steer. Well it was terrifying, but it strange how calmness takes over one. It is very strange. I saw these... in an instant I saw these great iron railings and the embankment: forty feet down was the main Glasgow - Edinburgh railway. I put my foot onto the brake, I eased down, and it drew the lorry very, very gently over on to the pavement. I could see what was going to happen. So with a gentle but very firm movement, I eased down. Now, those said iron railings, to my left, separated us from the embankment and the main line. From forty miles an hour, to the front wheels hanging over the railway line took seconds. Those railings certainly prevented the demise of the Theatre Workshop Company – now what a thought is that?

Harry's drawing of the incident

KH: That sounds absolutely horrendous.

HG: Yes, yes, George now, when we talk about it – when we meet – he actually does a little shudder, because fourteen of our friends were in the back. As we drove into the railings, obviously they'd bent over, and the front wheels were hanging over that embankment. But the railings held – big six foot, wrought iron railings. I'll bet a pound they're still there.

KH: They must have been strong railings!

HG: British engineering, from Scunthorpe. Anyway that night, that night, it was strange how everybody was calm. Howard Goorney acted with a broken arm. I remember Barbara Young was traumatized somewhat, because she was sitting near the tail board which was up of course. But the back was open, and they were singing. Ewan MacColl was thrown to the front and had bruising on the side of his face. Others had cuts – lots of them with cuts on their foreheads – and two had damaged elbows. The first thing we said was that it was despicable to send us out in an unsafe vehicle. But then, paradoxically the story started as a joke that it was planned to get insurance to start a new company. But Kate, it was horrendous - as you say, horrendous.

KH: So what happened after this terrible incident, which miraculously you all got through?

HG: Well yes, miraculously we got through. And well it was a company built on enterprise, everyone was stoic. You know all behaved stoically. We got the lorry repaired and then we continued on the tour. But then the most dire thing of course, we got snow. Yes, black ice on the roads, cold digs, freezing church halls and as all miners' smoked, so we got smoky miners' institutes.

KH: Oh dear, how absolutely terrible.

HG: But you see we were young, but it was horrible. Imagine breathing all that horrid...ugh! It reminded me of my youth when you went to a cinema, it was unknown then that there was a scare, you know! I mean, in the early thirties everybody... I mean, most people smoked, following the film stars. That was our evening entertainment, going to the cinema, and sitting in a smoky atmosphere. And the projection light, you know, lighting up through the smoke-filled hall or cinema.

Anyway... oh yes, digs. Barbara and... who did I say was...? Oh Maggie – Maggie Bury – Barbara and Maggie Bury had gone ahead and got digs for us, on this tour. And I usually shared with George Cooper, because you usually tried to get two into the same place. And George and I - God we were devils! We had great fun together. George, he'd take anything, he'd take that pen in front of you there, and he'd use it like a microphone and start doing a sort of BBC voice, you know this sort of thing. Or he'd take a walking

stick and become somebody in a film, with a sabre, he was great. Hey, we had some gruesome experiences too – like dog-hair soup for supper.

KH: Oh no, that's awful.

HG: Oh yes, we got to one place, we got in there late at night, we'd been given the key. They'd all gone to bed, and there was this bowl of soup on the... and it was a polished black, leaded grate, you know, with a little oven on the side, and a little tiny fire. And there, standing on top of the oven was this bowl of soup. We ladled it out in these two bowls, and George said, 'I'm not eating this dog-haired soup'. True! And then in the morning, discovering that we'd spent the night in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Delicate, the undertaker. And we were in the next room to one that had a full coffin. George and I, we roared. And then other times, we had to sleep in our raincoats because beds were damp.

But you see you must understand that we were truly a group theatre. Every one helped each other. You know, if you were down you were helped to raise your spirits. And then of course in every town we were acclaimed, so that lifted our spirits as well. And we truly believed that one day we'd live and work together, without all this suffering and struggling. So on we went despite my misgivings.

KH: When you say 'misgivings', what were your misgivings?

HG: Ah, there were quite a few really. Well, having seen what happened in Sweden when all this publicity and marketing went on for their plays. We had nothing like that, there was no advance publicity. And the other misgiving was that Joan always said that we have to get to that section of the... these were her words, and I've got them here – that 'we have to get to that section of the community who have little opportunity of seeing plays of artistic merit and significance'. That, you see, was one of them, and a dream of a permanent theatre base, which we often talked about. I mean that was another misgiving. ... it was a company of clever people, artistically clever people, of talented people and we ought to be in a base. And that was tough for me too. So there was enough to have misgivings about.

KH: Did everybody want a permanent base?

HG: Everybody. Who wants to tour? If you had a permanent base at least you were going to build an audience. And we all believed that we should try. Ewan was all for this, he tried... we tried to get an old church in Glasgow. I went to various other places around the surrounding area to find places... So yes, we were aiming sometime for that. It was a shame, actually, that at the time we could not be in a permanent base. I remember Barbara Young saying at the time, 'Oh God for somewhere where we could have... where I would have a dressing room with washing facilities, and not have to change in a miners' institute lavatory, or a church hall where everybody comes in!' with no changing rooms and so on and it was cold. [We never had changing rooms and it was always cold] It wasn't fair on the company, it wasn't fair on Joan - Joan would loved to have had a base. Gerry had problems obviously because he was... it was his

responsibility to raise cash all the time. We often thought that his father was one of the benefactors. In fact, I know that to be true, because I got quite close to Gerry, and helped him set up when we did get a permanent base.

KH: Do you think a young company today could cope with the kind of conditions that you had to work in?

