

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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## Jean Barbour – interview transcript

**Interviewer: Sue Barbour**

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Variety artiste. Auditions; agents; backstage; The Barbour Brothers; Peter Barbour; Roy Barbour; comedians; dancing; The Dancing Years; Bernard Delfont; digs; dressing rooms; The Ed Sullivan Show; The Grade Organisation; Francis Laidler; Emile Littler; music; pantomime; rehearsals (band calls); Beryl Reid; Cliff Richard; Speciality Acts; Stars in Battledress; Summer Seasons; stilt dancing; Theatre Clubs; touring abroad; touring (UK); Arthur Worsley.

SB: This is Sue Barbour from the University of Sheffield interviewing Jean Barbour, my mother, and first of all, Jean, I would like to ask you if you are in agreement for this recording to be used for the British Library Theatre Project and for future generations to learn about Variety Theatre?

JB: Oh yes. Yes, it's fine.

SB: OK. First of all, I want to ask you... Where were you born, and if you came from a show business family?

JB: I was born in Hendon, London and my family were nothing to do with show business. And, actually, it was from a very early age I started going to dancing classes... You know, when you're little, I think, your parents like to get rid of you for an hour, now and again [both laugh] – I went to dancing classes from about six years old onwards, and we actually moved from London to Hertfordshire and lived in various places in Hertfordshire and ended up in Welwyn Garden City. And, when I got to Welwyn, of course, it was the sort of place where they were very keen on music and theatre and actually from a very early age my family took me to shows... You know, suitable theatre.

SB: Oh, did they?

JB: Yes, from quite an early age and I was always taken to the pantomimes in London and all that sort of thing so I got quite interested early on and then in Welwyn I went to a dancing school where they were very keen on Ballroom Dancing and one of the boys – actually, I went to a co-ed school – and one of the boys at the school was interested in Ballroom Dancing so he and I - gosh, from about the age of nine! - started Ballroom Dancing together.

SB: Can you remember his name?

JB: Bob Carter.

SB: Oh right!

JB: And we did quite a lot and we used to go in for exhibitions and all this sort of thing, you know – at an early age – and so that started me off. And of course apart from that we did tap dancing and ballet and so I was into that sort of thing then but what really started me keen on going into show business myself was the Fred Astaire/Ginger Rogers films and I was allowed to go, on a Saturday afternoon, to our local cinema - which was only small in Welwyn in those days – and we sort of used to go with... a crowd of us and it was always the musicals I was interested in and I mean, there were various odd things that we weren't allowed to go to because they weren't suitable but anything like musicals... we used to go. And... I used to sit there absolutely mesmerized with this dancing. And Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers... I thought they were absolutely wonderful and I got the idea that I would like to be in show business; but how to get into show business when none of your family are anything to do with it, it's – you actually have no idea how to get in. And as I grew up – I was fourteen – the War broke out and so, at fourteen, I just carried on at school and the dancing and things and I mean, it was at Welwyn - although it was only a short way from London, it wasn't very far but... we didn't have a lot of bombs. We had a few but not many, and anyway, when I got to fifteen, my Headmaster at school said to my parents, 'Why don't you take Jean away from school and send her somewhere where she can do what she wants to do, which is music, singing, dancing. She's not a bit academic, she hates anything academic and she's very good at sport, very good at music, sings...' and I had an adult voice. At the age of ten, I had a...

SB: So how did you discover you could sing? Do you remember?

JB: I sang from the age of about eight. I used to sing to records.

SB: Oh right.

JB: We had a record player and I used to play them and sing to the record player right up... And at the age of ten, where we actually used to have our dancing classes, which was a hotel called the... it's gone out of my head... I'll remember in a minute - the Cherry Tree, got it! - So we used to have, with our dancing school; they used to have Young People's Dances, once a year. Where nobody was over the age – unless it was your parents – you couldn't go over the age of about... I think it was nineteen or something like that and they always had a band, the same band that used to play all the time. It was a local band and they were very good and when we used to go to these 'Young People's Dances' my dancing teacher used to say to me, 'Why don't you go and sing? Have a song, sing with the band'. So, anyway, this started up and I went and I sang with the band and I can remember I used to sing "My Own" which was a Deanna Durbin song, and the other one was called "Alone" which was a pop number at the time and I sang those two and they went very well there, so every time we had a 'Young People's Dance' or every time anybody had a party down there, they used to invite me to go and sing with the band, so that's how I started that.

SB: Oh, I see.

JB: Anyway, when I left school at fifteen and a half, getting on for sixteen, and my school Master had said, you know, "Take her away". I went to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and so, of course the War was on then and I used to go up to London – I didn't go every day – I went, to start with, about three days a week. Then I went for the whole week. From about fifteen – I was actually only about fifteen, I remember now, I was just fifteen because I had my fifteenth year and sixteenth year and at seventeen you could join the Forces. And my sister, who was seven years older than me, went into the FANY's (Field Army Nursing Yeomanry), which were prior to the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service) and they were a special sort of thing in the army and they eventually all went into the ATS. So, anyway, she was in and talking about what she was doing and

I thought, 'Oh, I wouldn't mind doing that' and the Recruiting Office – in those days, Fleet Street – there was a Recruiting Office there at the top of Fleet Street and actually the Guildhall was off Fleet Street then, in an old building at the back of there, and I happened to be walking up there one day – and it was a very nice day, I remember – and I walked straight in and signed on to go into the ATS - at seventeen and a half, you could get in – and I wasn't quite seventeen and a half so I signed on to go in when I was seventeen and a half. And when I came out of the Recruiting Office, I thought to myself, 'God! How am I going to tell the family? I mean, I'm at the Guildhall and I don't have to go into anything because I'm at College'.

Anyway, I went home and I broke the news. They weren't very pleased but they didn't say, 'No, you can't' or anything like that, so to cut a long story short, I went into the ATS. And I didn't want to be stuck in an office – so, I didn't want to anything, sort of boring, so I was a driver and I drove everything from three ton lorries to Staff cars and ambulances and the lot. And I loved it, because you were out on the road most of the time. You were your own boss really, I suppose, as it were, except that if you were on Staff cars you had an officer with you usually, who used to sort of say where you had to go and what you had to do, but we had a good old time doing that. And although there were times when it was pretty boring, most of the time it was quite interesting until... the Doodlebugs. And because I was a driver I very often used to have to go out of London and I was stationed at Cambridge and Harpenden and out of London so actually the bombing didn't really affect me until the Doodlebugs, when I was stationed bang in the middle of London. And the first Doodlebug that came over, practically hit us, where we were, so that sort of started, 'Oh, dear!'. However, I was then on ambulances right through the Doodlebug era until the V2s, which were the ones that used to come over and just drop. Not the actual V1s which were the Doodlebugs, which looked like a little aeroplane coming across, and you could see it coming and then it stopped... and just dropped. Anyway, that was horrific. I must say that driving an ambulance at that time, we went to the most horrific things, which I'm not going to go into detail because it's a thing that's there and you know, you always remember but it's a long, long time ago and that was really terrible and I was there for eighteen months to two years.

SB: During this time, did you stop all forms of training? Or singing?

JB: Oh yes. Absolutely. I mean, you were – we hardly slept for a year – I mean, we used to catnap sometimes or sit in our ambulances or in our rest room. We had a huge house in London, which had been taken over by the army. All the ambulance drivers of that area. The army ambulances. I had this great huge ambulance.

SB: But did you have any nights off? Or any form of entertainment at all?

JB: No. You occasionally got 48 hours, and I shall never forget the first 48 hours because Welwyn was only 20 minutes on the train from King's Cross and I remember my first 48 hours - or I think it was only 24 hours to start with - and I remember getting on the train and going home and we'd had a pretty horrific week. It was the first time I'd ever experienced all the dreadful things that happened, and I got on the train and I went home and I had my own key and I got to the house. It was early afternoon and I put the key in the door – went to the door and there was nobody there and I went into the living room and I sat down and I cried for a solid hour. Wept my heart out, I absolutely was so keyed up and tense.

SB: Mmm.

JB: I just cried my eyes out and I felt OK then and I went back and carried on. And then I had 48 hours every month, I think. But you were only allowed to stay in it for I think it was eighteen months or two years and then suddenly, the Commanding Officer said, 'Right, you're off to Cambridge', and I got to Cambridge to another requisitioned house.

It was a beautiful – it was hot weather, lovely weather - and we used to sit in the garden and sort of loll about and I kept going to the board and seeing when I was on duty because I thought I was going to another unit and I kept saying... and eventually after about four days I went and said, 'When am I on duty?' and they said, 'You're not on duty. You're resting after your experience in London. You rest here. We'll tell you when you're right to go back on duty'. And I was there a couple of weeks and then they sent me on leave for a week – home – and then I got back and they said, 'Right, now we'll give you some work', and then I was driving Staff cars, driving officers about the country for a time.

JB: Well, the fact was that at the end of the War. The War ended in August 1945. The end of the whole thing. August 1945. And I was actually at a place in Hertfordshire, actually Buntingford.

SB: Oh, yes.

JB: My house now is called Buntingford House. I was sent there because it was a sort of out-station where you went and I was the Doctor's driver because we had an M.I. room, which was a Medical Inspection room and another little house – nothing to do with the unit: it was a REME (Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers) unit, we weren't anything to do with it. There were a couple of drivers and I was the Doctor's driver and I drove a small Staff car, I had an ambulance and I had to look after them and we lived in this house and we just had to go where the Doctor had to go. So, I was there with a girl who was the secretary of the M.I. room and I don't know what happened or how it happened but we had a party or something and somebody said – No, I happened to say I was at the Guildhall and I used to sing – and at this party this girl said to me, 'Oh, go on, sing because we want some entertainment', so I went up and somebody played the piano – I can't remember who – and I happened to sing and this girl said to me, 'You're mad!', I said, 'What do you mean?' She said, 'Why aren't you in Stars in Battledress?', and I said, 'What do you mean?' and so she said, 'There's Stars in Battledress. It's at Army Entertainments and now the War is over, you can easily get in'. I mean, during the War it was only occasionally they'd say, 'well, you can go and you can go' but it all depended what you were doing - I mean, there's no way I'd have got on while I was in London with the Doodlebugs, whatever I did. And, she said, 'Why don't you have an audition?' and I said, 'How do I do that?', and she said, 'Oh, you write to the... I know about all this'.

