

THEATRE ARCHIVE PROJECT

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Edward Hardwicke – interview transcript

Interviewer: Kate Harris

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KH: This is an interview on 6th November with Edward Hardwicke. Kate Harris is conducting the interview. Can I begin by asking how you first became interested in the theatre?

EH: Well it was a bit difficult for me not to be, because both my parents were actors, so I grew up surrounded by that kind of atmosphere. And in the sort of dark moments, which we all have in this business, I often wondered whether I ended up being an actor simply because of that, because I didn't know anything [else], or whether I really, really wanted to do it off my own bat. Because I was absolutely surrounded by actors. In reality I think I wanted to be a comedian... my great heroes were... was a man called Sid Field who was a wonderful comic – English comic – Danny Kaye, all those people. And of course when I started, which was... I went to drama school in 1952, to RADA – Royal Academy – and I think I'm right in saying that when we graduated two years later there were 90 students who graduated, only one of whom did not work, and that's because he was not well.

KH: Gosh!

EH: Because there was a rep theatre... in every town in the country. And I always say that if your hands weren't touching the floor you could get a job. I mean there were just actors everywhere. I mean the... obviously the quality varied from one rep to another, but there were weekly reps in every single town virtually. So it was quite easy for people to get jobs. So it's a much tougher world today.

KH: What was your experience of RADA?

EH: Well it... I think the chief thing I came away in those days, because the... I don't really - it's a disgraceful thing to admit, I don't remember an awful lot about the training. But you're with like-minded people, which is one of the things that... you

know, you all go off to see shows and things. And it was great having other people who were interested, who you were studying with, to go and see things.

What we learnt, apart from the given... the facilities to be in productions - which was obviously something you can't do at home! - I'm not altogether sure. I think the voice teaching was probably very good, though it's very different now. I don't think people are trained to speak ['RADA' accent] the way we were, which is probably a good thing. And of course, you know, television has grown out of all proportion since those days, offered a lot of work people which wasn't part of my immediate entry into the business, which was as I say was reps and [theatre].

KH: So when you left RADA where did you go to?

EH: I was very lucky, I got a job at the Bristol Old Vic, which came about because the company there put on... gosh...! Famous musical... Salad Days! And the entire company was suddenly whisked off to London in Salad Days. There was a new director who took over the Bristol Old Vic, and so a new company was swept in. And I was fortunate – as so often happens in this business, it's luck as much as anything else – that I happened to leave drama school just at the point when all that happened. So I got into the Bristol Old Vic, which was just wonderful. It was the most beautiful theatre in England really. I mean, it's an original Georgian theatre, wonderful company. We did three weekly rep, which meant that you had...

KH: You had a bit more time.

EH: Absolutely. [Most] people were doing weekly rep. Three weekly you can really explore what you were doing. And there was no Royal Court, so we were getting the kind of plays that would otherwise have gone there. For example... I was in the first production of *The Crucible* when it came from New York.

KH: Gosh, that's amazing!

EH: And it went straight to Bristol, at a time when the McCarthy thing was going on. So the political implications of the play were the overriding thing that interested people at the time. I don't think they realised that it was such a good play. I mean, I think that's probably not entirely true, but it was definitely the politics... And I remember the first thing that happened after the first night was the set was sold.

KH: Gosh!

EH: Not so much the play. It was a brilliant set, a wonderful designer called Patrick Robertson who worked at Bristol in those days. And it was comprised of a lot of gables which looked like the eaves of houses. And it was wonderful to be in a play as important as that.

KH: That's amazing. What other kind... what other things were you putting on?

EH: Well we would... we obviously did the usual Shakespeare. I think that first season I seem remember we did *Much Ado about Nothing*, and then the occasional new play. I mean apart from *The Crucible*... I remember there was a play called *Image in the Sun*. And the usual kind, restoration... there was wide selection of plays. But doing three weekly rep meant that you could do that.

And also, it was the... a stepping stone to the Old Vic, they were closely linked in those days. So you liked to think that you might be invited to the Old Vic. So Bristol was a wonderful place [for the theatre]... you know, was not just the Old Vic, there was the Bristol Little Theatre which was a more... the usual kind of rep with quite commercial plays. And then they had the touring theatre. So... you know, it was a pretty lively place.

KH: You mentioned about having a bit more time for rehearsal, to work things through, and new plays coming through, did you feel at that point that the way you were being directed, or thoughts about direction and acting were at all different to what you'd learnt at RADA?