HG: I wouldn't have said so. Knowing today that kids... for young people, teenagers, students in their early twenties, there's too much technology for a start. And they're governed by technology aren't they? They design now through technology. So no, I think that it would be difficult.

I think for anyone today to comprehend what Theatre Workshop was, and why we then chose to put up with such hardships, and for so long, it would be impossible for them to comprehend, or to know about. But we were happy. We were happy to be alive for goodness sake! You know, we'd come back from the war, lots of us. And it wasn't material rights that concerned us, but as Ewan said, it was human rights. Dedicated, willing to work – and another thing: we worked in order that every penny was ploughed back into the company, for the benefit of all the company. That was... well Joan and Ewan's philosophy, but it was our philosophy too. And that's what kept all of us and Theatre Workshop, going and alive.

But it was fun as well. It was fun. There was a feeling of, a great feeling of being part of a family, with Joan as the mother hen, shall I say. We enjoyed each other's company. Obviously you know, there were foibles, people had their own thoughts, and sometimes people were tetchy and that sort of thing. But there was a feeling of trust, and camaraderie that developed right from the start. And that trust and camaraderie takes me back to the 1920s, as a little boy playing with pals in our street in South Wales. Enjoying that... in kids you see it's a true spirit isn't it, of trust and familiarity. God we hated going to bed, and we looked forward to each new day, and new goals with our pals. And so it was for me at Theatre Workshop in the early 1950s, that's how it was. That's how I felt it.

KH: That's wonderful to have memories like that. And so many other people that I've talked to from the company who remember being there then have those sort of memories. So it's just a testament to the work that you did. What was the next big development for you in Theatre Workshop's history?

HG: What, for me personally or for the company?

KH: Well, either.

HG: Well the biggest development of course was the move to Theatre Royal, Stratford East, in London.

Harry's drawing of the theatre

As I said earlier, during '51 and '52 Gerry and Ewan had sent me round to various places to view, because I'd studied architecture and building and so on, and design. They said if I saw something that could be adapted for use as a theatre then obviously I'd be the person to send. And I did go to Kelvinside... I went to... all around Edinburgh. Went to Crewe - saw two places in Crewe - down to Liverpool. But they were all abortive - all those attempts to find somewhere were quite abortive. When I came back I always came back with a newspaper cutting. I'd be away for two or three days and I always went - because I learned this from people like Harry Secombe in Cardiff, and the other people that I met there - they always wanted to know who the local reporters were, and how to get into the press, and how to get some sort of coverage. You know, in the Evening Echo for example, or the Western Mail - Harry Secombe always got publicity for the shows, or he'd send me to talk to someone and say, 'This is the story, tell them this or tell them that'. So I always contacted local papers wherever I went. First thing I did, I'd phone the local paper and said, 'I'm here looking for a place. And there's no theatre here, how would you like...?', 'Oh, I'll meet you, talk to you. Yes, let's get a story.'. And I always got stories - coverage. So they loved that.

Anyway, Gerry said, 'Right, you and I are going to drive down to London!'. I said, 'Oh God, another abortive attempt.'. But anyway, we drove through the night, shared the driving, and we got to this place, Stratford East, in the early hours. A mad driver was Gerry - he was a mad driver. I remember coming down on the A1, pouring with rain, and I looked at the speedometer and it was over 90. And we were actually gliding on top of this water. There's a word for it, I can't think of it now [aquaplaning]. But mad - I thought we'd never reach there. Anyway, when I took over it quietened down a bit.

When we got there, and then sat... we were cold and shivering in the old jalopy of Gerry's, outside the theatre until... there was a café in Angel Lane called Café Angel - the Angel Café [opened]. We got to know them very well later - but that's another story. Anyway I sat in the car while. Gerry went round for sandwiches - bacon sandwiches. And then this agent guy came with the key. I was thrilled to be able to say 'Right' - I was the first inside Theatre Royal, Stratford.

KH: That's quite an amazing story.

HG: It was, oh yes, first inside. There was a but. And again, as I said previously, there's a big but. This was a bigger 'but', even! I'll never forget that scene of total neglect, utter, utter neglect. And the stench of urine, sorry, but it was foul. Broken seats, the backs hanging down, holes in the auditorium floor, peeling paint everywhere, wallpaper hanging down.

Now, Gerry was still out getting the sandwiches. And because I'd studied engineering and architecture, I was able to do a nifty sort of survey as I was going round with this agent guy, with Gerry out of the way. So I was making notes - leaks in the roof, especially over the stage...

KH: Oh dear.

HG: Yes, it had pools on the stage. And a terrific rake on the stage, I thought was going to be a bit of a problem but it wasn't. And I found a crack in the proscenium arch, I later discovered it was cosmetic, but it looked bad! Worn steps coming down from the

dressing rooms, down onto the stage – worn stone steps, smooth like glass and worn – can you imagine trying to do quick changes?

KH: It's a disaster waiting to happen.

HG: Terrible for the actors and actresses. And then you know the fly ropes on the side, you know, tied off - they're all for flying heavy flats and so on. They were... most of them were worn - they were down to sort of the thickness of my finger, where they should have been the thickness of my wrist! I could go on and on. But – this is the big but – the most dangerous of all was the worn lifting gear that I found on that fire curtain which – it was iron – must have weighed half a tonne. That was the thing that worried me most.

KH: So you'd kind of encountered all these potentially disastrous things, what was Gerry's reaction when you told him what you'd found out?

HG: He was aghast, poor old Gerry, aghast. And then can you imagine me relating all these things to him, sitting eating our sandwiches in that smelly, smelly bar? There were empty beer casks – empty beer casks! Can you imagine the foul smell from stale beer, and then stale food?

KH: That's horrible.

