

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Leila and Gerald Gould – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Sarah Burbridge**

**12 January 2008**

Secretary to Theatre Workshop and her husband. Authors; Big Rock Candy Mountain; George Cooper; drama techniques; East London Theatres; Howard Goorney; Joan Littlewood; money; plays; politics; theatre-going; Theatre Royal, Stratford East; Theatre Workshop; the Theatre Workshop cast.

SB: OK, just for the records, do you mind having your interview posted on the British Library Theatre Archive website?

LG: No.

SB: OK, just to start off, how was it that you first became involved in Theatre Workshop?

LG: We saw it advertised and we went along and there were eight in the audience. Six of us and two other people. That was all.

SB: When was that?

LG: 1953. I think it was The Imaginary Invalid they were doing.

GG: No, before then. I think she wants to know before then.

LG: 1953.

GG: We're talking about the meeting where all the boys and girls...Lewis and his wife were there.

LG: They weren't at the first meeting.

GG: She was.

LG: No she wasn't, there were only eight of us.

GG: Sam Smith...we're not talking about The Imaginary Invalid.

LG: I'm talking about the first time we ever went to the theatre there were just eight people there.

GG: Before the theatre there was a meeting.

LG: Oh. But then, afterwards, we got all our friends involved and we gradually built up the numbers, but it was hard work. And then there was an advert; they wanted a secretary so I went along, I applied for the job and I got it. And I earned more than any member in the company. I earned £5 a week and they were just getting a meal a week. No money.

SB: No money at all?

LG: No money. It was awful. I needed the money because I had to travel and I had to put my baby in a day centre. But that was how I got the job.

SB: Were you already involved in acting or the theatre?

LG: No, no. Just enjoyed it and then we gradually built up the audiences didn't we?

GG: Yes.

LG: Got all our friends to come, and we got them to involve other people. And then eventually when we did move away - we moved to Rainham in Essex - we had a...what do you call it?

GG: A community group.

LG: A community group and we took all the children to the theatre at Christmas on three or four buses and that's how we sort of built it all up and then also our friends would take food along to the company. I can still see them going along with tins. Tins of food. They were hungry!

SB: They were that badly off?

LG: Very badly off! And then Harry Corbett and George Luscombe painted my parents' home because they were so hungry and my parents fed them and watered them. It was very hard going.

SB: Did a lot of people apply for the job of secretary?

LG: No.

SB: Just you?

LG: Just me. And I got it and I stayed there for a couple of years.

SB: Who interviewed you?

LG: Joan.

SB: Was it a hard interview?

LG: No it was easy, and I got it and I enjoyed it. And then I worked next door because in the summer they wanted the theatre and there was a firm next door, hardware, called 'Pardoe and Tiffin'. I worked in there, but they were also very helpful to the theatre. They were very good.

SB: It was 1953: that was the year they moved to the actual theatre in Stratford East. What state was the actual theatre in?

LG: Oh terrible! Terrible, terrible. It was dirty, it was smelly, it was revolting. They tried very hard cleaning it up.

SB: Was it...the cast were living in the theatre weren't they?

LG: They weren't allowed to! They weren't supposed to be living in there but they all had separate rooms and Shirley, who's written in my book, had a lovely room because her father was a director of 'Paton and Baldwin's'. They were the biggest wool people in the country and she came from a very wealthy family and I'll always remember she had a gorgeous plaid rug and she had a lovely room which she'd made up with all her bits and pieces. The others... often they came home and slept at our house. Well, on the floor because we hadn't got a second bedroom. Harry Corbett and Avis did. They came home and stayed with us.

SB: Was there ever any trouble about the fact that they weren't supposed to be living in the theatre or did nobody really mind?

LG: I was reading today the person actually knew all about it and never ever split on them. He was an employee of the council. He never split on them. But it was known and they had to move around so quickly. I can even remember, one of them slept on the coal in the boiler room.

SB: On the actual coal?

LG: Yes. Keith... he was a funny man.

SB: How long was it before they were able to do the theatre up?

LG: Oh years, years. They did it up. Murray Melvin was the instigator and they have done it up beautifully. Nothing like it was, it's all been completely... I mean, I haven't seen it since it's been done - I really should go. It's nothing like it was, oh it's much better.

SB: How important do you think the roles of individuals in the company were like Joan Littlewood and Murray Melvin?

