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BECTU History Project

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Interviewee: Betty Willingale

Interviewer: Darrol Blake

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NB: The time codes given here are estimates based on readings from the original cassette recording.

Tape 1 Side A

So I'll just have to dole all this out sorry. The copyright of this recording is vested in The BECTU History Project. The subject of the interview is Betty Willingale, the interviewer is Darrol Blake, the recordist is Rick Harley. The date is the fifth of March 2003.

[RH]: Okay all yours now.

Thank you. Right, let's begin with you identifying yourself?

My name is Betty Willingale. I was born in Rotherhithe, which is in south east London in 1927. Mm, I left school in 1944 after having been an evacuee, so I'd gone from Rotherhithe, and want, and needed a job, had to have a job, didn't want to pack biscuits in Peek Frean's factory. Mm, really would have loved to work in the theatre but knew nothing about it. Sort of thought that perhaps working for The BBC would be a wonderful place to start because there would be programmes going on and also a weekly pay cheque or, you know, pay packet in this. So I applied to The BBC and had an interview but I...

Which department did you go in to?

Well, I didn't know. I just, I didn't know anything about anything really, you know, I was sixteen going on ten really. And I was interviewed by a formidable lady called Florence Milnes, who was The BBC Librarian, she was a great friend of Sir John Reith, and she told me in no uncertain terms there was no sort of job going in Broadcasting House, which I found very dashing because Broadcasting House was Mecca in those days, you know, glamorous and all that. She then told me about a strange place called Bush House which housed the European Service of The BBC and outlined what they did there and mentioned all the nationalities involved, at which I actually took fright and she offered me a job in the library there as a junior. And I said 'Oh I can't possibly work there', which surprised her, mm, because I said 'well, I've never met a foreigner'. [Laughter] Went to Bush House which, and then had eleven of the most exciting years ever.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

And that was during the war wasn't it?

That was during the war.

Can you paint us a picture of what it was like working in the West End during the war as a...?

Well, well, I mean we were bombed in Bush House, I mean awful things happened, but it was just such a, an intellectual hothouse really. You know, mm, and I, I, people would come in in uniform, you know, there were, there was a man called Guy Bryan and James Monaghan and they were war correspondents so they were in and out. And the, the people there had come to get away from obviously from Hitler, a lot of Jewish people, but they were all so eminent in their world, you know, they were professors of this, that and the other or they'd been ambassadors or they were authors, mm, and it was the most wonderful place to learn really. And in fact years and years later after I had produced *Fortunes of War*, a Dr Wolff rang me up and he had been in the German Service there and he'd enjoyed *Fortunes of War* so much he was going to take me out to lunch, well in his eighties. And I said to him 'You know I was such a child really when I worked there and knew them all', but I just used to think 'well aren't they lucky to, to be in London and England away from all the horrors', you know. I didn't have imagination enough to realise what it must have been like to leave your country, leave everything behind you, and I said to Dr Wolff, who was extremely distinguished in his field, he had his own programmes in Germany and all that and I said 'Well, I don't know what you did and how you came to be here', and I nearly fell off my chair because he'd been a playwright and he was Max Reinhardt's dramaturg in Vienna, so I really did rub shoulders with some amazing people. And they were all very good to me because I was quite ignorant. And, mm, I remember on one occasion somebody was holding forth about Keiker Gurd [ph A 04:20] who I'd never heard of and they were going on and on about phallic symbols and I remember saying 'What is a phallic symbol'? So they told me.

Yes.

And then said 'It's time you were educated'. [Laughter]

[Laughter]

And they told me how to pronounce Waugh, you know, Evelyn Waugh and Graham Greene. [Laughter] And one of them once came in, well one who didn't have very good English because all the rest of their English was so much better than mine. Mm, I always remember somebody asking 'Is there was a play, a book called *Milestony*', and I had the devil's own job tracking this down until I realised it was *Milestones*, you know, [Laughter] but who would know?

[A 05:12]

[Laughter]

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

It was, why did I remember that? Silly things. But there were, you know, as I say, there was the blitz and blackouts and all sorts, you know.