HG: And you know how carpets, when they get wet, they get sticky and your feet stick to them, especially if you're wearing sneakers or rubber soled shoes. Butt ends strewn and stuck into this sticky carpet, all over the bar [area]. It was quite sad really to see this great big bear of a man, well subdued really. And he turned to me, he put his hand on my shoulder, he said, 'Thanks for coming Harry, let's go back, we can't make this our home.'

But you see, I was not daunted. And I said, 'Gerry, sit back down.' 'No, no.' 'Gerry please, sit back down, just listen, and once you've listened if you still want to go fine, but listen.'. Now I gave him then the full results of my survey. Then I said the company could... because they're all good at [jobs], they have initiative, all of them, they're all good with their hands, and under my supervision we could all do the repairs and paint the place. What he didn't know, and Kate, what I haven't told you is, I had had a big ace up my sleeve – and this is what turned the tables. My favourite Uncle Bill in Croydon had two DIY stores – Stone Bros in Lower Church Street, Croydon. From the 1930s, right through until the late sixties, well known, my favourite... I used to go in [the] holidays and stay there and help behind the counter. So it taught me a lot. He had a workshop where he made things – stools and so on – and he had a lathe that he worked.

Anyway I told Gerry about my favourite uncle. And then I had to persuade him that I could get all the materials we needed for free, and have them delivered, and borrow the 200 quid for ten weeks rent that we had to put down as a deposit - £20 a week. Now he said, 'I'll listen, yes, I'm listening.' But he said, 'If we fail here we're far from what was our base, either in Manchester or in Glasgow.' - because we'd been living in a place in Glasgow at Kelvinside, somebody else might have told you about that. So I said, 'Gerry

have we got time, time's on our side, let's stroll around Stratford, let's talk to people.' So we strolled around, talked to people. And well, he and I were very good at just stopping and chatting you know. And he got the idea that people [wanted theatre]... now, we knew that Jane had been stripping off twice a night, weekly, the month before we arrived, but it had closed; it had been dark for the month. So people were sad, they told us... 'Oh yes, what are you going to put on first?' 'Oh Twelfth Night, if we come.' Because we were doing Twelfth Night you see on tour. So, 'Oh, that sounds good.' And he got enthused. And then we went back to May's Café, and we met May and Bert – the most delightful Cockney couple, endearing. And they were charm itself. They actually gave us then a lunch for free.

KH: Oh how nice.

HG: Yes. And they said 'Please come back, open up the theatre'. Of course it brought patronage to their café as well, it was worth their while. But ... that wasn't... there was no ploy there as it were, they were really... which everybody learned later on ... wonderful people. Anyway, it took up 'til – lunchtime – for me to convince Gerry. And that week I did get a gift of money from a left sympathizer, and I did get the building materials from dear Uncle Bill. Now Kate, the rest is history. Members hitching down, or riding with gear in lorries.

KH: It's almost like it was meant to be, with you getting the left sympathizer's donation, and then your Uncle Bill's help, that's fantastic.

HG: It was incredible, it was incredible, yes.

KH: You mentioned earlier, one of the things that kind of convinced you that you'd be able to do it, was the fact that there was so much initiative amongst the members of the company. I wondered if you could maybe say a little bit about how that might have fed into your work, in the early days, of Stratford East.

HG: In the early days, oh yes. Well not just I, but we all learned to turn any situation to the company's advantage. I personally, as designer and stage manager – and this is harking back to my Unity days in Cardiff when, remember when I told you about 'grist to the mill'?

KH: Yes.

HG: Well, that raised its head again. I could say that that became my euphemism for nicking trees from Epping Forest for Treasure Island, or blagging money from a left sympathizer to pay wages. You know, Joan was such a rogue. She was very clever. She flattered me. Now I look back, she called me her 'renaissance man'. And I think that was a flattering phrase to get me to do the impossible. But you see, we all did the impossible. I mean we all had a wide range of interests, and our own ways of working. I, as a designer, craftsman and so on, could make things, make most things. For the first play

for example, Twelfth Night, I made most of the staging for that, helped by various other people. Gerry was good with his hands too.

But you see it was Joan who was the persuasive one, no doubt about that at all. And she was the one who got Karl Woods – another ex-miner from Newcastle – she got Karl and I to go into Epping Forest for trees. And Karl and I, guess what, spent a night in the local jail after being prevailed upon by that devious so-and-so, Joan Littlewood, to go at night with tiny torches and hand saws, and an axe, to Epping Forest to nick those trees. Of course cops came, bells rang, clanked, we were surrounded, and in no time at all we were in clink.

KH: That must have been very uncomfortable.

HG: It was awful, it was awful. Of course, once you're there you don't know what's happening. You're not told anything. But then Gerry came next morning got us out, and once again the story went round that she'd tipped off the police to get publicity. Oh yes! The company, they were also, I recall, furious, especially George, my pal. And George demanded a company meeting: 'Why should we be, you know in clink, in jail because of this?'. But the company meeting got nowhere. But I suppose I can be thankful that Joan praised me – you asked about initiative – she praised my initiative. Nothing more – just praised my initiative.

KH: Oh well, that was something I suppose! When you made the move to Stratford East, a few other people who had been with you in Manchester didn't make that transition, and I just wondered, once you'd arrived, did you start to realise Joan's dream of a group theatre?

HG: When you say some of them didn't...

KH: People like David Scase and Rosalie Williams, they didn't move down to Stratford East, did they?

HG: Oh yes. No, that wasn't because of... that was simply because of the move. They already had a house in Manchester. Rosalie was one of the leading players, a beautiful lady, a wonderful actress. David, very, very clever, he'd been a sound technician with BBC, and that's where Joan met him when she was doing BBC radio up there. Very, very clever stage director. No they came [corrected by interviewee: stayed] because they were starting a family, and they couldn't move down, reluctantly. But then they got work with Library Theatre. And interesting couple of stories there too.