LG: Oh fantastic. Oh, she was just so different. She was so dedicated. She just lived, ate and slept theatre. Nothing else. Gerry did everything else for her. All her clothes, well not... she didn't have many clothes, but just did everything for Joan and she just worked. Theatre. That was all it was. She was so dedicated.

SB: How would you describe her as a person?

LG: Well she was very nice. As long as it was theatre! That's all she was interested in. Her whole life was devoted to it. And it paid. She was remarkable.

SB: Did you know her very well?

LG: Nobody knew her terribly well because it was hard to get to know her because of her work. The last time we saw her was at Gerry's wake when he'd died and she had a big wake over at their home in South London and we were all invited. I think that was the last time I saw her wasn't it?

GG: Yeah.

SB: Was she easy to work with?

LG: If you went her way, yes. She had definite ideas, usually right. She knew just what she wanted and she was a perfectionist. Oh yes, she was a joy to work with.

SB: Have you got any particular memories that stick in your mind about working with her?

LG: I gave everything back to the theatre. I had loads of posters and lots of possession of hers which when we moved here it was just too much so I gave it all to Philip Hedley, who was the manager at the time so I presume it's all at the theatre.

SB: Are there any particular productions which stick in your mind from Theatre Workshop?

LG: I think...oh, well without a doubt Oh! What a Lovely War. That was incredible - you know about that, do you?

SB: Yes.

LG: Oh, that was incredible!

GG: The Quare Fellow.

LG: Oh, and The Quare Fellow. Brendan Behan. He was - I was just reading about him - he was always drunk.

SB: Really?

LG: Oh yes. I was just reading about how he was interviewed by Malcolm Muggeridge on the BBC and he was drunk at the BBC and there was another one. Oh...Schweik! George was in that one and he was very good. Schweik, Oh What a Lovely War and Brendan Behan's [inaudible] They were exceptional.

SB: What was so good about them? What made them stand out for you?

LG: Well, George's acting, number one. He is a born comic. He's always funny, always funny. He filled the part so effortlessly. Oh! What a Lovely War because it was so politically motivated that it just brought it all home to you about the First World War. I mean, you know, how they put the numbers up on the screen about how many people

had been killed that day. And that really shook you. And then Borstal Boy was just a political thing again, but very true.

SB: Did they get big audiences?

LG: Yes. They got very...Schweik and Oh! What a Lovely War transferred to - and I think Borstal Boy - all transferred to the West End. Not for long, but they did transfer. Got them some money.

GG: A really big change came when Gerry got the Theatre Workshop to go to the Paris Festival instead of the Old Vic.

LG: Yes they got to the Paris Festival instead of the Old Vic . That was really an achievement. The establishment and the Arts Council couldn't get over that. They didn't get grants. They got over there but they couldn't get back. They had to go and borrow the money from the British consulate to get home! But they achieved great success, they really did.

SB: Was funding a big problem?

LG: Funding was always a problem. Always. They just were not recognised.

GG: Councillor Abe Woolf was a great protagonist of them in the council. It was West Ham and then it was Newham and then they joined together with London and he was a great help.

LG: He tried, as councillor. Although they were all socialist councillors they was no help from any of them. I mean, Gerry wrote a lot of letters asking for help but nothing came.

SB: Even when they became more successful?

LG: Oh no, no.

GG: Yes, they did help a bit.

LG: Oh, nothing very much. On a Monday morning, I can always remember, Mr Bellchamber, the man from the Council would come in and he would want the £20 rent and I had to make up all kinds of excuses. If I was left there I knew there was no money and I had to make up all kinds of excuses about why the money wasn't available.

SB: What kind of things did you have to say?

LG: Oh 'it will be coming', 'the cheque will be in the post', you know - the usual! But he was very sympathetic. I can still remember him, I can still see him. Little man.

LG: Well, usual correspondence. Writing to people, appealing for funds. That was the main thing. Writing and appealing for funds all the time. And also, writing out, typing up scripts.

SB: Would you say the funding was the biggest problem?

LG: Oh it was all we did, was appeal for money. Gerry's father owned a raincoat company in Manchester and he was a very wealthy man and he was always bailing us out, always bailing us out. He was wonderful, I mean, there's only so much you can do. But he was wonderful and his brothers were related to Marks and Sparks so they sort of helped out a bit, but it was difficult.

SB: How do you feel the balance shifted between art and politics and what motivated the company?

