

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Jane Thornton – interview transcript

Interviewer: Lauren Dey

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Stage Manager. Alistair Sim; Black Comedy; changes to stage management practices; The Chinese Prime Minister; Come Spy With Me; David Collison; Ferrograph sound equipment; LAMDA; LAMDA new theatre; Number Ten; On the Level; Peter Bridge Productions; Repertory Players; Revox sound equipment; Robert Ornbo; scenery changing; stage management; Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds; Theatre Royal, Windsor; understudying; early video machines; West End runs.

This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and thus differs in places from the recording.

LD: OK, an interview with Jane Thornton conducted by Lauren Dey. To start off with, could you just tell me a bit about your earliest experiences and memories of theatre?

JT: Working in it or as a visitor to it?

LD: Either, when you were a child visiting, whatever.

JT: Well, because my parents were in the theatre - my Father is an actor and my Mother was - I got taken to theatres quite early on and I can remember being taken to the original production of Carousel at Drury Lane...

LD: Really?

JT: ... and they said we were going to sit in a box and as a six year old I thought 'how can I go to a theatre and sit in a cardboard box?'. So I couldn't understand that one. So I discovered that and I saw Margot Fonteyn do Swan Lake I think, and I was taken to lots of things; I probably can't remember them all without the programmes. The early years of the National Theatre we went to quite a few productions at the Old Vic, Royal Hunt of the Sun I remember and I absolutely adored Maggie Smith and Robert Stephens in - what's it called? I've gone dead. The show about the black - Black Comedy, that's it! Where the whole thing's reversed - you have to start with a blackout, which means all the lights are up. If you don't know the show...

LD: I've never seen it, no.

JT: It's a very funny play where the people in the show are suffering a blackout but of course you can't see them if it's blackout so they reverse it. So the show opens so you can't see a thing but you can hear them moving around and then they say, 'Oh hell! the lights have gone out.' and the lights come up. So then the whole play... it was so clever. Imagine people in full light but they're not meant to see anything and that was the basis. And I did wonder how they coped with modern productions of that because they're so strict about exit lights these days and they're quite bright nowadays and I gather they have to have a special dispensation to turn them off at the beginning of the play when they do it now.

LD: You said about your mother and father being involved in acting, did you ever see them on stage?

JT: I didn't see my mother because she stopped when I came along and she just looked after me, but my father, yes I've seen him in several things; plays, a play at Windsor, a Pantomime at Windsor, and he did *When We Are Married* at the Strand Theatre in London; revues, musicals, all sorts of things.

LD: So it was very exciting?

JT: Yes. Yes it's very interesting seeing a relative up there. It's a completely different relationship when it's someone you know.

LD: When you were going, was the attraction of the theatre the actual play, or was it that, you know, you went as a family, or was it just the experience of going to the theatre, do you think, at the time?

JT: I think it was a love of theatre, I think they wanted to educate me as well. I did ballet when I was much younger so I was always interested in ballet, which has, you know, lots of wonderful scenery and interesting effects were going on there, yes, very magical. You know. And I always was interested in how it was done, and how it worked, and that side of it.

LD: So would you say you were more interested in, like you say, the stage management or did you ever think about going into acting?

JT: Never.

LD: Never?

JT: And that's significant, actually; I did not want to act. I did want to dance but I wasn't good enough, so I had to drop that idea and I said – well, I think I was about fourteen - I think I said, 'Nope, I'm going to do stage management'.

LD: Fourteen? That young?

JT: I was quite young when I decided, and then I went to a little boarding school in the country and ended up making little props for the school plays and on the book, bossing everyone about, so yes I obviously was a natural stage manager!

LD: Yeah. [laughs] What time, like what year was it really that you actually started working in stage management, like being paid for it?

