

# THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

<http://sounds.bl.uk>

## Robert Aldous – interview transcript

Interviewer: Jonathan Holt

22 March 2010

JH: How are you? Are you OK?

RA: I'm fine, thank you. [laughs]

JH: OK. The first thing I wanted to ask you really was just how you initially became interested in the theatre.

RA: Oh, from a very little boy. I was covered in bandages until I was twelve with infantile eczema. So that meant I didn't do the things other little boys would do, like play football... [laughs] and I just wasn't able to do it. So that meant I had to find some sort of self-expression, make myself useful... [laughs]. At first I rather fancied - because I was a chorister in my local church - going into the church in some way, because I had a great-uncle who was a rural dean. But a sister at the skin hospital in Nottingham, which was where I lived, took a great liking and took me off to the Theatre Royal in Nottingham to see the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, which was then at its height, really; it had some splendid actor/singers.

JH: And what year was that?

RA: Well I'd be about twelve, [thinking] so you've got to add twelve to the '34... '46. Something like that: 1946. And she took me to see *The Mikado* and I decided overnight that the church was out of the window: this is what I wanted to do. And so I pursued it immediately, I went and found somebody who taught acting and elocution. And not long after that we moved to London and I had to find somebody who could do that there. We moved to Ealing and I found the great-great-granddaughters of Sarah Siddons, the famous actress.

JH: OK

RA: These two ladies had a theatre down the road which they called "The Bankside Theatre Club and Coterie".

JH: That was in Ealing?

RA: In Ealing. And they performed excerpts from Shakespeare. They were *extremely* good and I learnt a hell of a lot from them. I was the only one of their students who was allowed to act with them, so I was very fortunate and they made a great boast that they had turned down Alec Guinness. [laughs] And while I was doing that I entered poetry festivals, the local music and drama festivals, I did all that. And then did school plays: I

played *The Miser* and *Iago* in *Othello*. And then I got into RADA, which was a great thrill because it's incredibly difficult to get in there now and it was incredibly difficult to get in there then. Now, you have to have about five auditions, fortunately, I only had two in my day. And I found myself contemporaries of Richard Briers, Alec Guinness- [correcting himself] Albert Finney - Peter O'Toole, Alan Bates... they were all contemporaries. And then there was me [laughs]. And the extraordinary thing was that there was four times as many girls at RADA than there were boys. And all the boys made it, none of the girls did. And, you see, it's very tough on girls, because when you get out in the profession there are four times as many parts for men as there are for girls. So the odds of girls succeeding anyway aren't enormous. In fact, I'm still in touch with RADA; after I've seen you I'm going off to RADA because I'm a buddy to one of the finals students.

JH: OK, just round the corner.

RA: Just around the corner. So, I'm going to do that tonight. So, I've still kept in touch with RADA, I enjoyed my time there and I was thrilled to go there and, you know, I'm still very proud of having gone there.

JH: OK. How did you know about RADA?

RA: Well, I suppose, everybody knows about RADA. It is the leading drama school in the country. I have to say that other drama schools, other leading drama schools, are just as good. It's just that RADA has the kudos.

JH: OK, sure

RA: I mean, there's nothing wrong with the other drama schools, you can't tell, going into the profession, when you meet young actors, where they've been trained. It would be awful if you could.

JH: But it seemed to you at that age, that young age, that it was a likely thing to go into?

RA: Well, it was the only thing I could find that I could do. And fortunately, you know, I was there from '53 to '55 and I've had a very long career because we're now in 2010. And although I haven't made a lot of money or anything like that or become famous, at least I've kept working and I'm lucky to have kept working and I've had a really good time.

JH: So, just one more question about RADA. What would you do in a day at RADA?

RA: Oh well, I mean, it's very varied. You'd have diction classes, deportment classes, movement classes, singing classes. You'd be, obviously, directed in a play; you'd do two or three a term. So, you were kept very busy, and, of course, you had a lot of homework to do, for want of a better expression. I mean, you had to go and learn things.

JH: So once you graduated, what was next?