Yes. And you were, lived, still living in...?

In Rotherhithe with my father, yes.

Yes.

Yes, who was a lighterman.

Right, on the river.

Another almost defunct profession since your trade's now with...

Yes.

Yes. Because when I was a little girl the, where we lived in Rotherhithe the river was much busier. [Laughter] Oh Piccadilly Circus at its height, and when I go back now and look at it it's all so different but it's all, it's all so quiet. Strange nothing on the river and there used to be ships and tugs and God knows what, you know.

Had to come out of, come to leave...?

Rotherhithe?

Bush House, no.

Bush House? Well, mm, after eleven years even I thought, you know, the time had come perhaps to move on. And a lot of the people I'd known they'd, people had gone back to their own countries and it was becoming a different kind of... Well, it was still, still nice but I mean I was still the junior, you know. And I saw a job on the board, used to have in The BBC, offering to run the Script Library at Television. And so I applied for that and got it and joined the Television Service in 1955, the same week that commercial television began, so without knowing I'd joined at a very exciting time because The BBC had had to get its act together, [Laughter] you know, or had to for years particularly in Drama Department.

Yes. Because there was a very small section of The Television Centre built at that point wasn't there?

Yes, yes. We were stuck in a, we were, there was something called the Design Block where Scenic was and then there was a canteen. And where the Centre is now I don't remember, it's just a hole I think, I can't remember it at all. But, mm, as they The BBC gradually took on writers to train as script editors to help with the, you know, the new, well the new wave really because in those days most of the productions that went out were theatre based and writing for television hadn't become the art it did later. And poor Michael Barry who ran the department and I thought was one of the most, oh, best man of drama I've ever met, he was saddled really with a staff of producers, they were called then, we'd call them directors now, who were all on the

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

staff [Laughter] and so he could never bring in new people, newer people. And all this had to change and so when, as these writers came in, there were no offices for them because it was all so tiny, so there was a big car park and they were all put in caravans, and if ever the head of department or anybody wanted to see them I had to open my window and yell out, you know, [Laughter] to whoever was around, pass it down, you know. [Laughter]

Sure. Have you any idea of the quantity of production at that time? I mean was there a play every week or two plays every week?

Oh yes, yes. There was, well the big offering, I don't, I don't, I don't think we had terribly generic titles in those days but I may be wrong. Mm, but there was a play every Sunday night, and it was a big production, mm, of course, went out live, and then it, it, the same production was repeated on a Thursday. And then very gradually they sort of began to kind of introduce other little slots, you know, little half hour pieces or some such. And I can still remember when one of the script adapters, they were called then, called Vincent Tilsley came in to my, because they, they, for a long time they had to sit in my Script Library before the caravans came and this is where I think I first started learning about writing really listening to them. But Vincent came in looking shell-shocked. He'd just seen the head of department, Donald Wilson, who later went on to do *The Forsyte Saga* and he said 'I've been given this book', it was *David Copperfield*, 'and told to turn it in to thirteen episodes'. [Laughter] And I think, I think that was the first serial that Drama had ever done. Children's Department may have done some and Light Entertainment had a kind of soap called *The Grove Family* I think, but this was the first what came to be called, horribly I thought, the Classic Serial. Very daunting type of title isn't it - Classic Serial? Sounds as if you're going back to school.

[A 10:06]

And who, whose idea would that have been, have you any idea?

Donald Wilson.

Donald, it was Donald Wilson?

Head of our department, yes.

Yes.

Who...

Head of Script Unit?

Who, head of Script Unit, yes.

Yes, yes.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

Who liked serials and, because he wrote some rather good ones himself, you know, some kind of detective ones, you know. He didn't write *Tim Frazer* but he wrote ones like that. He brought in Francis Durbridge and so on and all that.

Yes, mm.

So...

Who had a radio track record.

Absolutely.

Yes.

Yes, absolutely.

Mm, and at what stage did that develop? How, what was, what did that...?

How did that all change?

How did it, what was the turning point? Was it, was it the arrival of, mm...?