No, David would never be out of work, he was too clever for that. And his... people of his ilk were far too professional and had high professional standards, not to be in work, in either radio or film or theatre. There wasn't much television then of course, and there wasn't the Granada studios then. No, but we kept in touch. And in fact he recommended me for a job... he went from there to Arena Theatre, running John English's company from Birmingham. And then when I left Theatre Workshop, he recommended me as stage director. And I got a job with John... so we were still...

KH: You were still in touch with them.

HG: ...very much in touch, and very much together. Yes, and Marjie, my wife, went up to Manchester and worked with Rosalie in television later on. So we were very, very close.

But you see in Stratford, the people who did come, we were all growing stronger together, and I use the word ensemble. Well we were evolving as this very good, strong, ensemble as a group. We were beginning to feel a genuine sort of affinity, each with each other. And, as I mentioned before, this feeling of mutual trust, and that was in rehearsing, training, reading, playing, you name it. And then of course I had to trust people even more, because they were helping me renovate the building.

But it was great: when my Uncle Bill sent a van with building materials, we often burned the midnight oil. But we didn't mind you see, because Gerry was a great one, with this great big pot of tea and mugs – builders mugs we called them, because they were so big. So whenever my Uncle Bill sent this van around with the stuff, we always worked through the night. But this tea used to give us a terrific lift, and people used to ask for more. We learned later that the villainous sod always laced the tea with Benzedrine. Can you imagine?

KH: Well I guess that's why you kept going for so long!

HG: Kept going! Kate, that's why my first night as Feste the clown in Twelfth Night was so enjoyable! Especially... oh yes I must tell you, sweets were thrown from the gods, as I sang [sings] 'With a hey ho, the wind and the rain.' Mind, as I mentioned before, Jane had been stripping there twice a night! [Laughs] So Joan's opening gambit of Twelfth Night really must have puzzled those guys – in fact all the locals. But as for the theatre developing as a successful popular theatre, I still had misgivings. You see we were playing this middleclass group. And there were worries about principles with some people. And even in the best run companies, there were – dare I say it – dangers and hazards. And well, one experience did leave a lasting impression on me.

KH: Is it something that you feel comfortable talking about?

HG: I suppose I could tell you about it, yes. It's known to everybody. Again, there was neglect somewhere. And it could have resulted in some nasty consequences. You know we all have these moments in our life when our equilibrium – that's the word – is sort of jolted. And I remember a performance, it's imbedded in my memory – November 1953 – George Cooper and I were on stage in *The Alchemist*. And he was chained to a huge prop chair which I'd made, a very heavy chair. And that was downstage under - right underneath – the proscenium arch.

And as George was talking, saying his lines, I suddenly heard a deafening roar of machinery. It filled the theatre. And everybody stopped, George stopped and looked. And there was a gasp from the side of stage, and certainly from the auditorium. And I knew instantly that the ratchet and gear mechanism had failed on that heavy iron fire curtain – do you remember I told you about it? Well George was in direct line of that

half a tonne of falling ironwork – absolutely on the line of the proscenium arch, underneath that fire curtain.

I pulled the chair instinctively back, with George trapped in it, chained into it. Pulled it onto its back, as the iron frame thudded – because it had no control, no counterbalance – thudded into the stage. I actually swore. Oh God I felt so furious, so frustrated. Do you know what, I said then 'What if?', and I still say to myself this day, 'What if?'.

KH: That must have been a terrible experience.

HG: It was.

KH: Just in that moment.

HG: It was. What was George to do or say? I was in charge of the machinery and the upkeep of stuff, you know. And I'd reported this to Gerry. And a local mechanic had actually come in to repair that lifting gear. I'd reported to Gerry and to the fire officer – who came in once a week – I was duty bound to do that, I could lose my job otherwise. You know, I was duty bound to do it. And I still wonder to this day, was it really fixed, you know. I suppose I should have checked myself. And that's why I feel guilty, even to this day. There were mixed feelings that night I can tell you. And George, he didn't know whether to thump me or hug me. I think he did both. Anyway, today, 54 years later we are still pals, and we often meet for a meal and a booming ho! ho! ho! – George's famous hearty laugh. [Laughter]

KH: I think anybody who's met George will remember his laugh.

HG: Everybody.

KH: It's so wonderful when he talks and just...

HG: Everybody, wonderful man. Has never changed, never has a harsh word.

KH: Lots of writers and academics talk about Joan as a sort of genius, and I wondered what your views were on her as a director.

HG: Is there such a thing as a genius?

KH: Well that's under debate I guess.

HG: It certainly is. It's been debated for aeons, yes. But yes, she has been called a genius, she been called a director of distinction. Yes, and that's been... we've read that

in books, magazines, articles. And over the last twenty years we've read even more about her genius.

But, well, you asked me earlier on if I could talk about some things, and some things are personal and close to one. But I think that sometimes these works – writers works – sometimes, you know, talking of Joan as glorifying her, some times the work of idolatrous writers, who represent her productions in their sort of... well yes, ideal forms, rather than as they were, as we knew them. I think you see... I think that they miss one essential, they were not there at the beginning, and let me explain about that.

In those formative years Joan's experimentation and the shaping of her, and of our ideas as well, began to determine the future style of the company's productions. We talked about Ewan and Joan starting with Red Megaphones, and developing the style, and then going on and finessing it. You see, only we had full knowledge of what went on during the always closed rehearsals, and always secret company meetings – where by the way, her language was always colourful and, for me and Marjie hideously crude at times. But at those meetings she encouraged us to join her sometimes in seeing current West End plays, because in the 1950's Equity members – did you know this? – they could go in free?