LG: Politics were against it. Because they were socialist orientated and nobody wanted to

SB: Do you think that when the company moved to Stratford East that they were still... you said with Oh! What a Lovely War, the political message was good, was that still important?

LG: Oh it was very important to them, but not to anybody else. I don't think they realised what it was all about, I think they just thought it was a good show.

SB: The audience?

LG: Yes. Mind you, a lot of the audience were encouraged by it; they hadn't realised so many people had been killed and it made them aware. On the whole....that has taken off since, I mean there's a film, a film about it, Oh! What a Lovely War, I think Richard Attenborough did it.

SB: Oh yes, yes there is. What kind of political messages do you think the company was trying to...

LG: Oh socialist. Very socialist. Jimmy Miller, whose real name was – no, his real name was Jimmy Miller, but he was called Ewan MacColl, he was a communist. I think there were one or two communists but on the whole they were all socialists.

SB: It was him, he wasn't very pleased about the move to Stratford East was he?

LG: Oh no, he left as a result and joined a folk group. But he was very successful at folk and latterly we used to have concerts on a Sunday evening and he would sing and he was great, and that brought in money and then it gradually went downhill with rubbish. I remember one of the last things that Gerry said to us was that he couldn't stand it. It was cheap, although it was bringing in the money and the place was full. It was awful.

GG: Smutty jokes...

LG: The material that was coming was not good.

SB: Was that under Joan?

LG: No, that was just coming in. It was not good.

SB: When the company or Joan was choosing plays, do you think it was more important to her to make a good play or make a good political message? Which do you think was more important?

LG: Political message. She was very keen on political things.

GG: I don't think really she would have considered them separate, the politics and the Theatre. I mean, they came from Manchester Unity, which was left wing. Her point of departure was that she thought that, whereas Unity did modern stuff with a political motivation, she did Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, the Elizabethans as well. She thought that the left wing theatre shouldn't confine itself to just particularly left wing programmes.

SB: So she thought you could use old plays to make the same point?

LG: She did Arden of Faversham.

GG: When Harry Corbett did...

LG: Richard II. He was fantastic. He proved what a good actor he was. Nothing like Steptoe.

GG: There was some suggestion of him - Richard II - being a homosexual. He did this very [Laughs] successfully and most of the critics tore it to pieces but at the same time the Shakespeare theatre - what's the name of the place? Near Birmingham. The, I've forgotten the name, the Shakespeare theatre, did the traditional thing. It was not accepted.

LG: The traditional one was done by the Old Vic.

GG: The Old Vic, yes. It was the usual good performance and they took their time...

LG: They got praise from Lewis Castle who was Sybil Thornwright's husband. And he just praised them tremendously, but it was a stunning performance. It was a schools play so it did very well. I can always remember, I had to be a fireman that day because there was no fireman in the theatre and you had to have a fireman. I can remember being a fireman. And I worked in the Box Office.

GG: You've forgotten about Volpone as well. Ben Jonson. That was George...

LG: George Cooper.

GG: That was fantastic. They did revive, they did a lot of Shakespeare, the Elizabethan theatre. They did it very well.

SB: What tended to be more popular, the classics or the new work that was coming through? Which of the plays were more popular, the classics which they remade or the new work that was coming through?

LG: I don't think the classics were but they did push it. They believed in it and they worked jolly hard. And they had very good staff. Shirley, who was the seamstress, was wonderful. They made marvellous costumes out of rubbish. Incredible. There were two of them, I've forgotten the name of the other girl. It's in the book. I know her well, she's still around. But the costumes were absolutely excellent.

SB: I know you came to the company in 1953, but did you get a sense of how it had changed? Since its previous work in Manchester.

LG: It did change, because they did different material. But having said that they were still very politically motivated. I think it was more politically motivated in Manchester than London.

SB: You said different material, what kind of different material?

LG: They did Uranium and Lysistrata and things like that, which were very politically motivated. The Uranium one was about the bomb, and then they changed their ways a bit. But they were a wonderful company. I can always remember people coming in to be interviewed. Now one who was interviewed for her plays was Doris Lessing, I can remember her writing to Joan submitting plays and Joan rejecting and now she's got the Nobel Peace prize!

GG: She had trouble with Brecht as well.

LG: Oh yes, because he wanted her to play Mother Courage and only she could play Mother Courage and she felt she couldn't because she was so committed to other things and she said to him she couldn't and he said 'it's all off' so she just had to go. She was always falling in.