JT: I started on... January 18th 1965 was my first professional engagement, at the Theatre Royal Windsor as the Lighting Board operator. I got the job through, you know, the usual grapevine. I'd finished my course at LAMDA and was looking for work and they said, 'Oh, well, we need a replacement'. Think someone wasn't well and they were in the middle of their panto season, so I went down to Windsor and worked a Strand PR board, I can't remember what PR stands for but it was one of the earlier automatic boards. It was quite tricky to operate because they were [changing] and a lot of theatre still had the old mechanical type such as the Grandmaster which everybody knows, which was a big thing with levers and it took two or three people to use it sometimes. But this was a desk type of control with one person operating and I stayed there for the panto and two or three plays, and that was my beginning.

LD: Did you move around a lot to different theatres?

JT: Yes, I was freelance. I never did weekly rep. There seemed to be a kind of understanding in those days that you started off in rep or you started in what they call the provinces, you know, out in Devon or up North anywhere, 'the provinces' was anywhere in the country. You did rep and then you moved, there was a sort of path that took you up and up towards the West End. The West End was considered the place to aim for.

LD: The top of the ladder?

JT: Yes. But I'm afraid I used my connections and I seemed to... My next job was with H.M. Tennent who were a big West End, very well known West End management and it was towards the end of their days. They'd peaked and their star was waning. The director on the show had worked with me at LAMDA and [he] recommended me for the stage management side so I was recommended as an ASM and got the job on condition that I understudied and I said, 'But I don't want to understudy', 'Oh, you'll have to' - everybody, all the ASMs were expected to understudy as well in those days because again it was the early days of formal training for stage management. Stage management was a very lowly task that you did because you couldn't get a job as an actor.

LD: Right.

JT: But my era - just before me and us - we were trained at drama school for stage management and all the technical jobs that went with it. So anyway they took me on as ASM understudy and I said, 'Well I can't act! I don't want to act!', I said, 'I'm no good at it'. 'Never mind, never mind'. OK, so eventually we did our tour and this was starring Dame Edith Evans and it was a very strict old-fashioned regime, I had to call everybody Miss or Mrs or Mister. I was Miss Thornton and Dame Edith was Dame Edith, I think she was at the time, and it was all, 'Do what you're told and don't speak unless you're spoken to'. It was all very strict and I found that a bit odd. Anyway, I did my stint with them and we started rehearsing, we did our pre-London dates and we came into the Globe Theatre on Shaftesbury Avenue, which is now called the Gielgud, and started understudy rehearsals. I wasn't given any notes and I thought, 'I'm not that good, I should always be given notes!', and one or two rehearsals went by and I thought, 'This is a bit strange', and eventually they came and said, 'Well, we're asking you to leave because you can't act'. I said, 'Well, I told you I couldn't act'. So being young I thought, 'I don't care', and I was laughing, I thought it was very funny actually. I thought, 'Right. That's it. I'm never going to understudy ever again'. I didn't train to be an actress, I wanted to be a stage manager.

LD: Did you ever get any people that you knew who went into being an understudy, who ran the stage management side and then just went into acting? Or did most people just stay?

JT: I think actually there was somebody on that show who had done stage management and she took over from me and ended up as a very good actress in her own right.

LD: Really?

JT: But then she was good at it. I wasn't. I think they brought her in to replace me. Which was interesting actually because obviously they replaced me with a good actress and they didn't replace me with presumably a good stage manager, which I thought, 'Hmmm, I see'. No, I must say on the whole I think that most people I knew in stage management were there because that's what they wanted to do. My parents used to say, 'Oh you'll have to understudy, because everybody does', and I used to say, 'No, not now, because times are changing'. I believe actually we've come full circle and I think it's come back now where they're asking people to understudy again. I think that's what's going on.

LD: Were there any particular theatres that you worked in that you favour for any reason at all? Like fond memories, or...

JT: I like them all. There was one particular one I didn't like I have to say, [Laughs] which was in, never mind it's gone, it might come back to me and we'll add it later. But there were lots of theatres being built in the sixties and a lot of us considered them ugly,

concrete boxes. Billingham, that's the one I'm thinking of, the Forum Theatre, Billingham. It was in the middle of one of these ghastly 1960s town centres which were dead and there were just concrete boxes all around us and I didn't like that. I liked the old ones, I have to confess. So my happiest memories were at Bury St Edmunds Theatre Royal, The Leeds Grand, I enjoyed working there. And again, sometimes your memories of a theatre are affected by the crew at the theatre, and some of them were absolutely wonderful, delightful and easy to work with, and others were prickly.