RA: Well I was very fortunate; I got two jobs on one day. I had to choose between going to Nottingham Playhouse or... what was the other one? Guildford, yes. And I got both and, of course, I chose Nottingham Playhouse because I came from Nottingham, so I

was thrilled to go to the Nottingham Playhouse. And I did a tour, an Arts Council tour, of the north-east of England. They were covering theatre-less areas and we did a tour of *As You Like It* in which I played no fewer than five different parts. And I was very thrilled - I got a notice in Darlington. [laughs] And... Roy Kinnear, yes, also went out into that company, too. There were four of us who went out to that company, which was very nice. And then, after that...oh yes, I got into a repertory season at His Majesty's Theatre in Aberdeen. It was a weekly rep, I had to be an Assistant Stage Manager and actor. But fortunately, I didn't have to learn a new part every week because I was the, you know, a youngster. I'd only have a part once every so often. I didn't have the strain of learning a new part every week as people in weekly repertory had to do. But the Stage Manager there took a liking to me and he got a job at the Royal Court Theatre in London

JH: What was his name?

RA: Well, I can't remember *his* name, I'm ashamed to say. But I went off to the Royal Court Theatre in London to join the English Stage Company, again, as an actor/ASM, as an Assistant Stage Manager is called. And I stayed there for two years and it was a hugely interesting time to be there, because it was the time they did *Look Back in Anger* and I've made a note of the plays I did there: we did *Nekrassov* by Jean-Paul Sartre; we did another of John Osborne's plays, *An Epitaph for George Dillon*; we did *Roots* which saw the rise of - what was Olivier's wife called? Joan Plowright! - we did *Lysistrata* and *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance*, John Arden. So, they were all... the more popular plays subsidised the lesser-known plays, because it took a long time for *Look Back in Anger* to be accepted. It failed largely through the critics when it was first put on. But the management had faith in it and they did *The Country Wife* as a sort of fill-in to try and make a bit of money in order to bring it back, so that when it came back, it was successful. And, as you know, they were promoting new playwrights and - they're not called the English Stage Company now - The Royal Court Theatre, but they won a hell of a lot of awards yesterday at the Olivier Awards, which is marvellous because they're still doing it, they're still promoting new plays and playwrights. So it was a very exciting thing to be involved in so young. So, you know, I saw George Devine in action, I saw John Osborne in action, Lindsay Anderson - who became a film director as well as a theatre director - John Dexter, Tony Richardson. They all became... - Bill Gaskill- they all became famous names and I was fortunate enough to see them in action.

JH: So how would that work on a daily basis? Would you just be present at rehearsals?

RA: Oh yes, well you'd be present at all rehearsals, and then, of course, I had small parts anyway. But as Assistant Stage Manager you'd have to make sure all the props were in the right position and I also did, on *Sergeant Musgrave's Dance*, the sound as well. And I remember Tony Armstrong-Jones, Princess Margaret's husband, taking the photographs before he was famous and he wore a check shirt and jeans which was, you know- they hadn't come in [laughs] and he was considered rather outrageous.

JH: And you wouldn't see him in those afterwards. OK, so watching... like, you mentioned, George Devine, watching him in action, did it inspire you in any way? Did you make any decisions about how you felt theatre should be made?

RA: Oh yes, but it made me terrified, of course, because one was working with really celebrated people and on an intellectual basis which I'd not approached my work from before. So, you learned a lot just listening to them; they were amazing people. And

Dudley Moore wrote the music to *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance*, before he was famous, and I was doing the sound with him on it, tying in the sound. And I remember with *Roots*, as I say, I remember Joan Plowright came to the fore and she was – we were at the Duke of York's Theatre – and she was being courted by Olivier. His Rolls would turn up on St Martin's Lane outside the theatre every Wednesday and we thought they were talking business, you see, because she'd suddenly become very famous. But in actual fact he was courting her, you know, [laughs] so one saw a bit of history in the making there [laughs].

JH: Anything else?

RA: Well after all that - you see, that took two years - we took one or two of them out on the road because, of course, that's what the Royal Court/The English Stage Company wanted to do: take these things out to the provinces. So, we did a lot of touring as well: The Edinburgh Festival, things like that. So, it was a formative time for me and I was very lucky to be doing it. And while I was in the Royal Court, I got into a children's television serial which I was able to...they transmitted live on Sundays, which was my day off. So I was stinking rich, you see! [laughs] I was earning £15.00 at the Royal Court, which was a hell of a lot of money, and thirty-three guineas every week at the BBC. [laughs]

JH: So once you left London, which theatres are we talking about? Where did you go?