SB: What kind of relationship did she have with writers?

LG: OK. She got on well with them.

SB: Because I know with A Taste of Honey...

LG: Oh, Shelagh Delaney! Oh, she had problems because she changed the play. Because she was apt to do that, always to change, she felt that she could do better.

SB: Was it the case that they changed it as they developed the play or...

LG: Yes, as they ran through it. I don't know if she ever overcame that, but I know there were problems there.

SB: Do you think the theatre became more commercial when it came to Stratford East?

LG: Oh I don't think so. I don't ever see it becoming too commercial. I mean, there was no money, they were declared bankrupt at one time and they were always searching for money and always staying at places where they hadn't got any money or they hadn't got the fare home. They travelled all over Europe.

SB: Even after moving to Stratford?

LG: They played all over Europe. They had some stunning letters from Moscow from three directors who came to see one of their plays. Obratzov, the puppeteer came. And he brought a lot of money. He filled the theatre, that was good.

SB: Were there ever times when the theatre was more affluent than others and there was more money coming in?

LG: When Obratzov came. That filled the theatre for a week. That was just wonderful, that paid the bills! But not the plays. Other than Schweik and Oh! What a Lovely War. And The Borstal Boy. Oh and the other thing was Red Roses for Me, that was a lovely play, O'Casey. I can remember going and the theatre was packed that night.

SB: What was that about?

LG: Sean O'Casey.

GG: It was a left wing motive, I've forgotten what it was about now. I think they did the Star Turn [inaudible].

LG: Something like that.

GG: I think if you were there at the beginning like we were, the dramatic difference between Joan Littlewood's production and the commercial theatre was ...whereas the matinée idols used to say their part to the stage. Joan Littlewood's, they walked across the stage talking, it was an entirely different thing.

LG: They had their back to the audience. That was one of the things, it was perfectly natural.

GG: It was entirely different. For anyone who was used to the theatre in those days, it was entirely different. Miles apart.

LG: And she also made the staff limber up before they went on to the sets. They had to work out first of all and it helped them. She made them work hard.

SB: Did she teach them these techniques?

LG: Oh yes. She showed them. She would stay up all night, rewriting. She was an incredible person.

SB: Do you know where she got these ideas from? These techniques?

LG: It was all her own.

SB: You mentioned about how the techniques were different to other theatres...

GG: She knew about the methods, she knew about those things. She knew about Stanislavski, she had a very wide knowledge. But she had her own concept. The idea that the theatre should be natural, and it did work - everyone else did it after that.

LG: She also had Jean Newlove who was Jimmy Miller's second wife who taught dancing and movement and this all helped the performances. She was at Laban, the [inaudible] she was in Laban as well.

SB: How would you say that Theatre Workshop related to other theatres at the time, or companies?

LG: It didn't.

GG: There weren't any other theatres in East London...

LG: Other than perhaps maybe Unity but that's all. But there was nothing else left wing.

GG: But there was nothing else in East London at all really.

LG: No theatres. They all closed down, because of the war, partly.

GG: Now there's one in Ilford but that was the nearest one, five or six miles away. The locals did come, slowly. They came, didn't they? At the end there were two sorts; there were the local people and then there were the people who, the arty, crafty...

LG: who came from out of London. Have you been to the theatre?

SB: No, I'm hoping to go.

LG: You should, it would be interesting to see what it's like now because it was refurbished a few years ago. It's probably a bit grubby now, but Murray Melvin got a lot of money.

SB: Yeah, we met Murray, he came to the University.

LG: He's done a lot for the theatre. In fact, there's a memorial there soon for Howard Goorney who died recently, a few months ago, and there's going to be a memorial. He was lovely, he was lovely.

GG: In was very good in, what was it...?

LG: Imaginary Invalid. He had to eat - he had to whisk an egg and, I'll always remember, he had to drink it and one day it was a bad egg!

GG: He was very neurotic, very fastidious about...

LG: He was very funny and last time I met him was on the Underground at Stratford and I said to him 'I saw you on television last night, Howard, I couldn't watch you.' He was so good, he was embarrassing. He hooted with laughter, he said 'That's what I wanted to be' and I said 'Well, you were'.

GG: He took the part of someone who made faux pas all the time...

LG: A waiter.

GG: He did it so well that we couldn't stand...

LG: He was a very good actor though. He did a lot, he was with the company a long time. Did a lot for them.