LD: Of the theatres you went round, did they differ in terms of the plays that they performed, or were they all pretty much the same at that time? Like did any take more risks in what they showed?

JT: I don't know about that. I know that there was what was considered the number one circuit which were the big privately owned theatres. Some of them tended to do ballet, pantomime, and musicals, and some of them took in plays. On the whole my experience was of the bigger theatres because I did one or two musicals. So I'm working in commercial theatre so maybe they weren't the risk takers, because they had to make money and they had to put on things that they were pretty sure would make money, and I think the subsidised reps and those sort of companies, which again were coming up again in that era, I have to confess I didn't work for. I was in the commercial sector doing the safe stuff.

LD: I know that certain productions at that time they tended to, like, change the production as the nights went on, like ever so slightly. Was that ever reflected in the stage management? Or did you do the routine the same?

JT: Do you mean the performers were allowed to change it, or the directors were changing things all the time?

LD: Like the directors would change for example the way a scene was acted, or like a prop or...

JT: Yes, but if you're on a pre-London tour - the preview regime hadn't started then. Where shows would open cold in London as they do now, they preview, don't they, having not toured before. I did what we called 'pre-London runs' which were trying new stuff out so you often were dealing with changes. You'd be rehearsing a certain way during the day and it wasn't quite ready to be changed so you'd have to do the old version in the evening and gradually as the new version was ready you'd incorporate it into the show, which meant a quite messy prompt script sometimes, with scribbles out and changes. And sometimes your cues would be numbered and you'd have on the left hand side all your instructions with your script on the right and the standbys usually in red with a red line going down to the go which is in green and you'd have your lighting cues numbered from one to whenever right through the show always consecutive - you never started renumbering at the beginning of an Act, you went from one right through to the end of a show, so one to one hundred and twenty if you've got one hundred and twenty lighting cues. Then you'd end up with A and B if they'd changed or added cues and then you'd have your sound cues, which were a separate set of numbers and your

fly cues which were separate again so lots and lots of changes would throw all this around a bit.

LD: Was that to get it perfect for the London show?

JT: Yes or they cut numbers and put numbers in. I did do a musical in 1966 called *On the Level*, which was directed by Wendy Toy, very well-known director, and that we rehearsed for six weeks in rehearsal rooms in Shadwell in East London and then we went for three weeks in Liverpool and three weeks in Southampton and we were working ridiculous hours. There were no rules about how many hours you worked then, I mean we were starting at nine in the morning and finishing at three the next morning, with a show in-between. So working out things, changing things, rewrites, chucking out numbers, putting in new numbers, so that was a lot of work. I was only an ASM on that show and an understudy for the sound equipment, I didn't have to run the book. I hadn't reached those heights then.

LD: You know, like you were saying when you were doing a tour that you'd be in Leeds, Liverpool, all the different places. Do you think that, because at the time television had obviously begun by then, do you think that there were different kinds of audiences in different places? Or was it generally the same? Like younger people or middle classes?

JT: I wasn't terribly aware of that sort of thing. But I suppose yes it was your middle class white audience, I imagine, for that sort of thing. We certainly noticed a difference in the audience reaction from town to town.

LD: Really?

JT: Yes. You'd be touring with a production, a play or a comedy. Comedies threw up this change more because you'd get completely different reactions to what we considered were the funny bits in different towns. Glasgow and Edinburgh were a very very different audience and noticeably different reactions you'd get. And so Leeds would be different from Eastbourne or Southampton. Again, reflecting the social mix that was in that city.

LD: Do you think certain cities had better senses of humour?

JT: I wouldn't say better, just different.

LD: So they found things in that play that were funny that you hadn't initially thought that would be a big laugh?

JT: Again, I'm not a director, so I don't know really. I was only aware of the audience reaction from the wings or from the book if I was on the book. No, I think humour's extraordinary, I think everyone finds something different to laugh at.