RA: Well, I went, once I'd finished at the Royal Court, I did a hell of a lot of repertory.

JH: But with the ESC. You said you took it to Edinburgh Festival. Did you take it anywhere else?

RA: Well, major provincial cities, certainly, yes. They were called in those days "Number One Tours", because theatres were graded "Number One" theatre, "Number Two" theatre... We did "Number One" tours of, you know, Manchester, Liverpool, Oxford... those sorts of places.

JH: And what were the theatres like? Were they in good nick?

RA: Well, not as... a lot of them have been refurbished. I would take a particular interest in - I have done right from the start - in the Frank Matcham theatres, theatres designed by Frank Matcham. His Majesty's, Aberdeen is one, and one of the most famous examples in London, of course, is the Coliseum. And I took an interest in those theatres on the road because I'm distantly related to him; we share the same great-great-grandmother or something like that. So, I had a double interest. But theatres, you know, in the fifties and sixties were quite shabby because we'd gone through the war and they were in a terrible state of repair usually. And so conditions for actors and actresses backstage were pretty awful, you know: broken window-panes; half the bulbs not working; terrible toilet facilities... [laughs] And those things have been looked at over the years now, so, you know, it's quite a pleasure to go into theatres now. Except that sometimes now that they look a bit too modern. The old theatres had character, you know, old wooden staircases and things like that, brick walls, and they had a sort of magic to them. Whereas now they're finished like any loo you might find in here, which is not quite the same thing.

JH: No, I understand that, sure. So then you went into the repertory.

RA: Yes, a hell of a lot of it.

JH: A hell of a lot?

RA: Well no it's not hell because... I feel so sorry for young actors today, because the repertory theatres have gone, the main provincial theatres work rather like West-End theatres, they cast each show afresh and the actors are cast because they look right. In repertory we had to play all sorts of characters it was real, real acting. We donned beards and moustaches galore. And I was very fortunate, as I say, because I only did weekly rep for a very short time. When I left the Royal Court I went to the Lincoln Theatre Royal and they had employed two companies of actors, and one week you played at the Theatre Royal and for the second week you went to one of three satellite theatres (Scunthorpe, Rotherham or Loughborough) whilst the other company was doing their first night in Lincoln. So, what was so interesting about the period, television had just started in peoples' homes because that all started with the Coronation, and people were seeing the basic diet of repertory theatres - doing light comedies and thrillers ad nauseum, which was what you had to do - but they were seeing them suddenly better done on television. So theatres started to close because people weren't going out any more, you see. But the surviving theatres, the theatres that were able to survive, looked about them and they thought: 'well, we'll have to do plays that are pre-eminently theatrical';. So, all of a sudden, we started do classical plays instead of the rubbish, you see. And to do a play in a fortnight was considered a huge luxury, a *huge* luxury. So, I went off to Lincoln and I was doing *School for Scandal*, plays like that, Shakespeare, Graham Greene: really, really good authors. And, you see, all that's gone now, and I feel so sorry for... it's always been difficult for actors, you know. But now the kids come and they've got no repertory to go to, they have to go to a pub fringe theatre, where they share the proceeds at the end of the run - which amounts to absolutely nothing - in the hope that somebody will see them. And it's awful. And we, as I say, we would stay in a company, in the fifties and sixties, for a long, long time.

JH: How long?

RA: Well, it could be three months, it could be six months, it could be a year. And that's what I found myself doing. And then, gradually, a lot of the provincial theatres, repertory theatres, established a reputation and people came flocking back, and they would expand to three-weekly runs, and then monthly runs. So, again, I was lucky then, I went to Bristol Old Vic...

JH: So, do you think that [the renewed interest] was because of the choice of plays?

RA: Yes, yes. As I say, they were pre-eminently theatrical: you'd only really see them in the theatre. So people saw their light comedies and thrillers ad nauseum on the box and then they'd come out and see really good plays.

JH: So, you were saying Shakespeare...

RA: Well, all the classical, you know, British and American authors. I remember Jean-Paul Sartre in Scunthorpe. [laughs] But that was really, really a golden period and I was fortunate enough to be doing it. I worked at Coventry, Glasgow, Nottingham again, and, you know, the great pride and joy for me was working at the Bristol Old Vic, because that was considered the cat's whiskers! [laughs]

JH: And had that gone under renovation at some point?