EH: No I don't... I don't think so. I think... I suppose you never get what you are taught to think of as the ideal. And every director has a different way of working. What I do remember clearly was working with actors who had been to the Old Vic School, [they] had a very definite and distinctive way of working, which they'd been taught, which I envied hugely. I mean, they had a way of working on a text, or reading a text and deciding how you would... and picking little bits and then... rather like a... one of those pictures with dots, you fill in a couple of dots and then gradually... And I can remember thinking gosh I... I was never taught to work like that, and how good that was. And how helpful it was when you were faced with possibly a director who might have a largely overall picture of a play, but wouldn't necessarily be very good at directing the very technical thing of where you stage and that kind of thing, which a young actor without a lot of experience needed.

KH: That must have been really helpful to you, having that influence from the Old Vic then.

EH: Well it was helpful, and one or two of the terrific actors that I was lucky enough to work with there, you know, one learnt a lot from watching them work, and how they actually were... And they had been taught at this wonderful school which sadly didn't last very long.

KH: This is the Michel Saint-Denis and...

EH: Yes, that's right.

KH: Yes, OK. And George Devine as well.

EH: I was desperate to go there. And I think I'm right... I don't really remember exactly, but I think it folded just about the time I started.

KH: So when you were at Bristol did you have any idea of where you wanted to work?

EH: Yes, I wanted to go to the Old Vic. That was the ambition.

KH: That was where you were aiming for.

EH: Yes, it was. I mean, I suppose looking back it's a bit strange, because at that time the Old Vic were committed pretty exclusively to doing Shakespeare. And my interests were wider than that. I mean, I love doing Shakespeare. I never thought of myself as particularly good at it, and so I was more interested in comedy and being a comedian, but the ambition would be to go to the Old Vic.

KH: So what subsequently happened?

EH: What did happen was... God it's difficult to remember now! I did go to the Old Vic, but in between I went and worked at Nottingham, at the Nottingham Playhouse. And then I sort of dotted around a bit. And I did eventually go to the Old Vic, and I was at one point possibly going to play Puck, which was very exciting, and they were doing a production of the Dream. It didn't happen. And I was there for certainly 18 months – 2 years, 18 months. And I loved it. I mean it was wonderful. You know, you make friends who stay with you for life, I know lots of people that I now am very friendly with who I was in that company with. I mean, there's a great camaraderie in these theatres, because you work with the same people for a year, 18 months. And that doesn't happen quite so much any more, because you know, there aren't the reps, and the other big companies seem to change their, you know, casts quite frequently.

KH: What were your first impressions of the Old Vic?

EH: Well my first impression was... My father was busy working, but my mother used to take me to see everything that was on when Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier were running it. So it was just an enormous thrill to be part of that set up. [It was called] the Old Vic Company, but it had been at the New Theatre, because the Old Vic Theatre was still being [restored from the war]. In fact my first visit there I remember sitting on those canvas and metal chairs, they didn't have seats in the auditorium. So when I joined the company it was just a great thrill to be in that theatre remembering everything that had been... you know, you felt really, 'I've arrived, I'm at the Old Vic'. In spite of the fact that you might have been on the fifth floor, and clambering up and down in different costumes! But it was wonderful, great experience.

KH: So who were you working with at that point?

EH: Well wait a minute... the leading man... One of the first productions I was in was Hamlet, and John Neville was playing Hamlet. Gosh who else was there? Oh there were a lot of... God I've gone blank! Paul Daneman...

KH: That's OK, we can come back to it.

EH: Yes, it will come back to me. But there were a lot of actors who went on to become you know, really very important in the profession. I'm trying to think of the ladies, there were some very impressive ladies there. It'll come back.

KH: OK, not to worry. What was it, do you think, about the Old Vic that made it such a special place to work?

EH: I think it's just the... I think it was the history. I mean, it's a lovely theatre. It's a lovely size. It had been altered a little bit. When the Vic Company went there they'd put a raked forestage on, which meant that the stage went... came into the audience a bit more than it had. It was just the history of the place, and the fact that it was... had all those productions and wonderful things had come from there. And it... for me it was wonderful because... I'd grown up going and seeing things with that company. So it was...

Corale Brown was in that company, and playing the Queen in Hamlet. And I remember the Queen – the actual Queen – came to visit the theatre, there was some sort of... and they were all standing on the stage, we were all on the stage in costume. I looked across and there was Corale, dressed as Gertrude. And I swear to you, you would have thought she was the Queen... It was an exciting time, thrilling.

KH: So what year was this when you were at...?

EH: That would have been '55 I suppose... 1955... yes... no, what am I talking about?! No, no, it would have been about '57, 1957.

KH: Right, OK. Were you... did you feel that things that were going on in other theatres at the time had much impact on what you were doing?