So, I wrote to them and they gave me an audition and I went up to London one day and sang a couple of songs and they said, 'You're in'. So then, I had to leave Buntingford, and my Commanding Officer at the time came and picked me up and took me to London. So I went in and I was there and I was told I was staying in this small hotel place, which had also been taken over by the army, of course. So anyway, I had a chat with the Officer who was in charge of the unit that I went to and he said, 'Well, we're sending a show over to Germany' – it was just after the War – 'And we're getting this show together and we'd like you to be in it'. So I said, 'Oh yes, OK. Fine'. So anyway, they had all the things. The sketches, scripts, the songs they wanted us to do, all these sort of thing, so we started rehearsing - all these people that they'd picked for this particular show – and we all got in this room and in walked two young men and I thought, 'Mmm, they're all right', you know, 'Good!', and they said, 'These are the Barbour Brothers' and Roy Barbour Junior had been in India in the army for quite a while and Peter Barbour had been in Germany during the war. He went over on D-Day etc. and almost at the end he was asked to get together a Concert Party because he was the only person who'd ever been anything to do with show business because his parents were both in show business and grandparents – they were a show business family. So he

was asked to get this thing together and he had a band and everything and he had a very good show going. And Roy wanted to come home from India, applied to Stars in Battledress and got hold of Peter and said, 'Why don't you come into Stars in Battledress with me and we can do an act together, like we used to before the War?'. As youngsters, you know, they were in show business and they used to do things before the War started. And, so Peter wasn't keen, not a bit, because he was on a very good thing where he was and he was in a nice house and so anyway, Roy eventually talked him into going into Stars in Battledress and so to cut another story short, they both appeared this day, for this show. So, we rehearsed this show. We took it to a few places in England to entertain some army camps – some army places – I think we toured and did about half a dozen towns.

SB: So, who else was in the show? So, they were like a double comedy...

JB: They were double comedy. There was a girl that tap-danced and did... a sort of dancing girl. There was a musician – Oh, we had a band, a four-piece band and there was a girl that did sketches and things – an actress – Joan Marshall – she was an actress and then there was Winnie Bell who was also a dancer and they used to – in scenes and things – they used to back scenes and all that sort of thing. I was the soubrette, well, singer really, I didn't do a great deal of dancing only sort of bits but I did all the vocal stuff in it and there was another boy – male singer – I think he only sang and he and I used to do some duets and things like that - together - and as far as I can remember, there was a magician, I think, at one period of time but I don't think he stayed very long. But anyway, we got this show together and off we went to Germany, which of course was quite amazing because you know, the places we used to go to. I mean, you could smell – the places were smashed to pieces, obviously... bombed out of existence and it was pretty amazing to see all this and anyway, obviously our army were out there in great force so we travelled every night. Oh, I know...we had a coach and a driver...

SB: Oh.

JB: ... who used to drive us everywhere. We were stationed in [pause] a place called Hareford and we had a requisitioned house there with servants –you know, Germans - working for us and we had lovely rooms, I always remember and every day we were taken to these outstations, to the army. Sometimes it was hours travelling.

SB: Really? So, it was all over Germany?

JB: Hours and hours. All over Germany. And it was quite hard work actually, because we got there and we had to set up, you know, and do all the sort of things you do if you're doing a one night stand, but we had to do this every night and we had scenery – only little bits of cut-out scenery - and so we had to do that and get it organised.

SB: And how long did that show go on for?

JB: Well, the show went on for about eighteen months and we came home once after a year to have a little bit of a break. We had a couple of weeks in England and then we went back again and then after eighteen months we were all ready to be demobbed, you see.

SB: Was that like 194... what? Seven or eight?

JB: I'll tell you. '48, yes, end of '48.

SB: So, what happened after you came back to England? You got demobbed?

JB: We got demobbed. Well, during the show, I got friendly with one of the Barbour Brothers, Peter Barbour. And, when we came home to England - I mean, he lived in Blackpool and I lived in Welwyn Garden City - but we sort of... Oh no, I know what

happened. He said, 'Oh well, we'll be in touch', he said, 'We'll go home and... I'll come down to London...' arranging to meet and see each other. But when I got home it was a case of 'Now then, have I any clothes to wear?' and 'What...?' and while we were in Germany, Peter was.... having been there for so long, he knew all the ropes - of how to get things and Black Market, I'm afraid it was... he got me a beautiful piece - well, roll - of material. It was a sort of orangey colour - beautiful sort of linen-y material because somebody wanted something that he had, and they said, 'What would you like in exchange?' - it was that sort of thing...

SB: Yes.

JB: ... Exchange. So, he said, 'What have you got?' and they happened to have this and he said, 'Oh, I'll have that then', and he gave it to me and I hadn't seen anything like that for years, you know, because everything was on coupon. So... got home... and it was a case of, 'What am I going to wear?' The family saved up their coupons and bought me a lovely coat and - it was a beautiful emerald green, I remember - beautiful coat it was, and all sorts of things and I got together some clothes and I had this material made up into a skirt and a coat and trousers, all to match, and I got myself a white blouse from somewhere in London - with my coupons - and anyway, so I got these things and I thought, 'Oh, I've got things to wear and that's fine', and I had a phone call from Blackpool saying, 'Would you like to come up and have a holiday in Blackpool, for a week?' So, I thought, 'Ooh, that's alright', so I said to my family, 'I'm going up to Blackpool for a week'. Now, had that been before the war, I'm not even sure if I'd be allowed to go [laughs] but, you know...

SB: Did they consider 'the North' to be a bit...

JB: Well, no, it was nothing to do with the North because half of them were Northerners anyway.

SB: Oh, yes.

JB: In the past, if you know what I mean? Oh no, it was nothing to do with that but it was to do with, 'was it a nice thing for a nice girl to do?'

SB: Oh yes.

JB: To go off to somebody they'd never even met!

SB: And did you say they were in show business?

JB: Yes. [Both laugh] Which was even more sort of, 'Oh!' However, what could they say? I'd been off on my own now for years, I mean, I was an adult at eighteen, believe me! I grew up overnight...

SB: Mmm.

JB: ...going into the army.

SB: So, did you think - when you came back - did you intend to carry on in show business?

JB: Well, having been in Stars in Battledress and having mixed with the Barbours I had great hopes there.

SB: Mmm.

JB: But, the other thing I thought about was that I should do it on my own. I shouldn't say 'because I'm with them they'll give me a ... [job] in their show' because Roy Barbour, father Barbour, was a well-known Star - not only in the North - he was known

up here, he was a Northern Star and he ran his own shows and he had the show every year in Blackpool, in the days when they had fourteen live shows every summer in Blackpool. Blackpool was the hub of show business then, after London. Blackpool was THE place to be. They lived there and he owned a theatre there and he worked himself and ran the theatre too. And he used to play all the big theatres all over the North. I mean, he came South now and again, but he was so well-known up there and he lived up there and he wanted to stay up there mainly so I knew that I could get into a Barbour show, a Roy Barbour show, which was... but I thought, no, I don't want to do it that way. But, I didn't know how or what, and it wasn't – I'll go back on the fact that I was asked if I'd want to go Blackpool.

SB: Right.

JB: I was asked if I wanted to go to Blackpool for a week. The Barbours had a lovely house in Blackpool and I went to all the shows in Blackpool. I was taken out every night and day and had a rare old time that week. And anyway, I had the week, then I went home and I thought, one day – I was thinking I ought to go up to London because I needed to get some things that I couldn't get in Welwyn. So, I'd get the train, which as I said only took twenty minutes to Kings Cross and I was dressed in my new clothes which I'd had in Blackpool – and everyone had said, 'where did you get that... where did you get that? Where did you get those clothes?' [Laughs] - because they were very striking – so, anyway, I had the skirt, the white blouse, the shoes and the coat and I got on the train and I happened to get in a carriage and sit.... I sat next to a boy who wasn't at my school but I'd known him quite well in the town and we got talking. So, he said, 'What are you doing? Where are you going? Where have you been?' and I said, 'I've come out of the army' and he said, 'Oh, yes' and what he was doing and he said, 'Actually, I'm just going up to London to do an audition'. So I said, 'Oh, that's interesting, where is it?'. He said, 'At the Palace Theatre'. I said, 'Oh, what's it for?' He said, 'Ivor Novello's *The Dancing Years*'. I said, 'Oh, I love that show. It's lovely, isn't it?' He said, 'Yes. Only they want boys and girls for the chorus'. So I said, 'Oh, that's interesting'. So he said, 'Yes'. So, I said, 'Oh, I've been in Stars in Battledress', so, he said, 'Why don't you come to the audition?' I said, 'Oh, no, I don't think so. I was coming up to London to...'. He said, 'Come with me and have a look and then you'll know what it's all about'. So, I found myself there, giving my name to the person at the door and everything and in I went. And they wanted eight girls and ten men and we went in and there was a queue of about 100 and something people and I thought, 'What am I doing here'. Anyway, as I said, I went in and gave my name because he was there and I said, 'Oh, I don't think I want to stand here' and he said, 'Oh, come on, don't be silly!'. Anyway, I went in and it came to me and I don't like to say this, but I'm sure that the striking colour of my clothes got the eye of the - because I thought, not the fact that I was picked out, because I went as a... but I went and I stood straight in the middle of that stage and there were two songs that I used to sing at auditions and every time I sang those two songs – for Stars in Battledress and for things – for parties, you know if everybody said – two songs I sang because I knew they would always go down well.

SB: What songs were those?

JB: "Lover" ...

SB: Oh, yes.

JB: and "The Moment I Saw You".

SB: Oh, yes.

JB... which was, at the time, top of the Hit Parade. And I went in and I stood up and I sang "Lover" and most people sang one [song] and they said, 'Can you sing another

song?' and I said, 'Yes', and I had my music – I didn't have my music, sorry, of course I didn't have any music – they said, 'What...?' - I said, 'I haven't any music' and they... That's right, that's right! Because I said to him, 'I can't go I haven't any music' and he said, 'They'll find you some music' so I said, "'Lover'" and everybody knew 'Lover' and the pianist said, 'Oh, yes, I know "Lover". What key?' and I said what key and I said, "The Moment I Saw You", which was top of the Hit Parade thing - they didn't have a Hit Parade then, but it was top of the charts - so he played that and they said, 'Yes, OK, you're in'. So, I thought, 'I don't know whether I want to be in!' It was for the tour and I thought, 'God, I don't want to go on tour!' and I thought, 'What have I done here?' and I said, 'You know, you've got me right...'. However, you had to go and speak to somebody afterwards about this and they said, 'We're happy to have you and you start rehearsals on such and such a day' and I thought, 'Oh, blimey! [Both laugh] This is ridiculous'. So, anyway, he got in too. So both of us went back to Welwyn Garden City and I said, 'Oh, my God!' so, anyway, I went in and they said, 'Hello, dear. Had a nice day?' [both laugh] and I said, 'Yes, sort of', and they said, 'What do you mean, sort of?' and I said, 'I've got myself into *The Dancing Years*' and they said, 'You what!' I said, 'Yes, and it's a tour' and they said, 'Is that what you want to do?' and I said, 'No, but I'm in, I've got it. I may as well start somewhere!'. So, they said, 'Well, it's great. It's a marvellous show and you actually got in' and I said, 'I'm only in the chorus'. And they said, 'Well, that doesn't matter, I mean there are only eight of you!' [laughs]. So, in I went and I did the tour and I had to tell Peter Barbour that I was now going on tour and he said, 'Oh, crikey, are you really?' I said, 'Yes'. Anyway, to cut a long story short, he asked me to marry him. So, I said, 'Well, I'm... going on tour'. He said, 'Well, that's alright', he said, 'You can get a week off in November' – and this was the spring – he said, 'We'll get married on my birthday, November 5th'. And I said, 'Oh, alright!' [both laugh]. I said, 'Oh, all right'. Then I had to go to my family and say, 'By the way, I'm getting married!' and they said, 'Oh....' [laughs] and I remember my uncle saying...