KH: I didn't know that at all.

HG: Oh yes, in theatres, and yes the pantomime, we had regular visits every week to go. I mean, George, you couldn't keep George away from the... what's the big one...? Palladium. We saw all the big stars you know, Johnnie Ray and all those great people from America... and then in the other theatres of course we saw Brian Rix – always dropping his trousers. We saw Gielgud at the Queen's, declaiming, you know - not real theatre really, as we knew it. Oh, Michael Redgrave, always camping it up, and always Michael Redgrave. And then John Neville, he was at the Old... yes, he was at the Old Vic wasn't he – always strident, we always thought. And all being stars, with no rapport with fellow actors. We used to talk about that, and we all knew that Joan had more creative ideas in her little finger than all those West End producers put together.

KH: Did Joan ever used to go with you to these productions?

HG: Oh yes she did. She loved it. Occasionally, but she did go. She loved... she went to the Old Vic at times. And the Palladium she loved, she loved some of those big, you know larger than life people. But I think she went in order to give us notes – she always gave us notes. Yes, it was wonderful. It was wonderful living and breathing the air of Theatre Royal, Stratford. Still poor though.

KH: We were just talking, well you were just talking, about when you used to go to the West End and people like Gielgud and Richardson, being big star actors, and not seeming terribly real, not seeming to be playing the real people on the stage as it were. And I just wanted... because in Theatre Workshop, you were encouraged to behave like real people, and I wondered if you could think of a production maybe, or an example, of where that came into play.

HG: Yes, in every play that Joan produced, that's the one criteria shall I say, that we became real, that we were not 'acting' in inverted commas. She had a gift for... first of all she had a gift for developing a rapport with her - you know we were called 'tospots?': 'Come on you lot, you tospots.'! Now that gift was impressive. And she never ever came to first rehearsals with a script. She'd allow us to improvise the entire scene, as I mentioned before. And you talked about the West End, well, she threw out all those stale conventions of popular theatre, as presented by the Gielguds and so on in the West End. And then of course all these mannerisms were copied by the rep companies up and down the country. But we were encouraged to behave, as you rightly say Kate, as real people.

It was funny really being miners on a stage and squatting against a wall in a street scene in *The Long Shift* - wonderful play by Gerry Raffles. Squatting down...you know, I remember miners in Rhymney, and Bargoed, all over Wales, squatting down playing cards on a pavement. And I suggested this to Joan when she was producing this. And I squatted down when we were supposed to be playing with cards. And she said, 'OK just say it: 'Come on lets tutty down.' - Tutty down meant squatting down, and that's what we did in Gerry's play, *The Long Shift*.

This was a wonderful play [on a set I designed], dramatically lit by John Bury, and then with the tension building, my God, talk about real people! The climax of this was a fight scene, and you know, real people, almost a real fight, that memory lingers. Not just with me taking part, but with all audiences who ever saw that, because they really believed that they were witnessing something that was real. There were caught up in the atmosphere. Ah, it was... yes, it was, it was wonderful. That life in the theatre, in those days, it was really wonderful.

KH: Did you ever see Joan Littlewood's manifesto for Theatre Workshop?

HG: Oh, Howard Goorney once produced this... you know, quite early on actually. Howard, he was the Equity member who encouraged everybody to become members. And he also did the - as I mentioned before - the administration with Gerry. And I think actually, he helped, in the late forties when he joined, I think he helped write the manifesto. And look here, here's part of it. Can I show you this?

KH: Yes, yes.

HG: Or shall I read it to you?

KH: No, please do, please do.

HG: Now Howard you see, I think he... yes, I'm sure he did [help], because he was more politically active than Joan was, I think at the time. And... well let me read this:

'What we are living and going through hell for is great theatre, and such things are never, ever borne easily. Compromise is no way out. We must do great plays, even though people would say it's impossible to exist in this society without compromise. Now at the moment they appear to be right. But we, as a team, shall become stronger. The great theatres have always been popular theatres, which reflect the dreams and

struggles of the people. Theatre Workshop is an organisation of artists, technicians, and actors who are experimenting in stagecraft. Its purpose is to create a flexible theatre art, as swift moving, and as plastic as the cinema.'

Do you know, look, we all kept copies. And then we believed in the dream. But there again, there again, rearing its ugly head, with my liberal background, progress, individual freedom, all that I was taught as a lad in Wales, all this kept my Welsh feet firmly on the ground. [Laughs]

KH: You've talked about living out this dream, and when you got to Stratford it was almost like part of the dream for you was beginning to be realized, because you had this permanent base. Once you were settled there did you get paid Equity minimum at all?

HG: Oh no. Bit of a laugh that really. We were paid £2 a week. Mind, Christmas time was the time we celebrated. George and I, and our Chinese meals and Sauternes - my taste is slightly different these days! But at Christmas time, when we did for example A Christmas Carol, takings were pretty high, and we did three shows a day, for £7 a week!

We all thought though that perhaps soon we wouldn't have to paint shop fronts, or labour on building sites - because that's what we did to supplement our wages. At the time, thinking back, we talked about it in fact, and we sensed the revolution that was coming. And each successive production brought more acclaim, the critics came, bigger audiences. That was when it became quite exciting.

KH: Did the success mean that Joan had to invite more people to be part of the company?