EH: Oh sure. I mean, Stratford was a place that we all used to try and go to [of course], and all the West End theatres. I mean, there were lots of terrific things going on. And also all the other reps: Birmingham, Manchester – the Library Theatre, Manchester. As I say there were theatres everywhere. But the main sort of exciting ones for young actors were the ones in the reps like Bristol Old Vic, Birmingham, Manchester, and there was one in Newcastle. I mean, they were all over the place. And I also worked [with a company] called The West of England Theatre Company, which was based in Exmouth and we had an old bus - a double decker bus - which used to lumber across Dartmoor. And we would play... one-nights in different towns. And this thing [bus] was always

breaking down in the middle of Dartmoor in the middle of the night. Well a lot of youngsters with masses of bottles of cider and God knows what else would have a riotous time in the middle of Dartmoor, three o'clock in the morning.

[Laughter]

KH: How much influence did your parents have on your career?

EH: Well I had... sort of two things, I had... one negative influence which was my father... They were both incredibly encouraging themselves, but the negative influence was when you got a job you always had the feeling everybody was saying 'oh, he's only here because his father's Cedric Hardwicke'. And that used to be a big... big burden to me actually. I got over it eventually. But in those days it was a bit unusual - not so any more - for actors' children to go into the business. It wasn't quite the thing it's become. It's now... you know, there are so many dynasties. And anyway he [my father] was off in Hollywood making films. He only managed to come and see me do one stage performance, which strangely enough was in the production of *Much Ado* at the Bristol Old Vic. And the actor playing one of the main parts... I can't remember now. I was only doing a tiny part, and I was got out of bed the night before at midnight and said 'Look, he's ill, you've got to go on'. So I had to learn this between midnight and the matinée, which my father came to see. So that was horrendous, horrendous! But he was very, very sweet and encouraging.

KH: What did you do after you left the Old Vic?

EH: After I left the Old Vic. I did plays... I did some productions at the Oxford Playhouse. I went back to Nottingham again and did something. Then I was in a production of *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, which went to what was then the St James' Theatre which [was subsequently] pulled down. I worked at the Arts Theatre at one point. I sort of shot about a bit. And I did a tiny, tiny bit of television, not a lot. But then I went back to Nottingham and I found myself suddenly... I remember very clearly, I was asked to be in a series called *Colditz*. And [at the time] I was in a production at Nottingham which I'd asked to do with Derek Jacobi. We were doing a Stoppard play. And Ian McKellan was directing it.

KH: Gosh!

EH: And suddenly this – and I'm not exaggerating – carton, big cardboard box was delivered to the stage door with 15 scripts for *Colditz*. Well I got... I mean, Derek and Ian gave me a terrible time and said, 'how dare you do this?!' - I mean joking! I remember we all went out to dinner and I was sent up rotten about the fact that I was doing this TV series. And that would have been... it would have been about 1959, something like that, I'm not sure... '60. I can't... no it must have been later than that. I'm terrible on dates.

KH: That's OK.

EH: But it was from Nottingham anyway. And that... then that was a long stretch in television which, you know was a completely different world.

KH: When you say it was a different world, what was it initially that was so different for you?

EH: I mean, I think the thing about... I suppose one would have to say... acting, as long as it's... you strive to be truthful. And if it's truthful it can be big or small, it's just a question of like turning the volume up and down.

But I do remember I worked with... Robert Wagner was in the series. And we became quite good friends. He was wonderful because he was film actor, you know and he'd... worked with Tracy and all sorts of people. And he used to just come up and say 'don't do that, don't move your head, keep yours still' or whatever. And I learnt a lot from him. I mean in the nicest [way]... You respected all that film background that he'd been though.

KH: What were people's attitudes to you going to work for television, when you first started working in television?

EH: What, my attitude to it?

KH: Or other people's, either.

EH: Well we were all a bit... all the theatre people were a bit grand about it. You know television... it's not like the theatre... The Theatre! But I actually got to enjoy it enormously. The only trouble with doing something like particular series is that we had an exterior set which was supposed to be the courtyard of this prison camp. And over a long period, which we were doing, you did find yourself thinking 'how can I lean up against this wall in a different way from last week?!' [Laughs] There are little tiny things like that, which sound ludicrous, but which kind of... get out of proportion. The physical limitations of something like that series are quite difficult to overcome.

KH: You were in the first... in the early days of the National you were in that cast weren't you?

EH: Yes.

KH: I was going to ask you a little bit about that, how that came about maybe?

EH: It came about... I'm not entirely certain I know. But I was asked by John Dexter if I would like to come and be in the company. And for some reason it got put off, and I joined... a little bit after it first opened when Laurence Olivier did Othello. And I can remember that as clearly as anything, because we were asked down to London for the reading. And in those days the National had a prefabricated series of buildings which was called... Aquinas Street. It became known as Aquinas... we just talked about Aquinas Street. We were in what was basically a Nissen hut for the reading of Othello – a big sort of open space with tables round it. And I can remember all the designs were pinned up on the wall round the room. And I mean, I'm going back to '64. I remember we were all in suits and we were going round sort of looking at the [designs]... [as if we were] in an art gallery.