LD: Can you tell me a bit about any specific plays that you worked on at the time?

JT: In this era?

LD: Yeah.

JT: I liked musicals, and there's quite a lot of musicals here, aren't there.

LD: Yeah, that's fine, talk about musicals.

JT: There's The Chinese Prime Minister, that was a play. That was the one with Edith Evans. A strange piece. I must confess I didn't really understand what it was all about. I did plays with George Baker at Bury St Edmunds. That was the nearest to rep that I did actually, because we did a play, and I think it ran for two weeks, and we did another one for two weeks, and I did Ibsen's Ghosts, and some Restoration Comedy. Then a very modern piece called A Resounding Tinkle by N.F. Simpson, I think. I didn't understand a word of it. I'm not terribly academic, I was just the practical person there to make sure the props were in the right place and do the sound effects if needed. Leeds Drama Festival was new plays; The Happy Apple was a new play – that was a comedy. Unfortunately it didn't make it to the West End and that had Pauline Collins in it in her early career, and you asked me to only go up to 1968, so that's where the list stops.

LD: Did any of the plays you worked on actually end up in the West End?

JT: Number 10 did. This one was 1968 and then Peter Bridge Productions and he was a West End Management as we call them and this play toured and then we took it for two weeks to Toronto - a big theatre in Toronto - and that came into London at the Strand Theatre - which is now the Novello, I think - and that had quite a cast: Alistair Sim, Michael Denison, Dulcie Gray and John Gregson, and on this I was the sound operator, and we used Ferrograph equipment [I brought this for you here]. Come Spy With Me was another musical in the West End, that was a long run at the Whitehall Theatre, which has been turned into the Trafalgar Studios now, a musical starring Danny La Rue and Barbara Windsor and there were 42 sound cues in that, and I worked the... And the equipment we used was from a company called Stagesound and it consisted of four vertical – so it's not a tape deck on the flat but up vertically. Four adapted Ferrograph decks, two with show cues and two standby running in sync in case of problems. So there were two machines doing sound cues and two standby machines and automatic stopping between the cues was achieved with bits of metallic tape attached to the quarter inch recording tape, now I don't know if you are familiar with reel to reel tape recorders?

LD: No, not really.

JT: Before your day! So quarter inch tapes running on spools that thick and we put these little metal strips on it and the machine had been adapted, there was a little pillar in it, when the metal strip passed over the pillar the tape stopped. So you used to tend to have your bit of tape with the coloured bit of tape between it and the next cue, so you could visually see your cues passing through, so you pressed a button and it played the tape and did the cue. So you'd set the volumes and the speakers you wanted it to come out of, pressed your button and the cue happened and it stopped it automatically and then you pressed your button for the next cue and if the cues were very fast after each other you had to shorten the coloured tape between the cues, this took so long to pass through. Occasionally after a long run the metal tapes sometimes lose the magnetism and occasionally you'd slip and two cues would go through and that was very embarrassing, you had to just stop it and wind back and remember to turn the volume down before you wound back otherwise it went 'whoop!!!!'.

LD: Did that ever happen in a play?

JT: I'm afraid it did. Yes, these things always happen. So that was that show with those decks and then the other one I did with Bridge Productions is Number 10, which was about Number 10 Downing Street. It was a political play [by] Ronald Miller, and again I was doing sound. Bishop Sound and Electrical Company was where they had hired the machines from and on this show I operated the first video machine to be used in theatre production.

LD: Really, you had the first one?

JT: That's what I understand, that's what I was told: 'This is the first time it has been used'. So that was a good technological jump, wasn't it? It was made by Phillips and it was huge by today's standards. It consisted of a wooden cabinet with a top opening lid which must have been about two and a half feet wide, twelve inches high and two feet deep. It had a large one inch wide tape. So, I have explained about the reel to reel tapes for sound, this was a reel to reel tape for visual and it was an inch deep, the tape itself was an inch thick. So there were huge spools and we had to put the loaded spool on the left, feed the tape through to the take up spool on the right through a series of gates and in the middle was the head the video head which was a little rectangular thing that had to be slipped in and you had to take it out every night, put it in its protective box because they told me it was worth a hundred pounds and that was a lot of money then – and put it in and play this machine every night, because they got a television up on the stage and it was probably the first video link. So that was interesting. One or two things went wrong during that show but then they always do, don't they? We were in the basement under the stage. When I did *Come Spy With Me* we were out front and again early days of putting the sound equipment and the lighting out front [lightning control].