HG: Yes, she did feel that she wanted to extend the company. And at the time she wanted to find two actors to join. She wanted to complement the company with two - a boy and a girl - two new tosspots. So on New Year's Day in 1954, Joan asked me to set up the stage for auditions to take place. You see, over two hundred people - actors/actresses - had responded to Gerry's adverts in the Stage and various papers and magazines. And I was asked to supervise the two days of auditions, and of course I had an opportunity, whilst people were on stage, to talk to everybody. And it was amazing that most of them thought that by joining Joan it would be a one-way ticket to the West End. Now that, Kate, was really prophetic, because that's what, much to Ewan's chagrin, that's what Theatre Workshop was to become - a try out for the West End. Certainly not the kind of theatre that he nor we had planned, nor that we had prepared for over a long period.

KH: Did Joan find actors to fit in with Theatre Workshop? How did recruiting, new people as it were, how did that work?

HG: Oh it worked well. I'll tell you first of all about that... well yes, it's part of the story. For a start that important day, when Gerry and I first visited the theatre, that was when I suppose we laid the foundation stones of Theatre Workshop at Stratford East. You see, now there was a London base where, later on, more actors and actresses would have the opportunity to work with Joan, and one of the best theatre companies in the country.

Now that day, and this particular day, the audition day, were to be of greater significance to me than anything else in my life so far.

KH: Why was it that it was so important to you particularly?

HG: It's part of the story that you asked...

KH: OK.

HG: ...because Joan auditioned all those people, and only two stood out as Theatre Workshop material. We were very excited on the side, you know, all of us. All gazing, looking, longing, learning from Joan as she was auditioning people, and knowing what she was expecting of people. Two stood out as Theatre Workshop material, as I say. She invited a great guy, Gerard Dynevor – no longer with us – and Marjie Lawrence.

I was absolutely thrilled, because I'd chatted with Marjie after her audition, and I really felt drawn to this down-to-earth beauty. I'll tell you, certainly a spark grew and developed into a love that's as strong today in 2007 as it was when we married shortly after, in 1955. And we still enjoy working together, and we have three offspring: Sarah, Robin and Laura, successfully following in our footsteps. So now you can understand the real significance of those dates for me.

KH: That's wonderful. And I can see now why it's such an important date for you. When you look back now, what are your feelings about the early years that you spent with Joan Littlewood and Theatre Workshop?

HG: Well, as you've heard, I've told you that I keep in touch with the few original members left from 1950. We all feel that those years of touring, up until 1953, were somewhat euphoric, enjoyable, tough, but enlightening. Quite recently I met George - George Cooper – Barbara Young, Bill Ormond, the guy from Newcastle, and Jean Newlove, the Laban expert, at a 'do' in the National Theatre. Anyone photographing us, or rather recording us, would have been amused. We were like exuberant kids again, dancing together, dancing around. People were looking at us and wondering what the hell was going on. Or we'd be huddled in corners, gossiping, you know talking about those old days. And we all agreed that despite that hard work that we talked about, and particularly the scarcity of things – goodness, we still had ration books in the early fifties! But we all felt then that there was a sense of elation. We felt we belonged.

And, you asked earlier, it was in those years that we believe the defining of Joan's production methods took place. You see what I haven't mentioned is we had summer camps and schools. And we had time to think and train at those summer camps and schools. That's where Bill Ormond, people like him, and Frank Elliot, that's where Joan picked them up, and asked them to join the company. Voice, singing coaching with Ewan McColl, then Laban training with Jean Newlove, and improvisation with Joan. Who encouraged us, incidentally, to record everything in notebooks. I wrote and I drew portraits in a book that I still have, it's just there. [gestures] Most of my drawings on tour incidentally, and my stage designs are displayed at the Theatre Royal in Stratford East. Joan always said, 'Have a pride in belonging to an ensemble, a group. Everybody equal,

no hierarchy.' Except of course, I always believed, Joan really enjoyed her dictatorship – oops, I'd better reword that! – a benign dictatorship. [Laughs]

KH: This idea of a dictatorship is quite strange in the context of a group theatre. From my point of view, it just seems a bit like it's not very compatible?

HG: Kate, you're absolutely right. But what you've got to remember is a boss is a boss in any group or organization. And sometimes that boss has to be devious or a bit of hypocrite to get results. She dictated, certainly. She got her way, fair enough. But Joan was interested in what happened to people when they worked together with as much security as they can get. That's why... that's part of the answer rather, to the question that you asked earlier on, about settling in a theatre, having a base. You see, it goes back to that. Her approach to acting derived from her and Ewan's beliefs, and those of Stanislavski. She wrote, and I'll read this:

'The notion that drew us together was the exploration of a method of work. It was not in the presentation of ideas in dramatic form that an aesthetic developed. It was in analysis, research and a study of human expression. If we only touched on these things we sharpened our sensibility.'

Think about it, Kate, we were doing actually everything that she preached. So, dictator, yes. Group theatre, sure. She had the ability and the knowledge to tower over all of us. Nevertheless, each one of us enjoyed an experience that comes once in a lifetime. Now that confidence, the confidence that grew from that experience made a great start for the future for us all. We all felt certain of that one fact.

KH: You're obviously really proud of your past with Joan and Theatre Workshop, what sort of legacy do you think Theatre Workshop has left behind?

HG: Yes, Marjie and I – talking of my wife and I – we certainly are proud to have been part of that... yes call it theatrical history in the making, as it were. Without doubt a revolution took place at Theatre Royal, Stratford East in the years 1953 to 1955. And without Theatre Workshop, nobody – nobody – could take for granted the realism that we now see in really good theatre.

And plenty of myths have grown up about the origins and legacy of Theatre Workshop. But the fact remains, Joan Littlewood and her company are recognised as having sowed some very important seeds for theatre companies in the UK - in fact, let's face it, all over the world. - and it was just after that, at the Royal Court in London, that we saw some of those important seeds being planted.