And we eventually sat down and Larry Olivier said, 'I hope we're all going to embarrass each other.' and then proceeded, very nearly to give the performance of Othello that he gave on the first night. So we were... I mean, I can remember I was playing Montano, which is not a very big part. But he's got a scene in Cyprus and then he comes on right at the end. And once this reading started and this extraordinary... I mean it was... it was an extraordinary piece of acting. And I can remember he was somewhere down the middle of the table and... I can remember looking at the script going... tearing at the paper and thinking I must quickly read this before I make a complete fool of myself.

[Laughter]

EH: And it was a bit like that, so it was very, very nerve-racking. And that was my introduction to the National. [John] Dexter in fact had a wonderful idea for the production. And I know he's a man who has got a sort of difficult reputation - people used to think he was... he could have a heart of gold. He could be quite tough with people... a bit of a bully, but he had a sensationally good idea for the way to direct Othello and make sense of it, because there's a lot of things in it which are difficult to sort out. But it was... he was in a sense overwhelmed by [Olivier's] performance. I mean, nothing wrong with that because it was staggering as a piece of... physical and verbal acting. I remember after we'd been doing it for quite a while, Olivier saying about the Pontic Sea speech that... I'm not sure which of the great actors it was, Kemble or something, had done it on one breath. And he said, 'I was determined to do that.'. And so there's an extraordinary thing with great actors like that, that it's not just thought, there are also physical challenges as well. And if you're on stage with him it was remarkable, just watching this man tearing this part off. A lot of people didn't like, but you couldn't help but notice it.

KH: What was it do you think that people didn't like about it?

EH: Well I think it was because it was... for one thing he made himself... I mean, for one thing now you would never get an actor putting on black make-up. That's first of all. So you have to start with that.

KH: It's just not politically correct any more so...

EH: It just would not be done. And he did make himself look West Indian, which is not what Othello is about.

KH: No.

EH: So he physically was doing a sort of completely different thing to what people normally expected with... I think the biggest problem it created in a way was for dear old Frank Finley playing Iago. When you see the film, or the film version of it, Frank's performance comes right up. And you may well... people may well look at Olivier and think this is operatic and over the top. But in the theatre it was pretty staggering.

KH: When you said that John Dexter had a very interesting idea for the production, could you say a little bit more about that?

EH: God, I'm going back such a long way! We're talking about... God!

KH: Yes I know, I'm sorry, it's a long time ago.

EH: No he... the main thing I remember him saying was that it was... that there was an occupying force, so that the relationship between the occupiers and the natives was quite... We should look to what was going on around the world at that particular time. That's the main thing I remember. And I remember, because I was playing Montano who was part of the occupying, so the kind of behaviour in front of the Venetians as it were you know, would be different. And I can remember he elaborated much more on that. I mean there were much more specific moments that came out. And I thought at the time... I remember thinking how clever that was. But [the production couldn't] accommodate really in the end, this towering performance, which was, you know, just extraordinary.

KH: How would you describe Olivier's style of acting? I mean obviously you'd seen him in other things as well at the Old Vic.

EH: Yes, oh yes. Well he was... it's difficult for me, because he was a massive hero to me. I mean as a youngster, before I even thought of being an actor, I remember being taken to see his Henry V, the film. And... my mother, bless her heart, as I think I said, took me to the Old Vic, I saw him do just about everything that he did at that time. And he was just... he had this enormous, natural authority. I remember, I think it was Harold Hobson who was the critic on the Sunday Times, saying that he and Richardson were interesting in that Olivier always made the audience feel inferior. And Richardson always made them feel superior.

KH: That's a really interesting...

EH: It's a very neat way of saying...

KH: Yes.

EH: But it does say an awful lot about Olivier. I mean, you were kind of in awe of him, whereas Ralph would always make you feel sympathy or you know, kind of you wanted to give him a big hug. But they're both giants in those different areas.

KH: How did you feel... or maybe you didn't feel... did you feel that acting styles changed?

EH: Oh yes. I think... I think I came into the business at a time when [there were] still... kind of echoes – very dim ones – of Edwardian acting. Very... I mean I think there was still an awful lot of people standing about doing that... you know and hands on the sword in Shakespeare. And I do remember when we got into the rehearsal of Othello, looking around and seeing – because I was doing very little – one or two of the young actors like Derek Jacobi, Frank Finley, who had discarded all that, and were much more today if you like, or as it was then. And that was a revelation to me that you could play Shakespeare... without all the kind of baggage that we'd all grown up with.