SB: Which uncle was this?

JB: That was Uncle Harry who was my mother's sister's husband with whom we had lived since my mother died.

SB: So, Harry Minton.

JB: Harry Minton. Because my mother had died when I was just six and we went to live with them because my father had asked us if we wanted to live with him and a housekeeper or with my aunt and uncle. Well, we had always been with my aunt and uncle. We lived near them. We were always on holiday with them. We were in their house all the time, so obviously, they hadn't got any children of their own and they wanted us to go and live with them and we lived with them. And, they were wonderful to us and it was because of them that we went to Welwyn Garden City.

SB: Oh, right. So, you had to tell them, then?

JB: I had to tell them and I said to my uncle... and he said, 'Have you any other surprises up your sleeve? [Both laugh] First you tell us you're in the army, then Stars in Battledress, then you're out of the army, then you're up to Blackpool with someone we've never even met and now you're getting married! Anything else?! [JB: laughs]. So, to cut a long story short... I did the tour...

SB: And did you tour everywhere?

JB: We went to all the Number 1 theatres and it was a lot of the sort of main theatres in the towns because... like in Leeds and Manchester and places there were the Opera House type theatres and the others and we were always at the Opera House type theatres.

SB: Yes. Like the Empires and Hippodromes?

JB: Yes, in *The Dancing Years* we were always at the grand theatres...

SB: In Leeds?

JB: Yes, in Leeds. And anyway, we did these and I took a week off to get married. And, my sister, poor thing, who was at home at the time, had all the arrangements to do for my wedding. I did absolutely nothing. She organised the dress, she organised everything else and I used to pop home at weekends to try things on. I didn't do absolutely anything and all the Barbours came haring down from Blackpool. Oh and incidentally they had met, because when we got engaged originally my uncle said, 'Right, we're going to meet these people'. So, he booked us into a hotel in Preston, the big hotel with all the gardens – I can't remember the name – and the Barbours came over that afternoon and we had a meal at night and we walked round the gardens and it was warmish weather and everything and there was my sister and she had, by then, got a little boy of two, they came. All the Barbours: mother, father, Roy, Peter and Geoffrey, who was the youngest and at school, still. And they all came over and that's how we all met and that was fine. And the next time they met was at our wedding.

SB: So, while you were in *The Dancing Years*, what was Peter doing?

JB: Ah, now... what was Peter doing? Peter was doing a Summer Season in Blackpool and then they did pantomime at Leeds and Bradford and when we actually got married - this was the year they did pantomime for Emile Littler - not Emile Littler...

SB: Francis Laidler?

JB: Francis Laidler - at Bradford and when they were at Bradford and when they were at Bradford I was at Manchester with *The Dancing Years*. So I used to go over at weekends because when we did *The Dancing Years* we didn't only go for one week, we went for three weeks or two weeks... longer than the odd week, so I popped over to Bradford and I remember the second time I went over to Bradford, Peter said to me, 'This is ridiculous', he said, 'This is absolutely ridiculous. You'll have to leave *The Dancing Years*', he said, 'I mean, you know, it's barmy'. He said, 'We got married and we never see each other'. So, I said, 'Yes, yes it is mad' So anyway, I went back to *Dancing Years* and gave in my notice and I had to give them, I think, a month's notice. So, I left *The Dancing Years* and then I was out of work! And I felt redundant, you know. And, of course, the pantomimes were twenty-week-long runs. I mean they were long, long runs.

SB: Were they two shows a day?

JB: Oh, yes. Yes, it was a jolly hard – in fact, what we used to do when I got back into the business in the pantomime and Summer Shows, because then we went into the same shows.

SB: Oh right.

JB: Peter and I. And managed to sort of do that. And I remember, at one time, when I wasn't in the pantomime – it was that year, I think – when I got into the Summer Show that they were coming into. I did an audition and got into the show that they were coming into, at Llandudno.

SB: Who was that for? Do you remember?

JB: Yes, it was for...

SB: Catlin's?

JB: Catlin's.

SB: Oh right.

JB: Catlin's and they were going into the show and I got into the show and I went, before they'd come out of pantomime, to rehearse the Summer Show.

SB: Oh, really?

JB: And they came, I think, a couple of days before the opening night. Out of the pantomime straight into the Season. And this happened, at that time and you were never out of work. One overlapped [the other] sometimes, which was awkward because they used to get very uppity about this but you know that's how it was.

SB: And when you stayed in Llandudno, where did you stay accommodation-wise?

JB: We always had a flat.

SB: Did you?

JB: Yes. We always had a flat because it was easier and relations used to come and stay, so it was easier.

SB: And did you all... the three of you... or was that just you and Peter, had a flat?

JB: No, no... Oh, yes, yes had the flat. But the three of us were in the show. Peter, Roy and me, and I wasn't anything to do with the Barbour Brothers then. I was the Soprano.

SB: Yes. So you were in the show and you and Peter had the flat. What did Roy do?

JB: Oh, he had digs. Oh yes, because he wanted to be sort of looked after. He didn't want to be... so anyway.

SB: That was a long Summer Season.

JB: It was a very long Summer Season. And that was 1949. You see 1948, '49... Just a minute, it must have been the end of 1947 when I went into *The Dancing Years*. I must have been demobbed the end of '47. Do you know, it's awful...

SB: Well, anyway, I can look up when the shows were.

JB: Anyway, the whole thing was that we did that Summer Season in Llandudno in 1949 and you were born in 1950.

SB: Right, so you must have been... Oh, no. Summer Season. You didn't do pantomime that year, then?

JB: No.

SB: You were pregnant.

JB: Yes.

SB: OK.

JB: No, hang on. Actually, strange as it may seem, we did the Summer Season and when we came out of the Summer Season we went on tour with a Roy Barbour show because he needed an act etc etc and I went in the show as well. We went on tour for a while and I worked right up until about... I worked for the first six months that I was pregnant.

SB: Oh did you?

JB: Yes. And, then I came out...

SB: And with Roy Barbour – the tour – how did you travel in those days?

JB: By train.

SB: By train.

JB: Well, everybody did in those days... Unless you were a millionaire!

SB: Oh really?

JB: Mmm.

SB: And what happened about props and all that kind of thing?

JB: Well, you just had all your props and bunged them in the wotsit van on the train and...

SB: Luggage... I've forgotten what it was called!

JB: The train... You know, where they used to put everything on the train. Gosh it's such a long time...

SB: But they used to have a guard, didn't they?

JB: Oh, yes.

SB: The guard's van.

JB: Guard's van. That's right. They all used to go in the guard's van. But everybody – if you were in a show – in *The Dancing Years* we travelled on the train, every single weekend. Nobody had cars, except for the Star. You know, we didn't have the money to have a car.

SB: The Company paid for the train fares, didn't they?

JB: Oh yes. Roy Barbour, who of course who was a Star... had two cars! [Both laugh]. We didn't have a car. I mean, Roy Barbour Senior.

SB: What sort of car did he have?

JB: He had all sorts, over the years, but when we got married... Oh, gosh... he had a Packard, which was a great big thing, took about eight people... well, six or seven. It was a great big car. It was a Packard. And he had a very up-market Lagonda, which was a very smart, sort of sporty car. He had a driver, in those days, called Henry. Henry used to pick us up and take us all over the place, you know, when we were sort of near them or in the same town and we used to go in at night or something, old Henry used to pick us up. But, that was earlier on because he had another smaller car than the Packard, I think he had a Rover that Henry used to pick us up. But I remember that we started doing pantomimes for Littler, you know, Emile Littler.

SB: Yes.

JB: He was the King of Pantomimes then - took over from everybody else - and he had the main pantomimes and we had a contract with him, which is a sort of... another story, because we had a six year contract with him.

SB: Really?

JB: Peter, Roy and I. We had a six year contract with Emile Littler and the thing that is another story which I'll probably tell you some other time was that we went to South Africa - Folies Bergere Revue - Folies 1952 - That's right, it was at the Prince of Wales, in London, 1952 and I didn't go into the show then because you were only small. But in 1953...

SB: So where was it in London?

JB: The Prince of Wales.

SB: Right.

JB: And in 1952 when you were two and a half, the show went to South Africa and I went with it and left you with my aunt and uncle in London. And we went... but, talking of Emile Littler, we were in the show for six months and it came to pantomime time and Littler forced us to go back to Oxford because we were booked in Oxford to do pantomime and the show stayed out there for another six months and we had to come home. And another thing that happened...

SB: He wouldn't release you?

JB: He wouldn't, no! He wouldn't release us, and the following year we went to Australia and he brought us back from Australia to do a pantomime, can you believe that? No way... he wouldn't release us at all, from any of the six years even though we said we'd do an extra year. He said, 'No, because the pantomimes are set and they move from town to town with the people and your act in it, is one of the main things' and we all did parts as well. So, we didn't only do an act, we did parts and he wouldn't replace us. He said, 'No, I can't go to all that trouble, you've got to come home'. So we were absolutely furious. However...

SB: So, was it the same sort of subject for the six years or different subjects?

JB: They were different subjects but what had happened was that we did, say, *Jack and Jill* or... I'm trying to think of all the pantomimes... they were not... we did, say, three years of three different pantomimes and then the next three were the same pantomimes that we had done, moved to different places. It was all rather complicated, but anyway, we weren't very pleased at the time.

SB: This is Part Two of my interview with Jean Barbour. Jean, I just want to go back to, you were talking about the Emile Littler Pantomimes and going back, before the Follies Bergere, just after I was born, how did you come to be in the act 'The Barbour Brothers and Jean' having been a solo performer. What was the point that you became a member of the act?