SB: Did actors tend to stay with the company for a long time?

LG: Yeah. John Bury. He stayed with them and then went to the National. Then he died.

GG: What about Camel?

LG: I'm talking. That's John Bury. He was called Camel, because when he lived in the theatre he was always so scruffy, that's why they called him Camel. His wife was Leila Greenwood. Who else was there? Maxwell Shaw. He died. Gerald [inaudible]. He died.

GG: Who was the bloke who went to Canada?

LG: George Luscombe. He's still out there. I always remember when I went out for my interview. The two Georges were there and they just could not stop laughing. Who else

was there? Israel Price. Long since gone. It's just Harry and Marjory and us and George. I think are the only [ones] left.

GG: Yes, Harry Greene, he was quite remarkable with his sets. If you wanted a brick wall he got the bricks and built the wall.

LG: Oh, he was marvellous!

SB: Didn't cut corners...

LG: Oh, wonderful sets!

SB: Gerald, were you in the company as well or was it just a case of if you worked there everyone you knew...

LG: He was involved.

GG: I was a General Practitioner but they... actually we lived a little way away at the time, so I recommended someone else to be the General...

LG: I can always remember Gerry phoning you and saying, 'Is it all right for somebody to go onstage if they've just had a miscarriage?' [Laughs] That's how desperate they were! Oh no, he helped. He did a lot of work for them, I mean, we all went on the stage.

GG: Once they asked me, that Tiny Tim wasn't there. They did A Christmas Carol and said could I go on and be Tiny Tim?!

LG: That's another thing, we just went on in small parts. We were in everything. But it was fun.

SB: Did it tend to take over when you were in the company?

LG: It did but it was lovely. You didn't mind at all. You never knew what you were going to do next. It was fun.

SB: Was it quite a family atmosphere?

LG: Oh yes. Everybody was very close. They needed to be. I was quite interested to hear that Harry Corbett was going to marry Avis.

GG: Avis Bunnage.

LG: Yeah, but he never did. They got ready for the wedding but nothing came of it.

GG: She died.

SB: So, you said the theatre was the only one in East London, do you think that was because of the area?

LG: Possibly. People weren't terribly interested in theatre really were they?

GG: You must remember that it was the time after the war, the television, Box came in, the Bingo- all sorts of rubbish! The theatre was downhill. It was only slowly that the locals started to come.

LG: That theatre had never paid.

SB: The building?

LG: The building itself had never paid.

GG: It was not the only theatre there you see.

LG: There was one round the corner wasn't there?

GG: [inaudible] Stratford Broadway, Stratford Empire. That shut down though, before the war that was the Theatre; my Dad used to take me there; he was involved in the theatre a bit, he was a teacher. He wrote some things for a Theatrical magazine, I don't know what it was. That stopped - theatre shut down. That was it. The Hackney Empire...

LG: The Hackney Empire's just been given an enormous grant by the Arts Council. Yes it's been given an enormous grant.

GG: ...yes it was a difficult time for the theatre. The left wing theatre... I mean, Unity Theatre in London like the Manchester one was mainly amateurs. I mean, you got some important people that came out of the London one but it was mainly an amateur theatre. Joan Littlewood, I suppose that's a point of departure in way that the people

who were there in the theatre were all professionals. They got paid a little but not much but they were professionals.

LG: She left when Gerry died. He died of his diabetes and that was the end of that.

SB: Why do you think that made her leave?

LG: Oh because she couldn't go back. She couldn't go back without Gerry. He was her lifeline, because he did everything for her. Absolutely did everything for her. All she had to do was eat, sleep and think theatre. Nothing else. Without him she couldn't. And then she went off to live in France. She came back and died. Remarkable person, remarkable.

SB: Did everyone get along with her?

LG: Yeah I think so. Harry Corbett didn't, he was always a bit funny. She said in her book she didn't get on terribly well with him but otherwise she got on quite well with people.

GG: You know Harry went into Steptoe and when they had this benefit, this thing for Gerry Raffles in the theatre...

LG: The wake?

GG: In the theatre they had the actors who were with him at the time and all the rest of it. And she made Harry do the bit from Richard II: "I wasteth time and now time wasteth me".

LG: He was good.

GG: He went on to do that thing with Steptoe and Son. She thought it was a waste of time.

SB: Just because it was only entertainment?

GG: That's right.

LG: It was so enjoyable.

SB: It was a good time?

LG: It was a very good time.