KH: Did that make you personally modify your performance?

EH: Yes, to some extent. Although... I never saw myself as a Shakespearian actor... I had no... desire to play Hamlet at some point. I might do now, [Laughs] but I didn't then. No, I mean I didn't... It made one realise that you could play what seemed to be this archaic language in a very modern way – or very naturalistic. The words themselves are not right but... truthful I suppose, truthful, yes.

KH: What did you feel...? I'm trying to think of the way to phrase this. What attitudes towards the National like when you were involved in Othello and early plays like that?

EH: Well I think we felt we were very privileged to be in what finally, after years and years of everybody wanting, was a national company. And I think also everybody... I mean the thing about Olivier, apart from his acting, was he was a terrific leader. I mean a real leader, and in the sense that he joined in with everybody. [which sometimes was a... I mean you'd be coming out of the stage door, you know with a couple of mates going for a meal, and he'd suddenly be there saying, 'What are you boys doing?' 'Well we're going to go and have a...' 'Oh can I come along?' You know and he would find... and then you thought I've got to be on best... which you didn't] But he was a terrific leader. We did feel that the breadth of plays that we were doing was a completely new... a new thing with a national company. I mean, I can remember we would be doing for example Othello in the evening, and in the afternoon we'd be doing Feydeau's Flea in Her Ear. So the kind of contrast... switching from these extraordinary different styles of acting was enormous.

And Ken Tynan, who I think was very much responsible for this... you know, for example in the case of *Flea in Her Ear*, we had a director from Comedie Française directing it. So we got all the sort of expertise that would come with somebody like that. Then you go and do *Othello* or *Rosencrantz & Guildenstern* which was again another different kind of style. So it was thrilling to be in a company all these different things. You know, they were doing Noel Coward, whereas the big national companies before that had stuck to Shakespeare and the classics... it was a bit of an innovation.

KH: What was the training like at the National? Did it differ at all from say Nottingham where you'd been previously?

EH: Well it differed in the sense that you were getting a very glitzy sort of audience. I mean, I can remember walking - and you wouldn't get this today - but I can remember going into the stage door on several productions, and there were people who'd slept in the street all round the building. Now you know that's... that gives you a...

I remember Olivier saying... I used to pass him in the corridor when we were doing *Othello*, he was coming out of his dressing room to do the Senate scene and I'd just done something. I can remember him one night saying, 'I just can't do it tonight, I can't.' You know, and he knew that the audience, almost entirely, were there to see him. They weren't coming, with that particular production, it wasn't the National Theatre, it was to see Laurence Olivier doing this extraordinary performance.

So it was different in the sense that... it was in the spotlight at that time. Now we just take it for granted. But it was very much in the spotlight. And you could get tickets for example off the linkman on the front of the Hilton Hotel. If you were prepared to pay fifty or sixty quid... you know, it was like that. So it was... it was a bit special.

KH: Did it make it at all difficult for yourself or for other performers to kind of work with the knowledge that everybody's coming to see Olivier, whatever the weather they're coming to see Olivier?

EH: I'm talking about that particular production, there were other things that were going on which he wasn't involved in. That particular... I mention because it happened to be the first thing I was in there. You know, you felt thrill... the interesting thing is that... people criticised him for this but... there weren't many actors of his generation involved in that company. I mean, Michael Redgrave came and did something, there were one or two. But basically the initial National Theatre Company that was got together was very young... or relatively young. And so we were all... I mean it was just very thrilling. You just thought 'I'm working in a wonderful company, we're doing all these extraordinary plays, and it's hugely successful, and getting an international audience'.

KH: What did your parents make of kind of the changes that were taking place, because they were very much part of that other generation that you've just kind of mentioned?

EH: Well my father sadly died by the time I went to the National, so he had no knowledge of it at all. He did... he was around when Olivier did the first season at Chichester, which was just before. I don't know - I never really talked to them about it

actually, funnily enough. I never really discussed it. I didn't see a lot of my father; he was off in America most of the time. And my mum used to talk to me, but she was always... she always thought, like a lot of mother's do, 'everything you do is wonderful'...

KH: Oh, that's nice.

EH: I kind of dismissed anything she said as being rubbish, which was awful because she was a very good actress, and you know... but I just knew that she was always going to be flattering to me.

KH: What other productions for you, from the time you were with the National, stood out for you?

EH: Well Rosencrantz certainly did. Flea in Her Ear was a wonderful experience and became the longest running show in the repertoire. And it was in the repertoire for four years. And I think there were only about two of us who didn't change, who consistently played the same part. And in fact during four years run it only did 200 performances, which is extraordinary when you think.

KH: That's amazing.