JB: Well, the point was... When you were born, I obviously stopped working for a couple of years, to look after you. And we were actually living in London and my aunt and uncle moved from Welwyn to St. Albans and we decided that they had a house there and we were staying there for a time, and then we had talked about it and we were looking for a house nearer London because at the time the boys were in London more than anywhere else and so we were looking for a house in London and we found one in Woodside Park and my aunt and uncle came and lived in our house and looked after you because I decided to go back into the business, obviously it was better for me to do that because I mean we needed the money at the time anyway – it was useful. So, they came and stayed and looked after you and they were marvellous with you and absolutely adored you and so that was fine and so after about two and a half years the Follies were on and during the time that I was at home looking after you, Peter said to me, 'Unless, you come into the act we're not going to be able to work together we're going to be apart all the time. You know, it's not always going to be easy to get you in the shows that we're in' and he said that, 'You really are going to have to come into the act'. I said, 'You're joking! Doing the stilts and everything?' and he said, 'Yes. Yes, your balance is good, I think I could easily teach you the act'. And after a lot of gentle persuasion... we used to go down to a hall at Woodside Park – it was a sort of hall – and he taught me the stilts. So, you know, it was a case of walking and hanging onto ropes and things to start with – to walk – and then the odd sort of step, and then gradually learning and it took about a year to get...

SB: Because I've just realised that we didn't ever speak about... Did Peter and Roy ever do the stilts in Stars in Battledress?

JB: Oh, yes.

SB: So, they'd always done...

JB: They'd always done that. They actually did the stilts... They were in London at the age of sixteen with an act and they started doing the stilt sort of thing in this act.

SB: Was that The Astairs?

JB: Yes. The Astairs. This was when they sort of left school and went into show business. And with them, they did a staircase dancing act and then they did the stilts and then Peter did a lot more stilts and thought it was ever so clever if he could go up and down steps so he made them have a staircase made so that he could do the stilts up and down steps so... he did that and that was the first time that had been done. And anyway... so, they had done the stilts so they both did their own stilts in their own various things abroad.

SB: So, they were stilt dancers rather [than stilt walkers]?

JB: Yes. They were Stilt Dancers. They were the only stilt actual dancers, at that time, ever, so...

SB: So, you'd actually seen them work doing the stilts? So, you knew...

JB: Oh, I knew. Oh, yes... I knew what I was in for.... Oh, yes! [Both laugh]

JB: Yes, I did and I thought, 'This is ridiculous, I'll never be able to do that in a hundred years!' and he said, 'Well, you're a dancer, so why can't you dance on stilts?'. Ha, ha! [Both laugh]. Anyway to cut a long story short: By the time the Folies Bergere Revue was going to South Africa, Peter said to Bernard Delfont, 'I want my wife in the act' and he said, 'Oh, do you?' He said, 'Yes'. He said, 'All right, let me see her work'. So, we went down to the Prince of Wales Theatre one day and I did things with Peter, you know, the steps and everything. The only thing I didn't do was the One-Legged [hopping on one leg, swinging]. They did that and I stood at the back, like that, to present them doing the one-legged, because I didn't do that. I could just about do it but I wasn't good enough to do it in a show. So, anyway I did it and he said, 'Oh, that might be quite nice, to have a girl in the act and she can work with you on the ground in the opening'. All the acts went on did a bit and I was in the middle and we did a dance in the opening in these gorgeous costumes and we did a dance just to come in and introduce who we were etc. and they made us beautiful things to wear and so I was in, with that and so that was fine and then I was in the act, went over to Africa.

SB: Because... is that when Geoffrey left the act?

JB: Yes. He had left the act before that actually and they were on their own. That's why Peter said, 'Well, he's gone, what about my wife coming in?' and he said, 'Let me see her work'. So, anyway we did it on the stage and all that sort of thing so... We did it and I was in it and I did it actually for a little while before we went to get me into the act etc. and then we got on a boat and went to Africa.

SB: So, how did you feel when you first started it?

JB: Terrified.

SB: Were you?

JB: Smiling all the time, of course! But, no... I thought I was confident enough, by then, after a year of practicing. I mean, you've got to get to the stage where the stilts... well, you know only too well... when you feel that the stilts are your legs.

SB: I was terrified when I first did it.

JB: Yes. Of course. I was. Absolutely terrified. But then, after a while and with the audience and everything and you get more confidence...

SB: Mmm.

JB: And then I got into the one-legged and I got to be... It was easy.

SB: Mmm.

JB: But, it takes time. I mean it isn't a thing that you do overnight.

SB: No.

JB: But, it was fine and then we went to Africa, as I said and Emile Littler dragged us back again. Because I was then going into the pantomime on stilts as well. Playing a part. We were all playing parts.

SB: But, you'd never done an Emile Littler Pantomime before you joined the act? Had you?

JB: No.

SB: Right. So, you came back from Africa, did the Emile Littler Pantomime and then, was that when you went to Australia?

JB: Erm, no, not immediately. I think we did the... well, come to think of it...

SB: You probably did something else because I came to Australia and I was five or six.

JB: That's right. You were five when we went to Australia. So, yes we did something else and then we got Australia. The people... It's like when you went to America... they came to England to look for acts.

SB: Yes.

JB: Saw your act so you got to America. Well, it was like that... they came over from Australia looking for acts, saw our act and wanted us in Australia. So, we went to Australia and did a show there and you had your sixth - We were there a year - and you had your sixth birthday in Australia.

SB: Right. And then you came back from Australia

JB: ...and went straight to America to do the Ed Sullivan Show, by which time I was well rehearsed... into the act and like it was my legs.

SB: And you worked in a club in New York, as well?

JB: We did the Latin Quarter on Broadway for a month.

SB: The man that owned that... his daughter, Barbara Walters is a famous TV presenter - like the David Frost of America - Barbara Walters [Lou Walters].

JB: That's right. Yes.

SB: So, you were in America. So, in other words, you were a Speciality Act that started travelling?

JB: Yes.

SB: and so, obviously, one of our best! You came back to England to... another Emile Littler Pantomime?

JB: Yes, we did. Yes, that's right. We did the whole six years with him. [Laughs] And actually, the funny thing about it was the last year, Roy Barbour was starring in Leeds at the Empire... no... he was starring in Leeds at the Theatre Royal and we were at the Empire for Emile Littler and he was at the Theatre Royal for somebody else... I can't remember who it was

SB: Was it Francis Laidler?

JB: Francis Laidler, yes, but I don't know whether it was Francis Laidler then... I think Francis Laidler... It must...

SB: I'll have a look.

JB: It could have been him still.

SB: So, you were all in the same town?

JB: We were all in the same town so, you know. I was talking about him the other day. That Roy Barbour Senior used to take us all out for lunch at various hotels all round the Yorkshire Moors and there was something in the paper about the Devonshire Arms Hotel at... there again, I can't remember but I'll look it up.

SB: It was in Yorkshire.

JB: Yes, in Yorkshire. He used to take us to these lovely places with all these lovely views. These beautiful hotels for Sunday Lunch and we all used to go out every weekend. We were there for twenty weeks again.

SB: So, now... what about digs? Were you in separate places?

JB: Oh yes. Yes. Peter and I and you were in one lot of digs. Marie and Roy had... I think they had a house or half a house and Roy was somewhere else. We never actually lived in the same place.

SB: No.

JB: But we saw each other a lot. At least...

SB: So, I was with you for that pantomime?

JB: You were with us then.

SB: So, who looked after me, during the show?

JB: Well, it was the holidays, you see.

SB: But who looked after me? Nobody? I was in the theatre?

JB: You were in the theatre. Because you were at the age when you were all right in the theatre. Everybody looked after you in the theatre. You know, who wasn't on stage. You were in everybody's dressing room.

SB: And in those days, children were allowed to stand on the side of the stage, weren't they?

JB: Oh, yes, of course they were. Oh gosh, yes.

SB: Because now with health and safety...

JB: ... they're not allowed to? That's sad, isn't it?

SB: Mmm.

JB: Because you learn an awful lot from that - from a young age. Oh, yes... you were up to your eyes...

SB: Did you find that children that were allowed on the side of the stage... they were sort of well behaved? Or they knew...

JB: Oh, they were well behaved. Show business kids in those days - I mean I don't know now - but in those days, were well behaved because they knew they had to be and they knew that it was important and also it was so interesting to them. They stood there because they wanted to see the acts, not because they wanted to mess about and you know scream and cry or throw things. It was because they were interested in the acts. You were fascinated with all the acts, especially if they had a magic act.

SB: Really?

JB: Yes. You were absolutely enthralled with Magic Acts. I remember one Christmas we had a Magic Act [in the pantomime] and you insisted on having a set of magic stuff. Oh God what a mess we were always in! All these grubby old bits of things... You used to say, 'I can do that... and that and that'. You used to try them out on us... Of course, they hardly ever worked but anyway... [Both laugh]

SB: I could have been a Comedy Magic Act.

JB: You could have been, yes. You could have been all sorts of things actually.

SB: So, I mean, it was perfectly normal for a child to be in the theatre and backstage?

JB: Oh yes. Yes. And usually, we stayed in digs where the landlady was used to show biz people leaving their kids with them at night. And in Leeds, occasionally, if you were tired or anything, our landlady used to look after you at night. You used to be in with them for half an hour and they used to put you to bed and all that sort of thing. And you know they were absolutely great and we knew these people because you used to stay... You used to get digs in each town that you stayed in - if you could get in - but if you knew well in advance and you used to write to them usually... I mean you didn't sort of ring everybody...

SB: No.

JB: .... in those days. You used to write to them. And they used to say, 'Yes, yes come'. And so we knew the people we stayed with and we always had pretty good digs. Only occasionally, if we suddenly went somewhere late, you know and it was late and all the decent digs had gone and then it was... [laughs]

SB: I do remember one digs story you told me about some digs that Arthur Worsley had... stayed for years. Can you just relate that story to me?