SB: Just to go back to the funding thing, I know you said they were always hard for money; when they were at the theatre did they make more than when they were travelling before?

LG: No! They never made any money, they were always in debt. Always in debt.

SB: And it was the same when they were in the theatre and when they were travelling?

LG: Oh yeah. They travelled on a pittance.

GG: If there was money she used it for better sets, better clothes, it was all went on the theatre.

SB: That always came first?

LG: Always. There was never a lot of money though.

GG: Driberg.

LG: Tom Driberg. He gave them money but, it said in the book, but it wasn't enough. He looked after them, Tom Driberg looked after them. And they camped in his home and he fed them and his wife fed them but, I think he gave them a couple of hundred pounds but how far can that go? He was very good to them and every summer they went to his house.

SB: How much of the work of Theatre Workshop reflected what was going on? I know you said about politics, but how much was it reflecting events and things at the time? How contemporary?

LG: It was very contemporary.

GG: They did some didn't they? About Vietnam.

LG: They did...I've forgotten what it was called.

GG: Goldfish bowl? Or something.

LG: I don't know. That was a wonderful...

GG: Fishbowl, something to do with a Fishbowl.

LG: Wonderful set, Harry built. I'll always remember he built a brick wall. That was about Vietnam, yes.

GG: They did some about Spain but that was of course later on. I mean, they were later than the period they were doing. I don't know if they did any awful lot when they did things that were topical. Sparrers Can't Sing, weren't terribly good or terribly political.

LG: No that was the thing about the buses, wasn't it? They did a thing about the buses as well which was not marvellous. Called On the Buses.

GG: Oh yes that became, that's when that chap, that also got onto television.

LG: Yes it was on television it was a film as well. There were some things, I mean, they weren't all good. But on the whole they were all worth seeing. We saw most of them.

SB: Was there much experimental...

LG: Some of it was, yes.

SB: How was that received by the audiences?

LG: Quite well actually. I'm surprised. But not by the locals - that's the point. Local people didn't seem to want theatre.

SB: They wanted other entertainment forms?

LG: Other entertainment. Bingo! [Laughs] But they came in from far and wide because they had a club, a Theatre Members' Club and people came in for that. I've since met someone in the village here who said to me, 'I hear you were at Theatre Workshop,' and he said 'did you know Alan Nunn?' he said 'He was a friend of mine who worked there.'. And he lived at Swiss Cottage, Keith. Lives here now. And he used to go see Theatre Workshop and was part of the Members' Club.

SB: They all come here!

LG: Isn't it funny?! Small world.

GG: What about Dogweed?

LG: Oh Dogweed! Peter Dogweed. He was director of what?

GG: He did The Bill. They say they all cut their teeth on The Bill.

LG: He did Saint Bartholomew's Fair. I think that must have been with the Arts Council. [inaudible] He did a lot of work in the Theatre. Yes there a few them.

SB: Were there many other theatres at the time doing experimental things?

LG: No.

SB: Just Theatre Workshop?

LG: Just no theatres really. But then they changed into Bingo Halls. Or closed down.

SB: Did that help Theatre Workshop in that there was less competition?

LG: No, not really. There was no interest.

GG: For a long time, sometimes our group were the only people who were there.

LG: Mind you, we'd get about thirty. I mean, we would get a really good crowd. Not enough to fill the Theatre but...

GG: There were people who came, yeah.

LG: They all helped.

GG: When it went to France that's when the change came, didn't it? They got national publicity and all the rest of it. Then they came back and played to more or less full houses.

LG: Only thing is, they hadn't got enough money to come back, they had to borrow it from the consulate!

GG: The bloke - it was a woman wasn't it? - came across from France from the National Theatre in Paris. During it died.

LG: That was tragic. They were always in trouble, always, always in trouble.

SB: In what way, money?

LG: Money. And things happening.

SB: What kind of things?

LG: Money mainly.

SB: What kind of other things?

LG: Perhaps somebody falling ill, or leaving. And someone had to step in. They was a time when George Cooper and Harry Corbett both of them were leaving at the same time and George was in Schweik which they'd promised to play somewhere and he wasn't going to be there, but they got him back for just a couple of weeks and then Harry was in something else. But they managed somehow. It was always a near miss.

SB: With money being tight, was that ever a factor in deciding what plays to do?

LG: No, it didn't seem to bother them. They had an idea and that was it.

SB: They'd do it?