RA: Oh yes, they bought the... I think it was called the "Moot Hall" next door. It had a tiny little frontage originally, it was very cramped. But they bought the "Moot Hall" next door - whatever a "Moot Hall" is - and they extended the foyer areas into that and they made something very grand out of the foyer area. And then, again, they did all the backstage; the dressing rooms became habitable [laughs] which they weren't... because I did three seasons at Bristol over all and they were quite grubby to start with, but they got grander and grander. But I've always enjoyed the repertory life; you make a hell of a lot of friends there. And because you're working in such close proximity, you're baring your souls, really, in these big plays, and you make friends that you keep for the rest of your life and I'm happy that that's happened to me too...

JH: So, people from all around? Was it a big mix of people?

RA: Yes, yes, yes... so. And a bit later on - I think a bit outside your period that you're dealing with now - I started doing provincial tours of plays for commercial organisations. At Triumph Theatre Productions I went on the road with big starry casts and I also did a bit of television. But the years you're talking about were a very fruitful and interesting time, yeah, I was lucky to be in it, yeah. And I'm still here to tell the tale, I'm now seventy-five. [laughs]

JH: Still going.

RA: I still do tours. I did a tour of *An Ideal Husband* the year before last and I also got involved in pantomime. Because I'm short, I was asked to be the Wicked Yellow Dwarf in *Goody Two-Shoes* with Vince Hill and Helen Shapiro. And I launched on a thirty-year career as a "baddie" in big commercial pantomimes, but I don't think I started that until the seventies, which is outside your period. But I had thirty years of doing that.

JH: But all along there is a big mix. Did you enjoy the moving around of the repertory?

RA: I've always enjoyed touring theatre. I've always enjoyed touring, and I've very much enjoyed living in different towns; it's always appealed to me. Some people hate it...

JH: Any favourite theatres? Any favourite cities?

RA: Not really. I got to know and like them all. I suppose I've got a huge affection for the Theatre Royal at Nottingham because that's where I did all my early theatre-going as a little boy. I saw Donald Wolfit, as I say, in a major role every night, I remember seeing him do that. So I had to wait twenty-five years to play the Theatre Royal in Nottingham and that was really a big thrill.

I used to sit up in the gallery and have an Eldorado ice-cream in the interval and sit on the front row and see everything that was going. You saw, because provincial theatres at this time, they would be, [the major touring houses] would be "prior to London" or "post-London". So they'd be trying out what they hoped would be successes in London.

JH: What kinds of thing?

RA: Well, I remember going to see *The White Devil* with Robert Helpmann and people like that.

JH: I can see how that could be considered a risk.

RA: Yes. And, major stars would appear on their way. I mean, in Nottingham, for example, I think *The Mousetrap* started its life there, that's where it first opened.

JH: Wow! I didn't know that

RA: ...with Richard Attenborough... was it? Yes, Richard Attenborough, I don't know [inaudible] Sylvia Sims? Sheila Sims?

JH: "Names". OK, and did you make it much to the theatre in your spare time?

RA: Do I now?

JH: Did you? Back then.

RA: Oh yes, well, when I was not working I'd go to the theatre. And, of course, they had this wonderful system in the West End at that period whereby you'd sit outside the theatre on stools to go into the Gallery. You bought a little stool and sat outside the theatre for about an hour. Rows, upon rows of people waiting to go into the Gallery. And you could afford to do that, you see. I mean, obviously the seats in the main house were expensive, but if you were a student or a young actor - or elderly people used to do it as well - you'd buy a little stool and about twenty minutes before the show they'd let you in, you see, they let you in in "stool-order", you see, into the theatres.

JH: So, how did you decide what plays you would go and see?

RA: Oh well, it was rather like it is now. You would see them advertised in the evening papers and you would have read notices and it's just like you do now: 'I rather fancy that' so you would try and get in there early and try and get a stool. I suppose, in a way, it's a bit like that half-price ticket booth except you sat in the gallery [laughs]. But you'd have to use your initiative if there was something you wanted to see. I mean, if you wanted to see Olivier, or one of those big stars, you'd really have to get there early and get one of these stools.