JB: Yes, well, Arthur. We used to stay in digs with Arthur quite often because in the latter days of Variety, Arthur Worsley, Ted Rogers, Peter and I, and probably another comic or an act of some kind used to be put in with Stars that come over from America as their backing to make sure that the show went, because they were all different acts. You know, each act was completely different and it would back the Star that came over from America. So, we used to go... So we were often doing a Variety tour with people like Frank Ifield - all those sorts of people who were big names then and they were all - most of them - very, very nice anyway and so we were put in a sort of tour with these people from town to town and we were always together and in the same digs. And when we got to these digs that Arthur had stayed in since he was a boy - because Arthur didn't go into the Army, because he wasn't completely fit, his health wasn't 100%. To go into the Army you had to have nothing wrong with you at all ever. You had to be fighting fit, in other words. Arthur started in the business as a very young boy

– 16 or something – 17? So, he started in the business and he worked all through the war, in the business, so he knew all the digs, all the people, everything. So, by the time we came out of the army and got into the business, Arthur had the best digs so anyway Arthur always used to say, 'I'll get you in my digs - I'll get you in my digs'. Anyway, we went somewhere or other and he said, 'I've got the best digs in the town here', he said, 'You must stay in them'. So, anyway he said, 'I'll fix them'. So, he phoned this landlady, fixed us all up there. Fixed us there and we got there and we were all shown our rooms. Peter and I had a plush room – beautiful room – very nice so we said, 'Goodness, Arthur knows what he's talking about... here'. So, we went down – I think, on a Sunday we had a sort of evening meal - and we sat there, we were talking and everything else and we said, 'Oh, these are good digs' and I said, 'Well, Arthur, of course you know you are the number 1 pet of all these digs, I mean you've stayed here forever, you are the favourite lodger', I said, 'No wonder you've got gorgeous digs like this'. So, he said, 'Oh, yes, yes they're very good' and the food was great. It was nicely laid out and beautiful napkins and all sorts of thing. It was all... perfect and the food was excellent and I said, 'Oh, this is lovely. You must have a marvellous room in this house, I mean; you're the 'pet'. Our room's great. Where are you? He said, 'Would you really like to know?' so we said, 'Yes'. So he said, 'All right, I'll show you'. So, he took us up to the next flight of stairs – upstairs – and there were a couple of rooms up there and then we went up another flight of stairs – which were sort of wooden-y stairs – and Peter looked at me and I looked at him and we followed one after the other and he [Arthur] opened the door at the top and in this room there was a... Well, it wasn't really a room – it was a sort of a room with a water tank [SB: laughs] in it and underneath this water tank was a little single bed, with a little box thing at the side of it and a couple of coat hangers hanging on a thing on the wall and he said, 'That's my bed!' and we said, 'You're joking!'. He said, "No, I'm not. I am the favourite lodger and if anybody else – I said someone else was coming - they get the best room and I'm up in the attic!" and he said, 'And I haven't had a wink's sleep because the water tank... [Both laugh] keeps banging every five minutes over my head', and he said, "So that's... I'm favourite am I?"

SB: Oh dear!

JB: God, we couldn't get over it. I said, 'This is terrible, have we got your room?' He said, 'Yes' [Both laugh]. Oh dear!

SB: Oh dear! Do you remember any other digs, in particular? The bad or good?

JB: Oh, we had some good digs and we had some grotty digs. We had some digs where I walked in – and they were in London – actually, strangely enough, in a very nice part of London, at Kew, you know? Near Kew Gardens. Kew.

SB: Mmm.

JB: We went into these digs and we walked into the kitchen for some reason or other and there was a fire and some sort of stands round the fire with sheets on them and I thought, 'Oh, they're the sheets that they've taken off and she's washed them for next week' – you know, for next week after we've gone – so anyway, we went upstairs and we were going to the theatre to see that our stuff was all right, that evening and it was a Sunday night and anyway, when we got back it was latish so we went up to bed. We got into bed and I said to Peter, 'These sheets are wet! They're not damp... they're wet!' And, the sheets that had been hanging around the thing, were the sheets that she'd put on our bed and they weren't dry. And it was quite late and I said, 'What are we going to do?' and he said, 'It's mad. We're...' I said, 'We can't.... They're in bed. What on earth can we do?' So, we put all our clothes back on again and our coats...our dressing gowns and coats and everything on and got into these sopping wet sheets... We must have been mad! I honestly... We should have... [both laugh]

SB: ...taken them off!

JB: We should have taken them off. This is what I say... slept on bare boards rather than that. Anyway, the next day I couldn't move – I had rheumatism – my back was aching - it was hurting me so much – I'd obviously got all this damp into my bones –and, of course, I've always been a bit susceptible to that sort of thing – and next day I was absolutely creased and somebody knew somebody that did massages and stuff and I crept almost bent in two because I thought, 'How am I going to work like this', and I had a massage and by a miracle, I actually did work but... and when I thought about it years later, I thought... We were young. I don't know why we put up with it. We used to put up with things in bad digs and sort of say, 'Oh, well they can't help it'. I mean, we were stupid. Most people would go raving mad and storm out of the house but we were, 'Oh well, you know... poor things, perhaps they haven't got any more sheets!' So barmy we were. We were as soft as putty – ridiculous – we used to put up with it. But, nine times out of ten we had really good digs. Very good digs.

SB: And when you did seasons, long seasons, I know we used to rent - have flats.

JB: Yes, we did have flats.

SB: Do you remember any of them?

JB: Well... because you were coming. I mean, you always came on your holidays. School holidays. And of course when you got to sort of nine, ten. I mean, when you went to...

SB: Well, when we got back from Australia, I went to Ealing to the Actor's... [Church Union].

JB: Ah, no I know what happened. We came home from Australia and we were told that we had to get on a boat in two days time to go to America to do the Ed Sullivan Television Show and we didn't know what to do with you and somebody said, 'There's a wonderful Actor's Church Union house and they look after the kids and they love it there. It's a wonderful place and the woman who runs it is great'. So, anyway, we got in touch with them... With here and they said, 'Yes, of course. Yes, we'll have her'. And you went to the Actor's Church Union Hostel, didn't you?

SB: Yes. And I think her name was Mrs. Parker.

JB: Oh, she was sweet. She was sort of an elderly lady, wasn't she? And she was so good to you kids and you were so happy there and the trouble was there... we came back and you wanted to stay and they shut it.

SB: Mmm.

JB: Something... Well, they obviously hadn't the money to keep it open. It was a shame because you were happy there. And then, I don't know...

SB: Because when did Snoo die? Before we went to Australia?

JB: Yes.

SB: So, you had to have somebody to look after me?

JB: Oh yes. Absolutely. Oh, you came to Australia. You were at a little school in Ealing.

SB: That was the Actor's Church Union.

JB: No, no, no.

SB: Yes, it was because we went to the house and...

JB: I beg your pardon, sorry, sorry...

SB: In Muswell Hill?

JB: Muswell Hill. Not Ealing, sorry. Muswell Hill. And it was a nice little school that... but the women was a bit of a ... well, she was hard. As hard as nails, that women...

SB: And I think I was the only boarder.

JB: I think you were, actually. At the time. But I always remember... what put me off suddenly was because I thought it was great it was nice and you weren't there for long and we went in one day and said, 'We're taking her to Australia' and she said, 'Oh, you haven't given me any notice'. So, we said, 'Well, we're terribly sorry but we can't because we are going on the boat two days time' or something.

SB: Oh yes.

JB: So, anyway we took you away from there.

SB: But, I do remember I loved the Actor's Church Union School.

JB: They were lovely.

SB: When it closed down...

JB: It was sad.

SB: It was then Watford... the Actor's... Watford. It had originally been the Orphanage but there weren't any Actor's Orphans so...

JB: No. So then you went there for a time. I don't think you were as happy there as the Actor's Church Union.

SB: No.

JB: Because, I think you were one of the younger ones and the older ones used to 'put on you'

SB: Mmm. They were bullies. Well, one of them was a bully.

JB: But then, I remember one of the teachers there said something about... When we picked you up she said something about, 'Oh I don't know why you're going to take her away because you won't be able to look after her' and all this sort of thing and I said, 'Well, if you don't mind she's my child and I'll do exactly what I like with her'. But I do remember that for a time...

SB: But that closed down as well.

JB: That closed down. But for a time you went over to Lowestoft to stay with your grandparents.

SB: I think that was for a term - when that closed down - for one term I went to Lowestoft.

JB: For a term and then we got you into Elmhurst Ballet School and actually, we took you from Lowestoft and we did a Summer Season at Morecambe and we were collecting all your clothes for Elmhurst and we had to have a trunk, your grandmother gave me her lovely trunk and it had your initials, we put on the front and we got everything they asked for on the list - it was strange, we went right through it and we got all the clothes for you - because you did an audition for Elmhurst and got in and... how old were you, nine? Eight, nine?

SB: Ten. Ten when I did the audition.

JB: Ten and then we took you to Elmhurst with your trunk and all your clothes and everything else and Miss Timmins was it wrote to us afterwards, I don't know why

because you said she was a little bit odd with you at times. And she said, 'You are the only people that have ever sent their child to this school with every single thing that was down on the list'. It said 'three pairs of so and so' or 'four pairs of so and so' or 'eight pairs of socks'...

SB: Yes.

JB: ... and we made sure... Peter made sure that you got eight pairs of socks and she said that every single thing that was down on the list was in the trunk and she said, 'Thank you', sort of thing.

SB: So, during that time when I was at all those schools and you'd been to America and you'd come back to England... Presumably, you were doing Summer Seasons and Pantomimes and in-between times I'm sure you were still on Variety Bills because I can remember you writing me letters and when you were saying about American Stars I know Paul Anka... you did bills with people like that.

JB: Yes, that's right. Yes, we did and of course the Seasons stopped being long. They were shorter Summer Seasons and pantomimes were shorter. Well, now they're about a month!

SB: Oh yes. Now.

JB: They used to be twenty weeks and now they're about month. They were shorter so in-between we used to do the Variety Bills. I said, with Arthur mostly and people like that. That's why we always... But, you see, Arthur Worsley and Audrey his wife - I mean, Audrey worked for Roy Barbour from the age of about fourteen, fifteen.

SB: Yes, she did a couple of summers for him.

JB: Summers for him, you see. Actually Peter had known Audrey from when they were kids and so Audrey married Arthur Worsley so we were friends forever.

SB: So, on these Variety Bills... You did a week in each place... How did you travel in those days?

JB: Well, to start with we went by train, in the very early days but then we got our own car.

SB: I can remember being on a train at one point with Roy Castle.

JB: That's right. Yes.

SB: So, was that a tour... You did several weeks with the same show? The same acts?

JB: Yes. The same acts. Then we all went by train because they paid for us, you see. I mean, we didn't have to pay our own fares, which in those days was great because in those days the money was a bit naff, to say the least, if that's the right word, I mean in those days. When you think about it now the difference was unbelievable but then...

SB: In the days of Variety then would it be the same bill going from town to town?

JB: Yes.

SB: So, you'd usually be with the same acts?

JB: Yes.

SB: For a set number of weeks?

JB: Yes.

SB: And was that because you all had the same management?

JB: Yes. It was always The Grade Organisation.

SB: And were you signed up to them?

JB: Yes, unfortunately. Well, yes.

SB: Oh.

JB: Well, actually it was a bit unfortunate because when Roy and Peter were in pantomime at the Palace Theatre in London - the first pantomime they did in London. They were in London and they were seen by the Delfonts and the Grades... saw them and both of them wanted them to sign up with them and Peter and Roy went into the Folies Bergere at the Prince of Wales and Peter thought that it was better to sign with the opposition because if you signed and worked for the same people... which it turned out in the end we did exactly the same signing up with the Grades. In fact, we would have been far better with the Delfonts because actually Bernard Delfont was jolly good to them and good to me because he accepted me into the act after Geoffrey left. Now, I don't think anybody else would have done that but he was always very nice to the boys and us. He was fine. However, we signed up or rather Peter signed an agency agreement with Lew Grade.