KH: That's a really interesting point that you've just raised about the Royal Court. I was wondering whether you saw any parallels between your work and the work that the English Stage Company were doing?

HG: Not to start with. Certainly later on, there were some good people coming in – Alan Bates, people like this. But the Royal Court, I mean, they had money for a start – they were subsidised. They were lucky - they were able to hire top designers. But then top designers you see were West End trained. And it was still a box set. Later on they did

experiment, both with the settings and with plays. John Osborne, whom I knew quite well, in fact I staged managed one of his first productions at Theatre Royal, Stratford. [With] *Look Back in Anger*, plays like that, they began to see that realism paid off on the stage. And then we began to see that there was going to be a parallel, which eventually was with Lindsay Anderson, who then developed along the lines of Joan and her presentation methods.

KH: He was an admirer of Joan Littlewood as well wasn't he, Lindsay Anderson?

HG: He was a great admirer of Joan Littlewood. Yes, he said some lovely things about Joan, and the productions... her productions. And I think at one time he wanted to come to Stratford East. Nothing came of it, because he was then offered film work. And he got drawn up... or drawn into that side of the media.

KH: I think this brings us on to the end of your time with Theatre Workshop. I just wondered if you wanted to say a little bit about that.

HG: Well Marjie and I, yes, we both left for different reasons. But in 1959 Joan did invite us back to join the cast of *Make Me an Offer*, because it was destined for the West End and she wanted a nucleus of old... of original members in the cast. Mind she had productions in the West End. And we felt that she was changing. We felt that she liked the success, but we also found – Marjie and I – that going into a company where there were, in inverted commas, 'stars' made rehearsals very difficult for her – in fact we know, we experienced it. None of the stars - Dan Massey, Dilys Laye, Diana Coupland, Meir Tzelniker, you know, big names - they weren't used to her approach. And like most West End actors, they all came line perfect, as the saying goes. They were not going to be influenced. There was no improvisation that they wanted to do. No development of their character – they knew what the characters were, they were going to play them night after night after night. And the writer – that was Wolf Mankovitz – and Joan had quite embarrassing arguments in front of us all. But there were two lovely people, Sheila Hancock and Roy Kinnear, and because of their backgrounds fitted in more easily. They had similar backgrounds and training to us and Joan. And not only that, they went into theatre with similar thoughts – realism, reality. Joan was very, very impressed with them, and she said so, oh yes.

KH: To go back to 1955 when you left, what happened after that, did you stay in the theatre?

HG: Yes. Marjie actually stayed on for a while with Joan. I mentioned earlier, David Scase had recommended me for the stage director's job with Arena Theatre, for a short tour, which was great, a great success. We actually played at Cardiff, where my beginnings were of course, after having left Rhymney and home.

KH: That must have been quite a journey back.

HG: It was fabulous. I got terrific headlines in the Western Mail, and the South Wales Echo. Ah, it was... ah it was glorious! And of course I could sneak up to the headmaster at Tredegar Grammar School and politely I could say, 'I did make it, Sir!'

KH: It's kind of a fabulous, 'the local boy done good' isn't it, for the papers.

HG: Exactly. It was. There were some pieces written about me, yes. Yes, anyway, then came calamity. God, we decided to get married! Now, I was now - to Joan - the villain and I'll tell you why. She actually cursed me - she said, 'You're ensnaring one of my best actresses.' She was actually bitterly abusive to me, can you believe it? And when I went back one day, she caught me off balance and, well we were on top of the stairs, so you can imagine what happened.

KH: That sounds...

HG: Yes, there was more to the story actually.

KH: That sounds pretty shocking. So was there more confrontation after that?

HG: I've been reluctant to talk about these things, but why not. It's got to be told, it's part of my history with Theatre Workshop, part of my history with Joan. I still have tremendous respect for her, for her work, for her bringing together people and forming a group that related to my youth and my upbringing. I was excited about everything. But you asked about confrontation. Well I took the job with Arena Theatre because she actually asked me to leave the company. Talk about hypocrisy eh? A local thug... yes, I'll tell you the story. A local thug had been pestering a gay member of the company. And I and another member of the company scared the thug off. But his father - they lived locally - another brute, he went to the police and lied to them, saying that this particular actor had accosted his son - absolute and total lies.

I was there in the paint bay, with the big doors open, leading on to the street, with this actor when this thug first came. Literally he was taunting him, because he saw that he was not like others. His effeminate sort of movements were, I suppose, anathema to him, and threw things at him, tossed some paint at him, threw a paint brush at him. And that's why I scared him off. But the father went to the police, and said that the son had been accosted by him - I mean, I beg your pardon, I'm getting now worked up about it - said that the actor had accosted his son, and further more that I'd tried to bribe this son, offering him money to clear off and... they were going to go to Joan, and [but] Joan heard about this obviously from me and the actor. She wanted no publicity, absolutely no involvement. She asked me and the actor to leave. We were... well, I don't know... I was... I said, 'Where are your principles?' You know, all her principles went right out of the damn' window. But... I keep saying a big but, but a wonderfully big but, the result of the court case - thrown out by a sensible Judge. Thrown out! So Marjie and I, we got married, and we left.

KH: That's obviously a really sad moment in the history of what, for the majority of time, was a fantastic experience for you.

HG: Yes.

KH: Can I just ask a little bit about what happened after you got married, and what you subsequently went on to do?

HG: Well I'd better say immediately that I repeat one of the previous questions, or the answer to the previous question – she invited us back. So there was some redeeming... redemption.