JH: And did you have particular tastes?

RA: I've always liked classic plays and I do like classic acting. I've just finished a play last night actually, I was doing a fringe play but we were properly paid because the two authors were American and very rich and they wanted it put on. And it was a play about a world-famous German philosopher called Heidegger in the fifties and sixties who went over to Hitler, and the play was examining why. I enjoyed doing that.

JH: Where was that?

RA: It was a theatre near Old Street, a purpose-built studio-theatre, it's called The Courtyard... yeah. But the trouble is, again, with those fringe theatres today, I mean, the people who go are not dedicated theatre-goers, they're friends of the actors. And, I suppose, that, again, is very sad. Because... as I say... you can't be a "character actor" now, which is what I consider myself to be. You have to... the kids who come out of drama schools now, have to... are cast how they look... and that's not acting, to me.

JH: A “character actor”?

RA: I’m a character actor, yeah. [laughs]

JH: So, how much would you say you owe to, say, RADA. Was that very formative?

RA: It was very formative, I learned a hell of a lot there. I’d done the Miser at school, I’d played Iago and I’d come out thinking I was the cat’s whiskers - used that phrase again, scrap that! – and I very soon found out that there were people rather better than me there. But people develop, I mean, I’ve seen actors who I didn’t think were that good but developed, later on, into really, really good actors. But the standard of teaching there was wonderful, I mean, we had one of the best voice teachers there’s ever been called Clifford Turner who has written a text book which is still used today. And it’s a great joy to read because you can see in it the way he spoke. And I was thrilled recently because my great-niece, who lives in Australia, wants to be an actress and she’s gone to a drama school over there and this book, *Voice and Speech in the Theatre*, was on their reading list. So, I thought ‘it must be OK, then’!

JH: Yeah, it’s done very well. But also the experience of the road you say you developed as an actor...

RA: Sorry?

JH: The experience of repertory... do you think...?

RA: Oh yes, playing a huge range of characters. I spent most of my time playing middle-aged characters and elderly parts and I really enjoyed that. I can’t remember playing parts my own age very often, I think I had to wait until I was thirty-one to play Willy Mossop in *Hobson’s Choice*, and Willy Mossop, in the script, is thirty-one. So, all my “juvenile period” (we used to use that term) I was playing much older people. In the early days - I don’t know if anyone has told you - theatres were very hierarchical and particularly in weekly rep, before it expanded into fortnight rep, three-week rep, because you’d have your “leading man” and then you’d have your “leading lady” and your “juvenile man” and your “juvenile man” and your “juvenile lady” and then you’d have your “juvenile character man” and so on. And these people, in their own towns, became big, big stars and if you were the “juvenile”, the “leading man” you play the “leading” part every week come what may. [laughs]

JH: So, who were you then?

RA: Well, I would be the “juvenile character”. [laughs] And it’s only recently that *The Spotlight*, where we used to advertise, stopped using those terms...

JH: Only recently?

RA: Very recently, within the last eight or nine years or so. People complained saying ‘we’re all actors, it’s ridiculous using these terms’.

JH: Wow! OK.

RA: So, have you run out of questions? [laughs]

JH: No! [laughs] I suppose because we are interested in that very specific time - I'd like to ask you more about the later stuff, but... Oh, one question I wanted to ask you: was it a big mix of people at RADA? Were there a lot of people from a similar background? I mean, you were from outside of London originally, aren't you...

RA: Well, yes, it was a very interesting time because, to a degree, drama schools were thought of, at the beginning of this period, as finishing schools. A lot of girls would there just to learn how to carry themselves, make up, deportment, and they were interested in the glamour and, as I say, there were four times as many girls as there were boys. It was the time of - I think I told you in my thing that I sent to you - it was the time that you were all called up for National Service and major county awards were being given by local authorities to encourage, to help people, get to drama school. So, it wasn't just people in London any more, it was people from all sorts of different social backgrounds, and that's why you got working-class people coming in and you got working-class characters appearing onstage in "kitchen sink" dramas. So all that was very fascinating, you see. So, then people would do a year at RADA or the other drama schools and then go into the forces and then come back and do their second year. So it was an entirely new breed of actor, because what RADA was doing in those days was producing you actors for the West End stage... that's what they liked to do. There were people like John Stride and - I'm trying to think - yes, at RADA... the prize medal, the Bancroft Gold Medal was given to who was considered to be the best actor, and in the principle size the medal was going to go on to the West End stage and play young men, you see, the "juvenile" parts. And we actually saw the changeover; we were sitting in His Majesty's Theatre on the day of the Bancroft Gold Medal and John Stride had been given the Deposition Scene in Richard II so that he would win it [laughs] and go on... well he did go on to greater things, but anyway, that's beside the point. So, we all sat waiting for the result, which we all considered to be a foregone conclusion, and we waited, and we waited, and we waited, and eventually we heard that the Gold Medal had gone to Brian Pringle for a portrayal of Abraham Lincoln. The shock! The horror! But it was the start of the switchover to ordinary people becoming actors and the "kitchen-sink" dramas starting. You know, the young "juvenile" actor starting for the West End stage was becoming a dying breed. So it was fascinating to see that.