SB: So, was it a sole agency agreement?

JB: A sole agency agreement, which turned out, in the end, to be not a very good thing. However, I mean it was all right to start with...

SB: But you needed to because they had control of the theatres?

JB: They had control of the theatres. They had control of everything.

SB: So, like the Number 1 theatres... If you wanted to work them...

JB: You had to be with them. Yes. So I mean that was it...

SB: Yes.

JB: But all the acts were in the same position. We were all tied to them and we had to do what they said and we had to go where they wanted us to go. I mean, you know, you were sort of tied.

SB: And what happened if they didn't get you work? Could you go with anyone...?

JB: No.

SB: You just had to be out of work.

JB: This is what happened... to us. Well, when the theatres started closing and you know, the work started getting less and... oh and that time you see, to go back a bit, when we came back from The Ed Sullivan Show Roy was married. He had got married before we went to Australia, you know to Billie Hancock and she came to Australia and she wasn't working you see, I mean, she got a job out there but not in the business and she didn't like the fact that I was in the act and she wasn't in the act. I can understand that in a way but anyway we came back and we went to America and did the show and then she said to Roy, 'You've got to come out of the act because we're not together'. This sort of thing. It was him that she wanted to... him to go out of the act. So, he said to us 'I'm leaving the business' which he did, which was daft actually. Anyway so...

SB: So you started to do a double act then?

JB: Peter went to Sydney Grace who was in The Grades and who was looking after us... and he was all right with us, he was fine. And he said, 'Look, Roy's leaving because his wife doesn't want him to tour without her, so we're going off on our own' and he said,

'That's all right. Yes, that's all right, just do whatever you want. What difference does it make; it's the same act with just the two of you'. So anyway, so that's all right, but then we did... but as the theatres closed and things got harder and they weren't putting out the Variety bills and things, and the people weren't coming over from America to do tours they were doing one nights and going back and all that sort of thing and things got... Oh, it got to be cabaret and I remember...

SB: So, before... I mean, I can remember you doing bills for a quite a long time.

JB: Oh, for a long time.

SB: So I mean... because a lot of people say, 'Oh, Variety finished in the early fifties', but I think you were doing it for a long time – 'til the sixties.

JB: And it was all because of the American Stars. It was all American Stars. All these people that came over for tours.

SB: But I mean you also did bills with people like Cliff Richard when he started out... Like the young singers, to support them.

JB: Oh, Yes, yes. The young pop stars that started to come. Cliff, yes.

SB: So, I do remember... what was the thing about Chiswick Empire? Wasn't there something...?

JB: Oh, that was his first... when he was Top of the Bill. Cliff Richard. And of course, what happened was all the girls were Cliff mad and they used to get together and they all used to come into the theatre. And what happened at Chiswick was that all the females came in to see him and scream and all that sort of thing and all the boyfriends went up into the circle and created havoc, so the first...

SB: What did they do?

JB: Well, it was absolutely unbelievable... The first night the band struck up and they started chucking tomatoes at the band. The tabs open and the first turn dancing act – because there was always a first turn dancing act – went on and did their act and they got pelted with tomatoes and eggs. The four boy act – was it the Dallas Boys? –

SB: Yes. It was.

JB: In their new suits for this great new Cliff Richard start went on. They threw everything at them. Their suits were covered in eggs and all sorts of things. They came off half way through their act. Des O'Connor went on and they threw half a brick at him, which missed him by half an inch. And then they rang down the curtain for the interval and the first turn dancing act were supposed to go on again and refused to go on. Des O'Connor refused to go on and we were on the stilts preceding Cliff and we were ready to go on and the stage was swimming in eggs, tomatoes and God knows what and Cliff came running down and said, 'Don't go on! Don't go on! I'll appear just to show my face. Please, don't go on because if you fall over it's going to be really bad. Don't go on!', and Peter said, 'It's all right Cliff, don't worry, we will just appear and if they throw anything at us, we're off straight away'. And then the Manager came round before Cliff had gone and said, 'Somebody has thrown a fire extinguisher into the stalls and it's hit somebody on the head, we're stopping the show'. So, they stopped the show and Cliff came up to our dressing room and he was shaking like a leaf and he had a moped parked in the car park and Peter said to him, 'Gosh, what's going to happen to your moped?' and he said, 'I couldn't care less about my moped. I don't want to be in this business any more, if that's what's going to happen, I don't want to be in show business'. And he was worried to death.

JB: Anyway the show closed. The Manager gave everybody their money back, who had paid and the following morning The Grades gave him the sack for giving everybody their money back. The Manager of the show, can you imagine that? The poor bloke, thinking that this was so serious that somebody had thrown something and the girl was carted off to hospital and fortunately it had just touched her. It hadn't gone straight in the middle of her head. If it had have done, she would have died. And the Manager was so upset that he gave everybody their money back and he got the sack, from The Grade Organisation - from the management... However, the following day, when this happened, The Shadows... it was Cliff Richard and The Drifters at the first show that he did at Chiswick Empire. Some of these boys had broken into the theatre - God knows how because there was a night watchman on usually, so I don't know how they got in - and they'd stolen the instruments - The Drifter's instruments - wrecked some of the dressing rooms and our stilt costumes were found half way down Chiswick Highway, on the street.

SB: Mmm. I remember driving along, because it was half term.

JB: And somebody said, 'I think your stilt trousers and everything are down Chiswick Highway'. And do you remember? And we drove down and picked them all up and they were filthy. They were all muddy and dirty. We took them to the cleaners and got them cleaned and we were at Finsbury Park Empire the next night. Anyway, they had the police, of course, the next night... and they said, 'It's all right, Cliff. You're all right, it isn't going to happen again' and the police were in their hundreds around Finsbury Park, Finsbury Park Empire, they didn't get near. Only the people that actually wanted to go and see the show were allowed in. So, it was fairly OK then. But the next week, we went to Coventry and although the police were around, some of the boys were found hiding under people's cars and they were trying to get in but in actual fact nothing happened. It was OK but from then onwards everywhere we went there were police everywhere and he [Cliff] was OK, only he was leaving the business and Des O'Connor said, 'If this is what show business is going to be like, I'm out'. He said, 'I'm never going to be in show business...' but he didn't leave the business but they talked him into coming to Finsbury Park, 'There'll be police' and when you think...

SB: And Tommy Wallis and Beryl were on the bill, weren't they?

JB: Yes, Tommy Wallis and Beryl. But it was absolute chaos. And then, of course Cliff had a photo taken with our puppet, which crops up now.

SB: With the girl puppet? Yes.

JB: The girl puppet. Because he was doing "Livin' Doll" and he was kneeling down and he's got our girl puppet and that picture keeps appearing all over the place.

SB: I know. So, you also - I do remember - you did a tour with Frank Ifield and he'd just started, hadn't he?

JB: Oh, he was very nice. He threw a party in the hotel opposite - this strangely enough was also at Coventry Empire - because there was a hotel almost opposite and he was staying there and he threw a party for all of us, you know, after the show, in his hotel room.

SB: Oh, did he?

JB: Yes - which I thought was rather nice of him. They didn't all do things like that. It was very nice.

SB: I do remember once going to a party - something to do with Michael Holiday, when you did a Summer Season.

JB: Yes. Michael Holiday. He used to come and have lunch with us. I used to cook him steaks. He didn't like his digs [Laughs]. Oh, God!

SB: And so, do you remember – I mean, you did Richard Stone Summer Seasons.

JB: Ah! That was a different situation altogether. That was Delfont and Stone.

SB: Oh, was it?

JB: Yes, that was Delfont and Stone but Richard Stone ran the shows but it was backed by Bernard Delfont, but I mean he'd always been OK with us, anyway. But Richard Stone was wonderful to us. We did five, six, seven, eight of his Summer Seasons and they were always good and everybody in them was nice and all the back-stage people were always lovely and they always gave me lovely clothes, if I was doing a sketch or anything, they always used to take me out and buy me lovely clothes to wear and things like that. Because in those shows we used to do everything. We used to do the act but we were also in the scenes. We used to sing, I used to sing and I did things with all sorts of Stars, you know, and I used to come on and do little bits with them – duets, all sorts of things and...

SB: I remember you did a season in Weston-Super-Mare: Beryl Reid, Craig Douglas, and Billy Burdon.

JB: Craig Douglas and Beryl Reid, that was one of the best shows I've been in. One of the happiest shows I can remember.

SB: Really?

JB: Yes, and I also remember that the Manager of the show at the time wasn't the usual manager and the show was asked...

SB: Do you mean the Company Manager?

JB: Yes. Yes, he came in because the normal Company Manager that had been with us for years was ill or something. And this manager came in at Weston-Super-Mare. The Council had said, 'Could the Artistes come to a banquet at lunchtime and do their acts – do bits of their acts – and it will give your show a boost'. As if we needed it, with Beryl Reid and Craig Douglas! However, they all did it except Beryl and us, because the Manager said, 'Oh, they don't want you. They don't want an act like yours there but they want the others' and Beryl said, 'I'm not doing it. Blow that! On an opening night! I mean, going to do it at lunchtime and then all those people will eat anyway', she said, 'No, I'm not going to do it'. So, anyway, she said to us, 'I wouldn't worry if I were you. They've never seen anything like you, in a place like this, before'. And she had her room next to us and she was always great with us, Beryl Reid. So, anyway, the show... it was the opening night - and afterwards Richard Stone always threw a party and we all went to this. There was food and everything - and anyway the show started and, of course, we were pre - her because we were very often before the Star because it was a different sort of thing to introduce the Star and so our act - I mean, we'd been on and off all night, doing bits in the show – but our actual act was just before Beryl Reid's act and we'd done sketches with her - In fact, one of the greatest things I ever did was a sketch with Beryl – so anyway, we went on – the show was going OK – and we appeared and did our act and we stopped the show, they wouldn't let us off! They absolutely stood up and applauded and they went raving mad! Went mad and we eventually came off stunned and Beryl said, 'I told you, didn't I? They've seen all the others and you're something else' and she said... and then she went on and she went well and we came off and we went to the party and everybody – all the people of the town, the Councillors and all these people – they all came up to us and said, 'That was the greatest act I've ever seen', 'That was absolutely marvellous'. They were all round us all night and

everybody else was absolutely shocked and she said, 'You stupid lot, you all did your act to them this afternoon, half the people in there. They were bored sick with you [both laugh] and by the time Jean and Peter got on - they were the only thing they hadn't seen!' Anyway, Richard Stone came up to us and he said, 'Well, that was great wasn't it?' and we said, 'Yes, we couldn't believe it', and he said, 'Oh, yes but you always go well', but the fact is that Beryl was right. She said, 'They've never seen anyone like you here before - and the act before - and because the others had already done their act at lunchtime they were a bit bored by the time you came on'. And so... it was hysterical, we couldn't believe it.