The turning point for me I suppose was the arrival of Sydney Newman, or Sydney Newman. Although I didn't turn in to a script editor or anything, I was set up as the liaison between the Script Unit, which had grown of course, and Drama Department.

Oh they weren't in the same department?

No. The Script Unit was always separate. Although we worked with them so closely but they used, I mean they used the Drama, because it had been Michael Barry's idea to bring in Donald Wilson, he thought they needed a Script Unit but we were all separate, we came under Resources or some strange thing, [Laughter] you know, wonderful Ian Atkins was eventually my boss. But, so my job really consisted of writing everybody's rejection letters really, not a lot, or any odd jobs, you know.

I assume there were a lot of unsolicited scripts?

Oh in the Script Unit we had, I mean we had an amazing intake well, when I was, you know, the Script Librarian there. Because, I mean one day we had over three hundred, three hundred and fifty, I, I couldn't believe it. I, I began to get rather alarmed, I used to think 'England's full of nutters', you know, 'who's doing terrible plays'. [Laughter]

Yes.

And they were all read. We had, we, we had what we used to call in shorthand 'skim readers' on the staff really and they would sift through them. Well, I would do the initial sift and then those that had come from agents or anybody that had written before we sent out to what we called our senior readers who, one man called Gerrard Tyrrell, who'd been a playwright, and Eric Crozier, who was a librettist who had been

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

a television producer before, and we had others of course, eventually. And then they would give a very big summing up. So everything was read always.

And did you ever discover anything?

One or two. We discovered a man called, mm, oh, was he called Peter Patterson. Oh dear, forgotten his name, did this... Peter Turson. Yes, I say Peter Patterson because his name was Paterson but he dropped it, did *The Fishing Party* and various things. But it was more that... On the basis of what the readers had said or what we thought ourselves one would get those writers in and encourage them. I mean the idea was to encourage people to write for television.

Right.

And very few plays come in ready made as, you know.

Okay. So had you by then moved on, had television moved on then from the, from the West End play or the...?

Well, oh yes. It was, it was very much the beginnings of commissions.

Commissions were already going out from, from producers?

Yes, from producers.

Yes.

And, mm, we, Michael Barry himself had managed to wrest some money from Kenneth Adam, who was in charge then I think, to get people in who could be helpful, and one was Nigel Kneale. I thought it was a pretty marvellous selection really. Nigel Kneale, Philip Mackie, who disappeared almost overnight to go to, head up drama, Granada Television. Mm, Giles Cooper, and I forget who the third was. But Nigel Kneale, I remember saying to him how, how did he, why, why had he come in to television, had he written something? And he said no, he'd written a book of short stories he'd won an award for, Somerset Maugham Award called *Tomato Cain* and apparently Michael Barry had read it and thought from it that he could see this man knew something about drama.

But, but, mm, Nigel Kneale wrote 'Quatermass'.

Yes. Well these had all happened before I got to the unit.

Exactly.

Yes, yes.

He had actually written the beginnings of 'Quatermass'.

Yes, yes, he had, yes.

Because I worked on the middle 'Quatermass'.

[A 15:00]

Yes.

In the autumn of '55.

Mm. But he, he had been, Nigel Kneale and Giles had been there a couple of years by the time I, I got there. Then Giles went pretty quickly but, and then, then so did Nigel Kneale, he went off to do films didn't he?

Yes, yes.

But he was, mm, he was very helpful to me because one never to be forgotten Christmas we were terribly behind with reading scripts and there were whole piles and, you know, one was honour bound to deal with things quickly so I thought there was nothing else for it I'd have to read them and at least, you know, write a little synopsis and things like that. And I remember asking Nigel Kneale how to read the scripts [Laughter] and he was very helpful and very nice so I always regarded him as my mentor really because he had such perfect taste I thought. I still do think he's one of the greatest writers we've had.

Now after 'David Copperfield' ...?

Mm, mm.

That which was presumably was successful?

Success, yes.

Did that immediately head up a whole series of Classic Serials?

It didn't immediately but it did pretty soon after. You know, this is the thing things don't happen.

No.