EH: That was a memorable production. Rosencrantz was one. I can't remember really many that weren't exciting. I suppose I remember being in a rather dreary production of Mother Courage which I wouldn't much enjoy.

KH: Rosencrantz was quite interesting because it kind of came from a very small Fringe play.

EH: Yes, it did.

KH: And then went to the National.

EH: Yes, it was done at the Edinburgh Festival originally. And I think it was... I'm pretty sure it was Ken Tynan who said 'you've got to do this'.

KH: What did you make of it?

EH: Well I... I loved it. I mean, I eventually went into it, and I can remember thinking 'God! Now I'm going to do this'. And we were lucky in that we were directed by the author for a while, when I took over.

KH: Oh, that's interesting.

EH: I remember saying something to him, he said, 'No, no, no' he said, 'it's Morecombe and Wise, that's what you've got to think of. Just think of Morecombe and Wise and you'll be all right.' And the minute he said that then I understood what it was all about. It was enormously enjoyable to do, hugely droll. And it was an enormous success. I mean it ran and ran and ran. I have a book my father started when I was born, and he asked all the sort of interesting people he'd met to write advice to a child. And I tried to keep it going with my children. And I got Tom to write. And he wrote a wonderful piece in it about facts and fiction. And he was terrific to have as a director. And he used to come and watch it quite frequently, and keep an eye on [it], give notes and things.

KH: You mentioned Brecht briefly, and playing in *Mother Courage*, when did you kind of become aware of Brecht?

EH: Oh very early on, because round about the time, just after I went to Bristol, the Berliner Ensemble was very much the 'in' company. And I think they were wonderful. But I think when we did it, and one or two directors tried to kind of mimic what they did, instead of kind of starting from their own standpoint, I found that a bit hard work. But I think the... no, it's interesting because he's not done now is he at all?

KH: Not so much, no.

EH: Hardly ever. I mean, I can't remember...

KH: He's very much a fixture on university syllabuses but...

EH: Oh really, is he? Yes.

KH: But not... you don't see as that many productions.

EH: I'm not bright [enough] to give any opinion about it, but working him as an actor, it needed a very specific kind of... I was going to say production, but that's contradicting what I've just said about our production, which was in fact mimicking exactly the Berlin Ensemble. Then I think that Brecht, the direction was very specific... with those plays. And I think without that it was like... I can't think of... a comparable example. But I think sometimes there are writers who direct their own things, and without them something goes missing. I think that applied a bit with those plays.

KH: That's interesting.

EH: They're very specific kind of... quite dry sort of style. And very political.

KH: What made you leave the National?

EH: I wasn't asked back. [Laughs] I don't remember now exactly. But you do reach a point in these companies where you think I'm not thinking freshly, I'm just doing... I've gone as far as I can go and I'm just repeating what I'm doing. I went there in 19... when did I go there? 1964, and I left in about '71. Although I'd had bits out in between.

KH: It's quite a long period of time though, isn't it, to stay in one company.

EH: It's a long period, a long time. But people did in those days... I mean we did all... They had a thing... a three year contract, but you could take six months out of it. And I did that at one point. So you knew you would kind of be taken back in. But you just... In the end you think, 'no, I want to do something else'. And I think that comes about sometimes because what you're offered in another season may not be very interesting, 'I don't want to do that, I don't want to do that, I'm going to go'.

KH: What did you want to go into?

EH: What did I go into?

KH: Or what did you want to do?

EH: What did I want to go into? I don't know, I just wanted to work. I always think that the next thing I want to do is the next job I'm offered, really. You know, you... if you're a kind of character, jobbing actor, you just want to work. And I don't remember particularly having any great sort of... I just wanted to do possibly different kind of parts. I don't know. I don't know, I can't... It's funny it all just disappears in one's memory now.

KH: How much do you think your time at the Old Vic and the National... what kind of influence do you think that had on the work that you did later in your career?

EH: Oh a lot. A lot, because you were watching and working with some terrific people. Vocally you were aware of people being terrific and having the ability to be heard but not blasting away, and... Olivier was always fascinating to watch, physically what he did, and a lot of other actors. You know there was some terrific people who were the core of that company. There were some great actors – Colin Blakeley, Bob Stephens, Bob Lang – there were a lot of really, really good actors who you couldn't help but learn from, just watching and being on the stage with them. I don't think there was a... particular style emerged from the National; in fact I'm certain it didn't. But I think it had a huge influence on the way people worked. I don't know, it all gets absorbed...

KH: No that's OK, that's great.

EH: Yes.

KH: What other... outside of your own work, what other things were you seeing in the theatre?

EH: Oh God!

KH: That you remember as thinking 'oh that was great', or maybe thinking 'oh that actually wasn't that great'.