LD: Yes, because that's how they do it now, don't they?

JT: Yes, and in those days we would either be on the side of the stage where you couldn't see what you were doing and you couldn't hear what you were doing, gradually they moved this all out front but I had so much equipment that there was no room for me in the auditorium so they put me in the basement under the stage with my four tape recorders and my huge video machine [referring to Number 10].

LD: So you operated that on your own?

JT: Yes, I was ASM Sound.

LD: What was that like, was it physically demanding?

JT: I liked it, I preferred working on the lighting and the sound. I enjoyed being a creative part of the show. It meant a lot to me to get it right, to get the volume right. If there were fades and fades up of music to get the effects right, you know, I was a creative part of the show and I liked that. So that's sound equipment. There was another note I put in about sound equipment, which was that the Ferrograph machines - and this will be interesting to the techies - the Ferrograph machines, the way they were adapted to work, they were silent. So the reels moved completely silently and stopped silently, which was great, particularly if you were out front near the audience so you don't get 'click, clang, bang wallop'. Then they did away with the Ferrograph machine, which was a two track and they started using Revox, which were four track, and they always clicked and clunked. They used a slightly different system of automatic stop where you'd take the powder off the tape with acetone to make the tape clear rather than brown. It sort of had a brown/red coating on the tape and you'd remove the coating and leave a bit of clear tape and a little light would shine through it and so stop the machine. Again, you'd push a button to start your sound cue and it would stop automatically as it passed across the light. So that's how all that was done.

LD: So did you have to do that yourself? Get the coating off?

JT: Yes, I edited all my own tapes. Occasionally you got the firms that you hired your equipment from they would also make up tapes and they also had libraries of sound effects. Sometimes you'd recognize sound effects if you'd... The 'EMI owl' I always referred to, because it came off a record that EMI had produced and it was the same owl and I'd recognize it, and this could happen. But then when I worked for George Baker at Bury St Edmunds I did all the recording because my father actually had a ferrograph machine at home, so I could do all the show tapes myself which saved the company a bit of money. So no, I enjoyed doing all that.

LD: Going back to when you were saying before that you worked on productions with the likes of Maggie Smith and Alistair Simm...

JT: I didn't work with Maggie Smith, I only saw her in the theatre.

LD: Oh you only saw her. Who was it that you said, Alistair Sim?

JT: Alistair Sim, yes.

LD: Did you ever have much interaction with the people who were in the play?

JT: Not a lot, no. I was a lowly ASM, sort of didn't mix with the stars. Alistair Sim was absolutely delightful to work with.

LD: He's a wonderful actor.

JT: Yes, wonderful, and Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray I mean were all lovely but, and John Gregson too. Funnily enough something did go wrong with the technical equipment. This was the show with all the new technical equipment and something went wrong one night and of course they didn't get what they were expecting up on the stage. I was horrified, I thought, 'Oh no, they'll sack me, I'm no good', and Alistair Sim just ad-libbed his way through it until we sorted the problem out and was absolutely brilliant, and I went up to apologise and he said, 'Oh that's OK, we managed, don't worry'.

LD: He's talented enough though, isn't he.

JT: Yes. Whereas other actors who are less secure maybe would have bitten my head off and who can blame them? Because they are the ones out there with egg on their faces if we make a mess of it.

LD: But if it's the first time things are being used there's bound to be little stops along the way.

JT: Well yes, things go wrong, don't they? Technical things always go wrong. But it was all more formal in those days. We certainly didn't call these people by their Christian names unless we were allowed to. So yes, it was more formal, the relationship between the ASMs and the stars.