JH: That's fantastic, a bit of justice. [laughs]

RA: Yes, it was, it was. It showed that anybody, anybody could become an actor, not just the privileged few who could afford to go to RADA, because a lot of people were able to get grants. I got a grant, I got what was called a Major County Award. So you had not only to do an audition for RADA, I had to do it for the then Middlesex County Council to get in.

JH: OK, Are there any productions, you've been in so many, are there any productions that stand out that you would like to talk about?

RA: Well, I don't know really. You don't know what you can do until you try it, and it's not a question I really like to answer. Because you're constantly surprising yourself about what you can do really, so I don't like to look at the past and say 'this is what I enjoy, you know, what I want to be', because I like to move on...

JH: But is... there's not a...

RA: Well, I suppose there's Willy Mossop, you know, I suppose that was good and I played Hobson himself a few years later, you know, I enjoyed doing that –

JH: Where was that sorry?

RA: *Hobson's Choice*, it's a very famous play-

JH: Where did you do it, sorry?

RA: Well I did it first of all at Hornchurch when I played Willy Mossop, and then I did it at Stoke-on-Trent in a Theatre in the Round - Peter Cheeseman's theatre - I played Hobson himself. So I played both parts in a rather good show-off play. [laughs]

JH: Both parts?

RA: Pardon?

JH: Both parts?

RA: Yes.

JH: Oh, not in one...

RA: Not in... oh no, no, no! [laughs]

JH: Sorry, I got confused there. Right. So did you ever spend time reading plays?

RA: Oh yes, well, when I was at RADA we had a play-reading group. Few of the students, we used to go to one another's houses and read plays. We did do that of our own volition.

JH: Any new writing?

RA: Well, I can't remember now, it was such a long time ago. [laughs] I think we tried to be as comprehensive as we could because, as I say, we were considering our versatility, you know, discovering what we could and couldn't do. And, as I say, playing parts that were older than I was, that was challenging.

JH: Yes, I can imagine. Right, well I'd better search for questions now.

RA: [laughs] How many people are actually you interviewing for this project?

JH: I'm not sure, I think we just have a day where we interview a few people, maybe, something like ten people.

RA: And what is your position at Sheffield, are you...

JH: I do a degree in English Literature...

RA: You've done the degree?

JH: This is my final year, English Literature and Drama.

RA: That's a beautiful theatre, the Lyceum Theatre

JH: Yeah.

RA: Because that's been refurbished, you see, and that, actually, was saved by the amateurs. Because I think it was going to be pulled down and the amateurs made a great to-do and saved it. But now it's now flourishing again and it's absolutely glorious. I was there doing *An Ideal Husband* the year before last and I did one of my pantos there: played Abanazar there with Danny La Rue and Les Dennis and Amanda Holden, I did that about thirteen years ago. So they've seen my "baddie" up there. [laughs]

JH: And what time are you talking about, when it faced closure?

RA: Pardon?

JH: When about was it facing closure?

RA: I can't remember, it must have been pretty derelict during the seventies and eighties because it was the nineties when they decided to do it up again, because the Crucible was there, you see. But, of course, The Crucible is not... there's a word that describes these theatres like the Lyceum but I can't think of it at the moment... [remembering] A "Lyric Theatre".

JH: A "Lyric Theatre"?