EH: Yes... gosh, that's difficult. If I'm being absolutely brutally honest I got - and always have been - slightly more interested in film than theatre.

KH: Oh that's interesting, that's really interesting.

EH: And I don't specifically remember... I mean certainly there were performances that... I remember seeing Paul Scofield in... I can't remember the play, but being hugely impressed by him always. Ralph Richardson, always. Day by the Sea with Gielgud and Ralph Richardson. But there weren't... now if you asked me about films, there are films that I can say immediately – terrific films. And I think that's possibly something to do with my generation, because we were the first generation where you could go to the movies. You know, most locals had two shows a week and for 1/9 you could go and see two films, or whatever. And I think we were very influenced by... I was very influenced by film.

KH: That's really interesting, because in that period as well a lot of... in the sort of late sixties, a lot of theatre things actually became films, and theatre actors went into films.

EH: Yes, that's quite true.

KH: I always think that's quite interesting.

EH: Well we were... British theatre has been fortunate in that it's always sort of provided film actors and directors, whereas in America it's rather different. But of course I also spent, as a child between the ages of five and ten or eleven, I was in Hollywood with my father. So I'd also grown up going to film studios and things.

I mean, funnily enough I was watching on television last week a film called The Black Swan with Tyrone Power. I remember going to the studio, because my father was working there and knew Ty Power, and being taken round the sets of this film and seeing these... there was a kind of artificial lake, and they [had] galleons which were

about as long as this table, in which a guy would lie inside and operate various things, and you know, they'd shoot. And of course to a child this was just total magic, I mean you know, you couldn't believe...and all the cannons and everything. And I wasn't interested in the actors, but all that was just fascinating. So film had that kind of magic that it could do all these extraordinary things. And to some extent that stays with you, you know, you're always astonished at the ingenuity. I mean even in my very adult life, when I was doing the Sherlock Holmes series I can remember at one point we got into a street and Jeremy Brett who was playing Holmes, and I were sitting in a Hansom cab, or some cab, in which there's a window behind us. The camera was there, and the camera operator said I can see the yellow lines in the road. So there was oh... [slap] right! And immediately the props department came out with a roll like that you know, of tape, with cobble stones. And they just went... sssshhhh... like that.

KH: Oh that's great.

EH: And you just thought 'that's fantastic, somebody's actually sat down and thought there may be yellow lines in the road'. And it's all that I just love, I just think it's just so exciting. But you know you... I mean that sounds a silly story but... I think film has that kind of feeling.

KH: It's kind of magical isn't it?

EH: Yes.

KH: Instant transportation visually.

EH: Yes. And because you know, the camera is looking at the glass like that, so you... in the theatre you can get away... I mean, I've got a wonderful theatre photographs that I love of an actor called Eric Porter playing King Lear at Bristol Old Vic when I was there. [His] was... an extraordinary performance, wonderful, powerful performance. And he's in costume... and you look at the costume and you can see, if you look closely, that the buttons on the costume are made with bottle tops! And you know, that's lovely. I think that's what it's all about. But film it's even more extraordinary because you have to cheat in close up.

KH: Yes, yes.

EH: So you know my recollection's more to do with film really than theatre. Although I would have to say that Olivier was, and remains, and Ralph Richardson, two great idols. And most of things that I remember them for were things I saw them [do] in the theatre.

KH: What was it about Richardson that you admired so much?

EH: Oh just a magic actor. I mean I would say without hesitation that the greatest Shakespearian performance I ever saw was Richardson's Falstaff, because he had all the bluster, but you just felt... when he's rejected by Hal at the end of the... you just wept you know, he was just an extraordinary actor to have that kind of... as Hobson said of feeling... making you feel superior. That's a crude way of putting it but... I just loved it. And he was an eccentric as well. I know and I mean Olivier as I say was just extraordinary...

I mean I think there [are] some wonderful actors who've emerged, who are in that category now. And I watched Mike Gambon the other night, who... like when we were all at the National together, we were all kind of doing the same kind of thing. But you know, you can see Tony Hopkins as an old... and the influences of all these people we're talking about are there. You can sort of sense them a little bit. I think somebody once said that acting... actors are a bit like sheepdogs, they inherit... they kind of pick up something from the past. And they herd sheep automatically, instinctively. And I think there's something in that. God, I don't want...! I never stopped talking.

KH: That's OK, that's the whole idea of the interview.

EH: Talk a lot of rubbish.

KH: No not at all.

EH: But it was very thrilling being in that company... certainly, you know, a highlight. And particularly in the sixties, because it was when it was sort of starting.

KH: Yes, yes. What do you think have been, for you, the biggest changes in the theatre since you first began?