LD: This was all during the sixties, and you said that one play was about 10 Downing Street. Do you think that because the Lord Chamberlain's censorship was coming to an end during this time, do you think that had an effect on any of the plays that were allowed to be performed or that were not censored as much?

JT: Certainly, yes. I don't think... well, there was no bad language or anything in this one, that wasn't a problem. I think the high profile shows were Oh! Calcutta, that had nudity in it, Hair had nudity in it, so this was the big thing then. You were allowed

nudity on the West End stage, you didn't have to have a club theatre to put it on and get away with it. You mentioned the censors, funnily enough. When I was at LAMDA doing a technical course they had a new theatre there and they used to have a little old studio theatre but the year before I went they'd opened their new theatre which was designed by Michael Warre and he also designed the Northcott Theatre in Exeter, and the LAMDA theatre was a smaller version of what was to be built at Northcott in Exeter a few years later and again it was a first: it was designed as an adaptable space, it has a little auditorium – a very curved auditorium going down to a flat stage, and you could put mobile units in and take your audience right the way round the back of you, or use the stage as a proscenium stage. It was adaptable. Again that was quite a new idea and they used to rent it out to companies and we had the Royal Shakespeare Company experimental group in there doing their Theatre of Cruelty, and this was Peter Brook and Charles Marowitz and I believe I'm right in saying Glenda Jackson's first appearance in the nude. Again, it was intellectually above my head I'm afraid I wasn't quite sure what was going on. But that was one of the sketches – it was sort of little snippets, it wasn't one play. They were trying out stuff and there was a very funny section in it I remember which was an actor at a table reading a letter that had been sent somewhere by the Lord Chamberlain saying what was meant to be cut from *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. So you can imagine the list of all the rude words that wasn't to be allowed - so this is post getting rid of the Lord Chamberlain - but apparently you weren't meant to send profanity through the post either and the Lord Chamberlain had posted this letter so that was one joke and then there was all the funny stuff in the letter and it may still be in the archive at the Royal Shakespeare Company. A little bit of history there.

LD: So they took straight from the court case of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*?

JT: I think that... I mean, this is going back a bit, I just have these memories of this very funny letter and the actor that did it was very good. It could've been Richard Gere that was reading it and he did it really well. Yes, again I thought I come from quite a conservative theatre background I think you know, my parents adored Shakespeare, they worked for Donald Wolfit and John Gielgud and we admired Noel Coward and Rattigan and all the playwrights that were being ousted by the new lot. But that's fine because that's what it's all about. But I think I was aware of it all going on around me and I thought, 'Well what's going on? I don't quite understand', but as you say I was just there to paint the scenery or make the props and help the actors as best I could.

LD: But at least you got to experience it, and quite early on as well.

JT: Yes, you look back and you think, 'Goodness me, look who I was working with'. I should've been perhaps more open, but I just thought, 'I don't understand what they're doing'. It was so strange. We didn't have degree courses in those days for stage management. They probably stretch you more now it's a wider training. Ours was very much a case of, 'This is how you paint scenery and this is how you work the lighting board and make sound tapes', and down-to-earth practical stuff.

LD: Do you think - apart from, like, obviously the technology now - do you think there's much of a difference between the role then of stage management than there is now?

Because you said even then you were coming out the front and doing the stuff there rather than being on the sides of the stage.

JT: The technical, the lighting and sound was moving out front and nearly always the person on the book was in the prompt corner which was behind the proscenium arch on the stage with the actors, But I know that even that position has changed in some theatres and they've even put the stage manager on the book out front, which I know some of the actors or the older actors certainly found quite disconcerting because they knew there was someone in the corner they could contact if they needed a prompt or if anything went wrong there was someone there in control and I know a lot of them were a bit miffed when they weren't there they were out in the control room. It's a better position to see the stage perhaps but I don't know about being in control of the stage when you're not actually on it. But the job's obviously changed, technology has changed the job. But I think basically stage management are there to make sure the show runs smoothly, that the actors are in the right place at the right time, the props are all there and everything happens correctly. So I would say the job is probably still the same but technology has changed it. Probably health and safety has changed it too, because we never had all that and I never saw anyone get hurt. We had the odd run in with trucks moving around the stage but I never saw anyone get hurt. I think probably with all this mechanical scenery and heavy stuff there is now the situation's a bit different.