RA: You couldn't call The Crucible a "Lyric Theatre", and now, of course, Sheffield is very fortunate because it has a Lyric Theatre and it also has a theatre where they can put on new plays, so you're very lucky up there. Well, of course, The Crucible has only just re-opened.

JH: Well that's interesting, you mention it was saved by the amateurs. I've read recently that repertory stuff in the time that you were acting in there was a kind of link with the community. Did you find that? Even links between theatre and education.

RA: Yeah well, they must have been one of the forerunners then in that sort of work.

JH: Did you come across anything like that?

RA: I've never done that sort of work myself, that came after I had become a straight-forward actor, really. Because Theatre in Education was just the actors trying to find work... and then someone invented it and it gave a lot of work to a lot of people and it served a very good, useful purpose. But it was started really, the movement, by people who were desperate to something to do and I don't know who thought it up but it caught on and fortunately it flourishes very successfully today. Does it in Sheffield now?

JH: Yeah, I think they've got a few projects here and there.

RA: Yes, it's certainly better than doing pub theatre. [laughs]

JH: Right, yeah I think we've reached the end of my questions. I'll ask you about some of the productions you mentioned you were in, I mean, I don't how involved you were, what kind of involvement you had but... *The Birthday Party* you mentioned.

RA: Yes I've done *The Birthday Party* twice; I've played Petey in that. I toured that twice.

JH: There was a famous review at the time it came out, a scathing review, not a good review, which finished with the line 'Sorry, Mr Pinter. You're not funny enough'. So, coming to reading that play for the first time did you agree with that?

RA: Well, by the time I came to do it, it was established, you see. So you got used to the idea of Pinter. I remember at Hornchurch we did a double-bill of his work too, we managed to cover it in rep. But these were tours I did of it. But, you know, I've done tours of plays like *Heartbreak House*, I did a four-play tour with Anthony Quayle, Gogie Withers and John McCallum which we touted round the country at major theatres: we did four plays, the public would come along and see four plays, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday: *Heartbreak House*. Thursday, Friday, Saturday: *Dandy*... Monday, Tuesday of the next week *The Cherry Orchard* and then there was another play, I can't remember what we did...

JH: That's incredible.

RA: I was in all four of them

JH: OK, was that difficult to manage?

RA: Yes, yes... so I've tagged along as a sort ordinary, middle-of-the-road actor really, and held my own and I've kept working, obviously I've had my out-of-work years. But I have been lucky, really.

JH: And when did you decide it was the end for the repertory?

RA: Sorry?

JH: Did you decide you got tired of the repertory?

RA: No, it's just that I got involved with the Triumph Theatre Productions, really, who put on my pantos and they asked to go on these major tours, you see. So besides employing me in panto as the "Evil King" or the baddie they asked me to go on tours around the country which... I was happy to do that.

JH: And where do you live at the moment?

RA: I live in Charlton, South-East London

JH: And so most of your stuff at the moment is round London, is it?

RA: Pardon?

JH: Most of your stuff nowadays is around London?

RA: Well, as I say, I did we did *An Ideal Husband* the year before last, we went all over. All over the country - the Sheffield Lyceum being one - you know, Bath, Oxford, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Newcastle, you name it. I still do that a bit. And last Christmas I was at The Churchill at Bromley doing pantomime again. I was sitting outside a cafe opposite the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane having a cup of tea and a chap came up to me, who I didn't recognise, and he said my name and I said 'Yes?', and I then realised who he was. I hadn't worked with him for forty years. I'd worked with him as an actor playing Van Helsing in *Dracula* [laughs]. And he directed me in *The Birthday Party*, actually.

JH: OK, what was his name?

RA: Kevin Wood, his name was. And he's now a theatrical impresario who has eleven pantomimes on the go throughout the country and he said to me, just like that 'Would you like to be in a pantomime at Bromley this Christmas?' and I thought he was joking. Because it was thirteen years since I had last done my Sheffield one, which was my last big baddie. And I was telling him 'I'm now seventy-five' and I thought that career was over. And so I was back doing a big panto, but this time I was a "goodie": I played the king in *Sleeping Beauty*. But, as I say, it's been a hugely interesting period, you know, with the rise of repertory into something big, the rise of television, the working class influence, you know, and new writing. It's been an amazing time really, an amazing time when I think about it.

JH: OK. I think that's been great. Thanks for talking to me Bob.