Yes, we got married, and then we pursued our careers, but paradoxically our training with Joan - especially, might I say, the improvisation sessions - they were to help Marjie and I audition for acting roles. We're talking about 1955, now if you remember 1955 was the start of a commercial television in this country. Now, Michael Westmore, a producer of the new commercial TV channel that was called ARTV, he'd seen us at Stratford East. He remembered us, and they were looking for a young married couple, for certain roles. He invited us to audition for what would turn out as the leading roles in the very first soap on ITV.

KH: So this was a fantastic opportunity.

HG: What an opportunity. And like the hundreds of others for these parts, we had to improvise, guess what – being the owners of a DIY store. And that was the setting for the new series, called Round at the Redways.

KH: Well given your Theatre Workshop training, and the fact that your uncle had had this DIY shop, it must have been a relative easy audition for you. How did you get on with the new medium once you'd started the new job?

HG: Well, to answer the first question, it was fairly easy, yes. We had... we'd been trained intrinsically not to... if anything went wrong on the stage, not to stop, but to improvise and get back on to track. So improvising there to these people, they had a counter – a set up of a counter – and goods on it... it was absolutely easy for me, because I'd spent college holidays helping behind the counter of Uncle Bill's DIY store in Croydon. It was ... so... [good] and Marjie was brilliant. That was one of the reasons Joan took her on, out of two hundred people who came to audition. And Michael Westmore must have liked what we did, because at five o'clock on the very first day of ITV's launch, Marjie spoke the first words. And the momentous line of this new weekly series? 'Darling, summat's up with the telly.'! [Laughs]

KH: So this must have kind of had quite a big impact on your way of life. And obviously people recognizing you in the streets and things as well.

HG: Well they did, and on buses, oh yes. It was terribly exciting. I mean who could imagine coming from... I mean, Marjie coming from Birmingham, from a working class

background. Father a mechanic and a tool maker in a factory. And my background, working class in Wales, who could imagine, here we were riding round on buses, being recognised, asked for autographs. After six months, I mean there wasn't anybody in London that... because it was new.... Everybody was buying a television set, and all tuning in. There wasn't much on television. It didn't go throughout the day. And it was great for us. So from £3 a week we were getting at Theatre Royal, Stratford. Suddenly, £30 a week – each! Kate! A fortune in 1955.

I mean we were written up as believable, real people in a real setting. All great credit to Joan, eh? 'Believable in a TV series', all down to that training. It was really terrific exposure for us. And it led to, what we can say now, fifty years – 5. 0. – fifty years of both of us being busy in films, TV and theatre. Do you know that Marjie has played in seven leads in the West End? Like Richard Brier's wife and... I won't mention the rest.

KH: That's incredible though, it's fantastic.

HG: Well she's also worked non-stop in television for almost 50 years. She's been in over 40 feature films, played opposite people like Peter Sellers, James Mason, oh names and names and names! [I love the] two horror films she played leads in! But you see, to me she's still the lovely Marjie Lawrence. I can't get used to Marjie Greene, and that's after 52 years.

KH: And what about yourself, what happened after you'd finished doing the TV series?

HG: Well, my career as a designer, craftsman and actor, they I suppose, combined to lead me in another direction. And after the series that we've just talked about, I was asked for ideas for [TV] magazine programmes. Michael Westmore asked Marjie and I, he said you're... or told us, you're bright people, I'm going to ask you a question. I want you to come up with strands for our Monday magazine series on television.

Marjie... paradoxically she was aware - much more than I - of the needs, especially of women's needs in television. And she and I had been doing up - we had money then, you see! - our flat in Primrose Hill. Talk about choice of location. [It wasn't my choice of location] Anyway, we got this top floor flat, and were doing it up. We did literally everything. So much so, that somebody, an art editor - or home editor rather - that Marjie knew, visited us and she loved what she saw. It then became an article in Ideal Home magazine, after we'd renovated the flat [our first home].

The short point is that Marjie said, 'Look, let's show them what we've done in our own flat'. And Michael Westmore loved the idea, so much so that in January 1957, I presented our concept, which became the first DIY on ITV in the UK. I still have a page, from TV Times, dated beginning of January 1957, and the credit reads 'Harry Greene being Handy round the Home'. And Kate, I've been doing that ever since. It's what I love – communicating. I've written over twenty books on DIY and home improvements. I've done years and years of radio-links and DIY phone-ins. People will know me all over the country for those. I've devised, written and presented DIY series like TV-am's Dream Home, DIY Challenge, DIY Doctor, On the House, The DIY Show, and I wrote the first - the very first - concept for Changing Rooms.

KH: And that's just run and run really hasn't it?

HG: It has, it has. Yes... I didn't want to be in that because it changed somewhat. I wrote it as Room for a Change. Yes, now not many people know that – Room for a Change. They changed the title and they changed it somewhat. They didn't have DIYers doing it, as I had saw it, or devised it in the first instance. But in my 80th year – that was in 2003 – I completed 10 years of weekly DIY shows on QVC. And do you know, I've been running my building company for 30 years – over 30 years really, 32 years. But people often ask me, 'Well, how did you learn the trades?' Well Kate, I subcontracted to workmen, tradesman, and I was their apprentice. I was their... the guy who helped. I mixed the plaster for them. But I learned all the trades. And I could plaster as good as any plasterer after three years, and the same with all the other trades. And that's why after 50 years of DIY on television, I became the UK's DIY guru, as they [the press] often call me. I've been a freelance all my life, so I was able to accept TV and theatre roles. And to date you know, I've been in 35 films. I'm lucky, I'm still enjoying a fulfilling career, and I have a loving family around me. They keep me grounded Kate, and I don't even mind the comic Welsh accents.

KH: That's been absolutely fantastic. Thank you so much.