LD: I know that you now work on the Eden Valley Museum Trust, when did you come out of the stage management?

JT: I carried on working in the same manner as a freelancer. I did quite a few seasons up in Edinburgh, I worked for Clive Perry in Edinburgh which was nice and there I met my musical director husband, got married and had three boys and gave up professional theatre at that point. That was in 1976 I did my last show. So it was a long time ago actually - it doesn't seem that long. Oh but then I did one or two little bits when I was asked to and I did some stage directing for the local amateurs who were doing musicals which used my skills because although the professional theatre was moving on, they're always pushing the boundaries technically the professionals. The amateurs of course were doing it the way I remembered so I was able to do that for a while and then I moved into, I just got interested in the history of everything, you know, archiving, and found that there was an opportunity to transfer my management and practical skills to the volunteer-run Museum that was opening near us in 2000 and I organized the opening, the procession for the opening so of course I had everyone in the right place at the right time and all my stage management skills came in handy. And then I enjoyed the creative input of doing exhibitions, which again involved using tapes and sound and lights so skills transfer that's gone on yeah. And managing volunteers you see, managing a group of people in order to get something done at a certain time, all at one time, ready.

LD: Yeah, so it's the same skills used.

JT: Yes, very similar skills. Skills I learnt with the amateurs have been useful at the museum because you deal with amateurs differently and volunteers differently to professionals. You can't say, 'You've got to be there, we're paying you to be there'. You

have to ask them if they're going to be there because they're doing it for fun, so different skills again.

LD: Do you have any fond memories? Because you've worked in stage management way past the era that we're looking at here, do you think it was better in what they call the 'Golden Era' now? Did you see it as a golden era at the time? Or is that more in hindsight that we see it from 1945 to 68, for British Theatre?

JT: We were certainly aware of the innovation going on around us, the Peter Brooks, the Theatre Workshop, the Royal Court -all the modern playwrights who were raising eyebrows and technically yes, if you think about it not much happened because of the... well, nothing happened because of the War years so the equipment that my parents were used to in the thirties and forties was probably almost the same as what we had after the War in the fifties, and the late fifties, sixties was when it all started changing. Big mechanical boards were going, the resistors, the way the electricity was delivered and the way the boards were used, they were getting smaller and instead of having three or four people operating a board you had one. We still had hand-flying either on counter weights or ropes, you know, hand ropes that people had to pull up. I never worked in a theatre with power flying, I'd left by then. So yeah, technically it was moving ahead quite fast and this is what's interesting about the theatre, it's always looking to the future and it's interesting recording the past knowing how we did it then but it's not how you do it now so I'm struggling with the whys and wherefores of why do we want to know about the past? It's an interesting question. Obviously people who are putting on plays need to know how things were done because they might be putting on a play in the era and they might want to know how they did it then, films, television. I mean, there's obviously a reason for keeping all this information.

LD: I think especially because this era is so well thought of, I think now when people study it, especially like on our course looking at just all like the innovation that was happening, everything was changing due to a number of reasons because of the censorship going down so I think that's what it is with this era in particular.

JT: With this particular era yes. I often think 'Golden Age' is when you, one thinks of one's golden age when you're young, your twenties, thirties because you're at your best and everything's bright and wonderful and you start getting older and you look back and everyone's golden age is going to be when they were twenty or thirty. It's always changing it's always moving forward certainly there are a lot more musicals in the West End now than there were when I was working in it. When I worked in it there were lots of managements like H.M. Tennent, Peter Bridge, Martin Landau's Marlan Productions, Michael Codron, and some of them had been around for a long, long time. All putting on plays, looking for new plays, and making money out of them, and there's not as much of that now. Certainly the West End's full of musicals and I mean, for a show to be in the theatre for twenty years was unthinkable. Two years was a long run then, you'd think, 'Wow, it's been on for two years', but twenty, extraordinary! I'll just mention one thing you might like to know about is, there was a thing called the Repertory Players and I have a programme from 1962 and I've got one right up to 1967 and they were an association of professional actors and directors of professional theatre people mainly working in the West End at the time and they used to look for and try and promote new plays and if you couldn't afford a big production, getting the Repertory Players to put on