SB: I do remember Craig Douglas had his 21st birthday party during that summer.

JB: Oh, yes. Do you remember the little girl? She had her... oh, were we with Craig only there?

SB: Yes.

JB: Well, we had a flat, didn't we?

SB: Yes.

JB: Yes, that's right because we had her party there, as well and Craig had taken her out once early on and she quite liked him and he ignored her for the rest of the show and poor kid, she was so upset and it was her birthday and we said, 'You'll come along?' We had the party in our flat - her birthday party. We said, 'You can have it in our flat'. And he came and stayed about ten minutes and left and she burst into tears and do you know, every time I hear [sings] 'It's my party and I'll cry if I want to' [both laugh] I always think of this poor kid with Craig Douglas. You know, he took her out a couple of times.

SB: Ah.

JB: After about a week or so.

SB: He was young, I suppose.

JB: I know, but I felt so sorry for this kid. I thought, 'Oh, flip!'.

SB: And what about the two summer seasons with Adam Faith?

JB: Oh, yes.

SB: That was in the sixties.

JB: Oh, yes. That's right.

SB: Because I was thirteen in Bridlington and fourteen in Margate.

JB: Margate. It was Margate that...

SB: Bridlington was the first one.

JB: Yes. Because we'd done Scarborough, Hadn't we?

SB: Yes. It was exactly the same show both years.

JB: Yes, and we did Bridlington and Margate. That was his early days. In fact, we worked with all these people in their early days. It was quite interesting. It's quite interesting to grow as old as I am and remember all these people starting because it was fascinating and those that became big Names. I mean, I can count a dozen of the people who we worked with in their early days and those who became Stars and those who didn't. It's quite interesting.

SB: Mmm. Or Stars who then disappeared or were probably overexposed... but mind you, you couldn't be as overexposed then, could you? I mean there were plenty of places to work but TV's different because when TV came...

JB: There wasn't much TV then. But, Dickie Valentine. We did a tour with Dickie Valentine and actually the funny thing about it is he eventually married a friend of ours, a young girl who was in pantomime with us at Finsbury Park and she had a boyfriend then – much older than her- and we always hoped that would sort of break up because he was much too old for her and then the next thing we knew, she was marrying Dickie Valentine which was very exciting.... And of course, when he was killed it was horrific, absolutely horrific.

SB: Mmm. So, did you find that people kept cropping up again, like you'd work with them and then not see them at all – for a while – and then...?

JB: Yes and strangely enough, most people, however long it is before you work together again, you feel that you know them.

SB: Oh, yes.

JB: I mean you pick up where you left off. Because in those days the acts were all run by agencies, if you know what I mean... you kept working with them and then not working with them and then working with them again and they'd crop up – the same acts - over and over again.

SB: Yes. And obviously you tended not to work with... Not with anyone did an act like yours! [Laughs] but I mean comedians probably knew Spesh acts more than they knew other comedians?

JB: Oh yes. Absolutely. We didn't often work with other Speciality Acts unless they were sort of singing, dancing acts.

SB: So, what about within a bill... did you find that there was any competition with... like if there were two comics on the bill? – First or second comic etc.... was there any... were they fighting for their position?

JB: No, I only met that once - and I'm not naming any names - but one Comic who thought he ought to be the... Because if there was a Star Comic on, they would precede the Star Singer... I mean, a Name Comic. They would precede them and we would precede the Comic. But, if there was no Comic on the bill we would precede the Star of the show but there was one Comic that thought he shouldn't be a Second Turn Comic, he should be way up there. We went somewhere else, to some theatre and I really can't remember where it was but Peter and I were always the last ones out on a Saturday night in the theatre. It always took us a lot longer to take our stuff up – to pack the puppets up – and the stilts and things and everybody had gone on the last night and this particular comic had a dressing room quite up high, right up at the top and the other comic, who was the Name Comic was down on the first floor.

SB: Of dressing rooms?

JB: Yes, sorry, that's what I mean - the dressing rooms – were on three stories and in this particular one [show] we were on the first floor and I can't remember who the Name Comic was, even, at this particular moment, but they had their names on the door, sort of gold screw-on things – they used to have these things that they used to screw on the names onto the doors – of the Stars. And this Star Comic had his screwed on. Anyway, this other comic had his name in these things – he must have had them himself – somewhere – because up there he didn't have his name on his door. Anyway, Peter and I were in the theatre and we were just about to leave and we found this Comic

unscrewing the name of the Star Comic and putting his name on the door, next door to ours! [Both laugh]. Putting his name on the door of the Star Comic and taking his name away so I don't know whether he'd had it specially done, as he was so annoyed.

SB: What? To leave for the next week?

JB: Yes, to leave for the next week, so whoever came in the next week [Both laugh] they thought HE was the Star Comic! [Both laugh]. I mean, how stupid, how petty can you get?

SB: Yes. Oh.

JB: He wasn't a very nice person anyway but the fact is that... How petty can you get? I mean, we've often been up in the gods, you know, in the early days and we had to cart our stilts down three flights of stairs, but it didn't matter... I mean, you know, that's where you were, on the bill.

SB: Did you find that you were all... like, when you arrived at the theatre at the beginning of the next week... was the first thing you did... go and look and see where your dressing room was?

JB: Go and see where your dressing room was, yes! Yes and you know we very often – people were good, because they knew we had millions of props and to lug them up flights of stairs wasn't easy – nobody had lifts in those days.

SB: No.

JB: And so it wasn't easy – it was pretty hard and so we were usually quite low down.

SB: And the Company Manager sorted it out?

JB: The Company Manager was always sort of very reasonable with us and our dressing room situation. Because of all our props, not because we were anything to write home about [Both laugh]. It was just the fact that that's how it was. We got on very well with... well, we never complained. We often had things to complain about but Peter used to say, 'There's no point. What are we going to complain about? OK so we're not very happy about the situation, but forget it'.

SB: That just reminded me... what about Mondays? You used to look at the list of where the dressing rooms were, and then there was the band call, wasn't there?

JB: Yes.

SB: Now, can you explain about how you knew whose turn it was for the band call?

JB: Well, it all depended actually. It was first come, first served.

SB: Was it?

JB: And if you put your band parts... If you put your music down on the front of the stage it was first come... Unless the Star of the show happened to walk in and they you'd obviously... they would do their band call first, but nine times out of ten, the Star was in bed when we put our band parts down. They used to come in late. In fact, I remember one act - and it was a female, someone pretty well known – and the band call had been done and it was a certain time and you should... everybody had to be there within that time... and the band call was over and the band sat waiting for the Star to come in and she didn't arrive and they'd all packed up and they were half-way out of the theatre when she walked in and they refused to do her band call. They said, 'No, you're late! We're not going to do a band call for you. You can go on as-is and if we can't read your music it's just too bad', and there was a hell of a row about it. They said, 'We've sat here for an extra half hour and we've been here since eight o'clock this

morning. We've sat here for an extra half to three quarters of an hour - you didn't come. It was an hour after the band call was over and we're going home! Sorry!' and that was it and of course the Musicians' Union were on their side.

SB: Yes.

JB: So I mean they had no... she didn't have any...

SB: Was there ever a time... I mean, did people... Were you allotted a specific time or...?

JB: No.

SB: And did you find that if you were last... Is that why you didn't want to be last in case they had to rush through your stuff?

JB: Yes.

SB: And you told me that a lot of Musical Directors used to like playing your music.

JB: Yes, well we were very... Well, I was very particular about what music we used because I think that the music was important. It had to fit the act and it had to be interesting and it couldn't be – how can I say...? You know, some acts and I'm not saying anything – the acts were great – but they had the same music year after year after year and you knew if they were on the bill, what their music was. Well, our music changed with the times. I used to hear something on the radio and say, 'That would be marvellous for that... let's do that for the puppets' and we had a very good musical director who used to do our band parts – music - and I would go down and say... tell him how we wanted it, because particularly in the stilts if we did the high kicks and we did the fast bits first, occasionally we used to stop it and then half-tempo it. I don't know if you remember...

SB: Yes.

JB: going into half-tempo for the high kicks and then back to the other tempo and we had to sort of -

[interruption]

So I had to explain... so, anyway, anything that I heard I used to think that would be great for that puppet or... So our music changed quite often. I mean, it cost us quite a lot of money sometimes and Peter used to say, 'Oh, God, have we got to change that again?', 'Yes, because this is 'in', it's modern, people like that music' and I never forget "Lullaby of Birdland".

SB: Yes.

JB: We were going to do The Ed Sullivan Show and on the way back from Australia, I heard "Lullaby of Birdland" on a radio somewhere and I thought, 'God, that would be marvellous to do the stilts to that because it's perky, it's modern, it's bang up to date' I thought, 'I must do something about that'. When we got back, they gave us two days and we had to get on a boat to go to America. I said, 'We've got to do "Birdland". It's the top thing in America. It's their great thing now, "Lullaby of Birdland". It's only just come over here and it's theirs', and I flew to this Musical Director and said, 'I'm sorry; you've got to drop everything! We are going to America. We've got to have this music to do 'The Ed Sullivan Show' and he went, 'Oh, God, you again!' That sort of thing.

SB: You can't remember his name?

JB: Yes. Er...Oh gosh, not off-hand, at the moment. My memory isn't quite like it used to be.

SB: I'll find it.

JB: But you'll find it in our music.

SB: Oh, right.

JB: His name's at the top... he lived in... anyway, he said, 'OK, how do you want it?' 'So and so and so...' Anyway, he brought it almost to the boat, you know, it was that late and we got that music and we'd had a rehearsal fortunately to do it and we'd never heard it before!

SB: Oh really! [Both laugh].

JB: And the boys went, 'God!' and I said, 'It's easy, it's easy, we just do the act to the music and it'll be absolutely fine' and we had a rehearsal and they had this forty piece band and it sounded absolutely marvellous and the boys were, 'Oh, that's great!' And we did it on the 'Ed Sullivan Show' and they said, 'Yes!' and he said, 'Oh, that's great, that music. It's "Birdland"'. And nobody had used it for a Speciality Act or anything like that.

SB: But you always had good... I can remember "Zambezi" and "Sandpaper Ballet".

JB: Yes, for the puppets.

SB: Yes.

JB: "Zambezi" for the tambourines. Yes.