LG: They did it. Didn't seem to bother about the money. They hadn't got it [Laughs]. Very adventurous. She did a lot for theatre, I think she did more for theatre than anybody. She made it interesting.

SB: The experience?

LG: Yeah.

SB: Just to finish up, either of you, have you got any particular anecdotes from the Theatre that you'd like to share?

LG: It was all a joke!

GG: I can't think of anything. I can't think of anything apart from the girl going on the stage when she'd just had an abortion, a miscarriage. A lot of peculiar things happened.

LG: I suppose really...

GG: When we went in first of all they couldn't afford to have the heating on.

LG: Had no heating!

GG: And then they were doing something, some Greek thing. I can't think...

LG: Lysistrata...

GG: And they had no clothes on.

LG: And they were blue! [Laughs] There was no heating at all. It didn't work. It never worked. They asked the audiences to come in coats.

GG: And then there was Camel's brother first of all, we had coffee there, and the cups were absolutely filthy.

LG: They hadn't been washed!

GG: [Laughs] They cleaned it up afterwards, when of course they got the money but... It was just this sort of bench with a somewhat grubby bloke behind it serving coffee.

LG: Filthy nails. It was another girl, Ruth, she wasn't part of the company but she worked behind the bar, she was very good to the company. I don't know if she's still alive but she worked well. It'd be interesting to go back and see what it's like. I'm sure it's lovely.

GG: It did introduce a lot of the kids we took along to the theatre.

LG: Well the last time we went we were taking our family, son and daughter in law and their two children and my son was taken ill across the roundabout and suddenly he had a kidney stone and he was screaming and they were wondering what was wrong with him and they had to take him to hospital so I spent the evening at the theatre with the girls at the pantomime and Gerald and his wife both spent the time at the hospital.

There was a lot there. The sets were fantastic. The sets were always good. That one, that night was Jack and the Beanstalk and that was an incredibly good set. I think that was the last time we went.

GG: We must mention Alan Lomax and the Big Rock Candy Mountain.

LG: He was American...

GG: He was, with his father, in charge of the Roosevelt Folk Music stuff in America and he to leave in a hurry [inaudible] for inditing people and he came to England and amongst other things they said to him at the moment, it was very short notice, 'Can you do a pantomime, something for Christmas?'

LG: They did Big Rock Candy Mountain, have you ever heard of it?

SB: No.

LG: Oh, lovely!

GG: It's actually the name of a song hobos used to sing out there.

SB: Yes, I think I know the song.

GG: Yes and he did it at a moment's notice. It was fantastic.

LG: We went along with our three coaches of children from when we were at Rainham but the other people who were good to them were May, her husband, the Italians, Italian generations who had the café in Angel Lane and who fed the company. And I can still see Harry Corbett walking. He always wore that coat that he wore in Steptoe, that tweed coat and his wellies turned down. Always, he just lived in them. And we all went down there for food. We used to pay on a Monday and that was when we had money and they were very good to the company.

GG: What about Mary and Len?

LG: Mary and Len were fantastic, put up George and various other... They used to take food to George in tins. Loads of biscuits and cakes and things. Incredible.

SB: So they definitely relied on the help of other people?

LG: Oh they did, oh they had to; at times there was no food. I noticed they called Joe B 'Mr Porridge' because he was always up early and would always make the porridge for breakfast. That was all they had.

SB: So that came first, theatre came first.

LG: Yes they had to have something. It was an incredible time. Very enjoyable.

GG: Why are you doing this?

SB: Firstly...is there anything else you'd like to add?

LG: I'll probably remember after, my memory's not so good now.

GG; There's so many anecdotes, aren't there, that you can go over? You have to have something to trigger it off.

LG: I can't think terribly well.

SB: How long were you with Theatre Workshop for?

LG: Two years.

SB: How come you left?

LG: We moved. We moved from Chingford to Rainham in Essex, which is quite a long way. But we kept up; we took more people there from Rainham than we did from Chingford. We used to contact all our friends, numerous phone calls. Badger them in, but they were very good, very good. They all appreciated the theatre. We kept up for years, as I say until just a few years ago with the pantomime.

SB: Stay loyal to them.

LG: It was excellent. There was so many things I had thought of beforehand but I can't think...

SB: Don't worry, you can always contact me after...

LG: Thank you very much.

SB: So I'll finish the interview for now. Thank you very much for your time.

LG: You're very welcome.