your show could be quite useful because they used to rent West End theatres on a Sunday. They'd have the play ready-rehearsed and it was all voluntary, the actors were voluntary and the stage crew and they had to pay for the theatre they had to pay for props and costumes that they rented but the rest was voluntary and I worked on some of those. Again it was useful for gathering experience but lots of plays here, some of them were never heard of again but then some of them got long runs. This was also probably the only time I worked with my father and I never worked with him professionally, funnily enough. There were very often actors working in the West End at the time that gave their time to put on these plays and I think they were defeated by cost eventually, and things just got too expensive and they gave up or they weren't making enough money out of it, selling plays or finding plays.

LD: I think we're about done. Is there anything else you want to add or talk about?

JT: Anything else you want to ask? That's what I sort of thought would be useful.

LD: Yeah, yeah, it has been.

JT: This musical I did in 1966, *On the Level*, had innovative scenery and effects and I believe it was one of the first if not the first show to use projected effects and we had big projectors hanging on the lighting bars which were designed by Robert Ormbo who worked for Theatre Projects, who sadly has died just recently I heard and he was a lighting designer and did all the effects for this, and David Collison - well known - and this was the early days of his career and he went on to be the man, Mister Sound, and he was an innovator in theatre sound and I think again possibly the first or very early use of float mics. The float mics were, the floats are the lights that run along the front of the stage or used to - they don't now, they got rid of those, you used to have your lights along the front so they were the floats and they had little microphones in the floats. This was pre-radio mics and the beginnings of theatre sound, in fact. Don't get me on that one because I have a bit of a bone to pick with the sound people now. Well, are you going to see a live show or not any more? But best not go into that! Anyway, these were very interesting little microphones in the floats and worked really well as it happened and again the sound desk's out front. And we had trucks, winched trucks that ran in grooves on a false floor and I think that was quite new and they had a false floor on the stage and they had grooves in these and little metal things with, not a spike but a vertical thing coming through the floor that moved up and down on winches and you could lift up bits of scenery off and replace them with different bits of scenery and move them around on and off and there were about half a dozen, three coming from one side three from another and three from the back wall down so I think there were nine tracks so we could move nine bits of scenery around by just turning winches, manually turning winches in the wings which meant you could move little bits. There was a desk or a chair on a platform so you could move that on and the other side would have something else - a desk and a hat stand, which had to be fixed quite well or it would have fallen over, but it meant that you could move little bits without having people coming on and placing them so you never saw the stagehands. We had an effect where everybody was going into the underground and getting on a train. There was no moving train but these new projections that they'd designed projected the image of the train onto the back and there were two sets of sliding doors in the back wall which opened and closed and people would go through them and then it would just fade out but people really thought

that there was a train moving in and people were getting on it and it was going but they were only stills slides and just projected on.

LD: So it was quite forward-thinking at the time.

JT: It was quite new yes. I know Patrick Robertson was a director or designer from Chichester and he started using projected scenery after that. I think the pop industry has affected theatre lighting and sound a lot. Again later on, after your era I worked on a musical that Andrew Bridge – who was Peter Bridge's son – was the lighting designer on that, and they said it was an innovative lighting rig in that again we were seeing the lamps, whereas before they always tried to hide them behind borders and we weren't meant to see them but now they were all visible again for the first time. Somebody working on that was from the pop industry and this show had radio mics and everything. I think in this era that we're discussing theatre was theatre and the pop industry was reasonably new and that was still very acoustic and the pop industry had more money than the theatre so they were able to move ahead technically and gradually I think the theatre's been able to take on the innovations that have come from the music scene and that's my understanding anyway.

LD: OK, I think we can leave it there Thank you very much.