EH: I think the disappearance of all the kind of rep theatres – local theatre. I think that's the biggest change, because... it's become a little bit like opera in that it's no longer a thing that everybody goes to. You know, if you're an opera-phile you go to Covent Garden or whatever. But the ordinary person who may go to the movies and watch television isn't going to go to the opera. I think when I started, everybody went to the theatre. Everybody in Bristol or Nottingham, people who wouldn't... now think about going. I think that's the big change, a huge change. And it's resulted in the fact that really good young actors tend to get thrown into things without having had the advantage of years of experience... And I can remember quite early on when I started, going to see somebody about... I think it was a film part. And believe it or not they said 'go away and get two or three years experience in rep before you come and see me again', it was a casting director. But I mean now that would... quite the opposite the case you know. 'Let's have somebody we've never seen before.'. And I think that can in some instances put a huge unfair demand on people, because they haven't had the... experience really. It'll never stop the real... really talented people obviously, but a lot of other actors who would make a good living out of being in the business, I think might suffer from that, missing that experience.

KH: There was one production that I wanted to ask you about, were you in The Royal Hunt of the Sun?

EH: The?

KH: Were you in Royal Hunt of the Sun, or have I just made that up?

EH: Yes I was. I was, I was, I was.

KH: I did want to ask you about that, because I mean that's historically an extraordinary production.

EH: It was yes. John Dexter.

KH: What was your experience of that?

EH: God where do I start?! First of all the play, I believe I'm right in saying, had been hawked around managements for something like five or six years before it was done by the National. It was done at Chichester, which is very special in that it's an open stage. And John Dexter, it's very crafty, what he did was he got another director who was his assistant – and it's awful because his name's gone – anyway all the Indians, all the people playing Indians and all the people playing the Spaniards, rehearsed their scenes totally separately for about five weeks.

KH: Oh, how interesting.

EH: And then he threw them together. And I do remember that... my one lasting memory, it's a personal one, which was that Robert Stephens was playing Atahualpa, developed this extraordinary delivery, his speech... [accented] 'Ata huall pa' Extraordinary, I can't even begin to do it. I remember Edward Petherbridge and myself were playing two sort of... I used to call my character 'Superclock' because I was covered in feathers from head to foot!

I can remember going home one night, desperately trying to find some sort of voice that was suitable for [my] part. And, as one sometimes does, about two o'clock in the morning I suddenly yes that's it, it's that... And I realised I'd left the script in my car. I lived up in Highgate, quite a rural... not residential area. And so I got out of bed, put my dressing gown on, and went out to get this script. And I remember one of the lines was, 'I'm sent by the son of God.' And I was doing this line. [Raised voice] 'I am sent by the son...' And a woman walked past me, walking her dog. [Laughs] It was about half past twelve at night. I've never been so embarrassed. So that's my one recollection...

But the... somewhere I have got... my dear, dear friend who's now died sadly, Robert Lang, about the time we were doing it the great fad was movie cameras. We all had

8mm movie cam – not sound, just 8mm film. And he made a film all through rehearsals, of the rehearsals.

KH: Gosh, how incredible!

EH: And I've got a video somewhere... of the rehearsal period of this play.

KH: Gosh!

EH: But it was extraordinary. And I have to say that Peter Shaffer who... and he's a terrific writer, but he owes a huge debt to John Dexter for that production, because he really was so imaginative. He threw the ball at the actors, he said, 'Come on, have you got any ideas?' And we were... at Chichester he had people all round... behind the main audience, blowing pipes and sort of sounds and things were coming from all over the place. And it was extraordinary. It was a real occasion. I don't think it worked nearly as well when it went to the Old Vic. But at Chichester it was terrific. And it was very much down to John. Because... the dialogue is 'white man speak with fork tongue'. I mean, it's like a... a lot of it's Hollywood B movie western. It's a terrific story.

And we all used to... I can remember the other thing; it's the silly things you remember. We were all covered in this brown make-up, and as the run went on, we used to find ways of removing bits of it during the [performance]. 'He won't see that bit', you know. And I remember one night I got it all wrong and took all the make-up off my face. I had a mask on. And we all used Fairy Liquid to get it off. When Olivier was doing Othello he came round and said 'I hear you boys are using some... what are you using?' And we said Fairy Liquid. So he started using Fairy Liquid, to get all the black off his Othello make-up. But that's the sort of ridiculously unartistic things to do. It was a nightmare act to do, a nightmare.

KH: That's really interesting. I think I've come to the end of my questions that I wanted to ask you.

EH: I'm sure.

KH: But I don't know whether you've got anything that you'd like to add that I've...

EH: No. I haven't stopped.

KH: I'm sure there are things that I've not mentioned at all that would be really interesting.

EH: No, no, no. Anyway I just haven't stopped. [Acting is not a job for grown ups].