SB: And we [Peter and Sue] did always continue that. Changing the songs.

SB: So, I was going to say. You did all the Summer Seasons and pantomimes and you said you always did sketches, like with Beryl Reid and... Jimmy Edwards, I can remember.

JB: Oh, gosh, yes!

SB: In Southend.

JB: Yes. Peter did a lot with him. With Jimmy Edwards in sketches.

SB: So, then, as the theatres were closing down, I suppose... I mean, all the Summer Seasons and the pantomimes and Variety was still going through the 1960s but obviously less and less and when did you start... or decide that you had to start doing all the Working Men's Clubs and Theatre Clubs?

JB: Well, you know, while we were... it's a sort of... When we were talking to Sydney Grace in the office he said to us one day, 'The theatres are all going to close, you'll have to get your act so you can work clubs'. And he said, 'You know, there are big clubs. There are big clubs. There are nightclubs; there are Working Men's Clubs. All sorts of Clubs. You will have to... because in America, it's all Club work now and it's coming here. This comes five years after. Everything happens in America and five years after it happens there, it happens here'. And he said, 'I'm warning you, it will be clubs and you're not going to like it very much but, you know, if you can get your act to fit the clubs then you'll be earning money because there are no shows'. I mean, there was a time when shows started to come off and oh, it was a really bad time in the business. Anyway, one of the... We did some clubs and we hated it actually but we had to do it. But there were some very good clubs and we always did very well when they'd never seen us before. So we did clubs for quite a while and then Peter said, 'Oh, I'm fed up with this, let's go abroad'. Well, of course, we weren't really... we weren't allowed to book ourselves anything but he said, 'You know, this is ridiculous. They're not booking us any stuff abroad so we'll either have to say to them, "Either you book us abroad or we'll go"'. So, anyway, he said that and they started sending us to Belgium... Brussels

and onto the Continent. To do the sort of Clubs on the Continent but they were vast places...

SB: Oh, yes.

JB: ...over there.

SB: But I mean you did things, like also, the Friedrichstrasse Palace in Berlin.

JB: Oh, the Friedrichstrasse Palace, Berlin. But we booked that ourselves, which we weren't supposed to.

SB: Oh, really?

JB: But we did that and anyway, we booked ourselves in Scandinavia and we did very well. We went to the Tivoli Gardens, Stockholm and all the Tivoli's and we did Copenhagen and...

SB: and Copenhagen and Oslo... I was there. That was, like, 1964.

JB: Well, this female agent had come over and seen us somewhere in London. Oh, we used to do Cabaret in Hotels, like the Savoy Hotel and things like that.

SB: And in Park Lane.

JB: And it was dangerous on those slippery floors. But we did that. However, this female Scandinavian agent saw us work and she said, 'I'd like to book you', and Peter said, 'Well, we not really supposed to...' However, she booked us and we did very, very well for about six months, at least, or more than that and one of the Grade agents happened to come over looking for acts and they happened to see us and they went berserk but they couldn't do anything about it but she said, 'You shouldn't really have worked for me. They went berserk in my office'. And we said, 'Well, we're sorry but they weren't giving us any work. What are we supposed to do? Starve?' So he [Peter] went into the office and said, 'What were we supposed to do? Starve? You're not giving us any work. What is all this about?' And I mean, let's be honest, when we first started, every act that they booked were getting £35 per week – a double act - £35 per week. Nobody was allowed to get more than £35 per week. And they were asking a lot more [from independent theatres], we found out later.

SB: Yes, didn't you say once that someone said....?

JB: Yes. But, just let me tell you one thing. The Jover Boys did a brilliant act and they put them in - The Grades put them in - to the London Palladium and they did their act – and they did an act sort of hanging...

SB: Balancing.

JB: Balancing act and they were the only act that hung feet to feet. It was a thing – feet to feet - I mean they did that [demonstrates] and hung feet to feet and it was very, very clever and of course The Jovers did all sorts of things. They did... I mean they were in Africa with us. The whole Jover set up and these were the two boys who did this act and they put them at the Palladium at £35 per week and they came out and went to them the next day and said, 'Look, we're both married. We cannot live on £35 between us. We want £40 per week', and they wouldn't let them have it and so they left the business. The two boys left the business as they wouldn't give them an extra fiver so they would get £20 per week each family and so that's why we said, 'No blow this, we can't live on this' – we had you at Elmhurst – how could we keep you at a decent school, you know, on that money. We had to do other things. We did all sorts of things. Sunday Concerts every season. We drove hundreds of miles to do a Sunday Concert to get an extra £20 to keep you at school.

SB: Mmm.

JB: It was, you know, terrible.

SB: What about when Peter... You said you went back somewhere and said, 'We love working here'. Do you remember that? And the guy said, 'I'd like to have you back more often'.

JB: Oh, yes, we did a Variety Show – I think it was in Scotland, if I remember rightly – and the Manager of the theatre was a Manager of a theatre that we'd been to and he'd gone from one down south up to Scotland and we played the theatre quite a lot and we knew him quite well and he was a hell of a nice bloke – ever so nice – and he said, 'Oh gosh, it's nice to have you here'. He said, 'This is great', and we said, 'Yes, we love coming here', because it was – I think it was in Edinburgh and we loved it, you know, up there and he said, 'You know, this isn't going to last' and we said, 'What do you mean?' and he said, 'This isn't going to last', he said, 'You know, we can't afford to pay the acts' and we said, 'Well, I don't know, I mean why? This is a lovely theatre; you get it packed every night'. He said, 'I know, but we cannot afford to pay you acts £100 per week, we just can't, we just haven't got the money, so we've got to either shut the place or let it' and Peter said, 'I beg your pardon?' and he didn't say anything to this bloke and he said [to me], 'That's why they're closing, aren't they? We're getting £35 a week, and they're asking £100 a week for us!'. They had the whole business tied up [pause]. I mean, anybody, when you see the amount now. I don't think anybody is tied to anybody really, like that, any more. It doesn't happen because people are not stupid. I mean, what could you do when it was that or nothing? And we didn't realise when we were younger in our twenties.

SB: And plus the fact that everybody wanted to work the Number 1 dates.

JB: Well, of course they did.

SB: And you couldn't do that, unless you worked for them?

JB: No, I mean we weren't interested in the Palace, Attercliffe [Laughs]. I mean I know that I shouldn't say things like this but when you think about it now, they had us really tied. We couldn't do anything. But the fact is we were really... poor. I mean we were working our guts out for nothing.

SB: Mmm.

JB: If you did that now, you'd earn a fortune.

SB: Yes, I mean there wasn't really... the VAF wasn't a strong union.

JB: No. It wasn't. We were all VAF members. Equity wouldn't have it now. I mean, Equity wouldn't stand for it now. If all those people... If Equity had been as strong as it is now... And it happened now... it can't happen now. You have to get a living wage now.

SB: But how did you afford all your costumes and things?

JB: Oh, don't ask me! I don't know. It was just the odd things we used to do extra, paid for our costumes but I remember the time that we needed new stuff and couldn't have it. We had to make do with the old. You know, make it look better and all this sort of thing.

SB: Yeah. It was difficult, wasn't it?

JB: Very difficult. But I mean Peter was determined... I mean, OK you could have gone to an ordinary school or something – but Peter was determined that you were going to have an education. The first thing he said when you were small was, 'That girl is going

to have a decent education, if it kills me'. It nearly did kill us actually! [Both laugh] But the fact was that – the whole point is that you are as you are and let's be honest – partly because of what you had at Elmhurst.

SB: Oh, yes.

JB: To say that you went to Elmhurst Ballet School meant something and the fact is that you – they taught you how to behave, how to live, how to work. And I don't know one Elmhurst girl who isn't jolly nice, well-behaved and kind and... they taught you... and also, the fact that it was slightly religious, you were taught to care for other people and how to live your life being kind and let's face it...

SB: To care for other people. Mmm. And also being trained for all aspects of theatre.

JB: Exactly. You had the basis for everything. When you went into the theatre you were a dancer, you could sing, you could act, you could do everything. I mean, you... OK so you ended up, because I retired. I got to the age where I felt that I couldn't do it any more. I got tired and I knew that you were capable and you...

SB: Well, it was a very physical act, wasn't it?

JB: Yes, it was and of course Peter taught you and you walked on stilts with us when I was in the act. You have a photograph of the three of us. You were on little tiny stilts.

SB: Mmm. And that's when we started to do the Theatre Clubs.

JB: That's right.

SB: Was there a space when... There was a time when Working Men's Clubs.... I mean was there a gap between when the Theatre Clubs started, like Wakefield Theatre Club and Batley and the theatres closing down? I mean, I remember – I seem to remember - that the Theatre Clubs – when it became the clubs and you were doing Manchester clubs and things like that, there weren't... the Theatre Clubs suddenly came into being.

JB: Yes.

SB: Then it was a case of getting out of the Working Men's Clubs and into the Theatre Clubs.

JB: Into the Theatre Clubs, yes. And of course with our height and everything the Theatre Clubs were the answer.

SB: Yes, they were much better.

JB: Because they had the space and everything. I mean, we were in some clubs where we hardly had space to do anything.

SB: But with Batley... and Greasborough Social Club I remember. Although that was a Social Club, it was a Theatre Club really. I mean we were with Alma Cogan.

JB: Oh, yes.

SB: So, in fact, they replaced the theatres really, the Theatre Clubs, didn't they? And of course after that the Civic Theatres came back. OK, well I think we'll finish then. And thank you very much.

JB: Oh, well it's been a pleasure. I hope I've remembered everything in the right order.

SB: Well, it doesn't really matter.

JB: It's a heck of a long time ago to remember every single little thing but it's been very interesting to think back on these things because you know it is a long time ago... the start of it all... a long time.

SB: Oh, yes.

JB: But as I say, it was great for me to see you and Peter in the West End in Barnum. You know, that was the greatest thing for me, to see you there, because the fact is Sue, Peter always looked young and the fact is that I felt too old and I am jolly sure that... I don't think that Peter and I would have got into Barnum but I think the fact that you were there... you were young, you could dance, you could sing and they wanted somebody that could do all those things. OK, so could I but I was too old. It was a young people's show and the fact that you were with Peter and the fact that you did the audition on your own and you sang on your own, you danced and you looked absolutely gorgeous. That got you and Peter into Barnum. Although the act is what they wanted, but they wanted you. They wouldn't have wanted me at my age.

SB: Well, I don't know if that's true, but what it is, is that it's almost gone full cycle hasn't it? Like, you started off in big shows in London and went all through the Variety thing and then we ended up back in London.

JB: Back in London. Yes.

SB: Well, that's a good point to finish on.

JB: It is, and then you were at the London Palladium [*Babes in the Woods*] afterwards and that was great for me.