It didn't happen overnight, they just happened, you know, at some point. But yes, it did really because again Donald was very, very keen on, on classic serials, on serials and of course, you know, wonderful field really.

Mm, indeed.

And, mm, so there was this slot bitterly fought over because Children's Department didn't want to give it up and they had the five-thirty to six slot for children's things and I'm afraid Drama got it off them [Laughter] and, and so that became...

Mm, the Classic Serial was born?

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

Yes, the Classic Serial, yes, yes, [Laughter] mm.

Now presumably all the directors or the straight producers...?

Gradually went.

Yes.

Newer people came.

So I was going to say they were all, they were all staff?

Well, most of them who were there, yes, all staff, yes. But then I suppose natural wastage or whatever they like to call it now I think well, they, you know, some of them getting on and they moved on and more people, you know, just came in on a freelance basis.

Yes.

Which wasn't, particularly so when after, I can't remember when Sydney Newman came, was it fairly early '60?

I think it might have been the '60s yes.

I think it was.

Yes.

And Michael Barry left to go to Ireland.

Yes.

And Sydney Newman devolved an entirely, I mean he, he initiated a totally different system, he really shook it all up, not necessarily for the better, and turned it in to three parts, mm.

Departments?

Departments. Play Department, Series Department and Serials. Serials was very much the poor relation really because, mm, he didn't like the Classic Serial at all Sydney. And Series were I think the hardest worked really because I do think series are terribly hard to get together aren't they? Play Department, which did wonderful things but I think also set up a really rather horrid snob, snobbery system because it, a lot of people who worked there seemed to think they were there because they were better than anybody else, [Laughter] which wasn't so really, a lot of it was stroke of pen really. And so what happened, I suppose I ought to be talking about me, what happened to me? Oh yes, no, no, you ask, you ask?

When, when, when the department, the group was split up in to three departments?

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

Mm, I went to Serials, I stayed in Serials Department.

Yes.

Yes, because I was, you know, I wasn't anything really, I was just, you know, still the script, script assistant they called me.

Yes, yes.

Drama assistant or something.

Yes.

And then I was approached by not my own department but Series Department and asked if I would go and script edit *Z-Cars*, which had been an enormous success and was sort of, you know, still trundling on. And I really didn't think I was, you know, no, I thought I'd, I, I didn't think I could bring anything to *Z-Cars*, you know, oh, very frightened of it all. But I think Donald Wilson was rather cross that somebody [Laughter] else from not his department had asked so he asked if I would like to because they were looking for script editors.

Yes. So you didn't have any, any truck with 'Z-Cars' after that?

No, no, no. I just thought it was so good.

Yes.

I, what could I do, you know. Mm, but he asked me to, if I would like to do the five-thirty which the Classic Serial which was very fair set, of course, I longed to do that and I was so thrilled, only to find I edited *Compact* which was a soap for a year.

[Laughter]

[Laughter] Yes.

[Laughter] And...

Do you know how 'Compact' came about? I mean do you know why The BBC put it on or if they put it on?

[A 20:00]

Well, I think they felt they had to have a soap really because *Coronation Street* was trundling away being frightfully sort of successful and The BBC, if you remember for a long time, I mean ITV wiped the floor with BBC Drama didn't they because with few exceptions BBC didn't seem to get it right somehow, it took a long time for people...

With The Bounty Theatre and...

Yes.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

And 'Coronation Street'?

Yes, Street, yes.

And things, Rediffusion...

Yes. Which, which had been such a resounding success. And so they'd set up this, mm, glamorous serial about life in a glamorous... Well, all I can say...

Was it a magazine, a magazine?

Is a magazine called *Compact*.

A magazine, yes.

And people who loved it loved it, and after three weeks I'd have hit anybody on the nose who said anything rude about it because they all worked so hard, and in those days we believed in company loyalty didn't we? You know, if you were working for something you really gave your all. Mm, and then I went to Classic Serial.

Yes.

Because by this time...

How long were you with 'Compact' then?

A year.

Ah, ha.

And by this time all those script editors who used to be in caravans, some had gone because that had been the idea to help them because, you know, as I say, writing for television was not an art in itself, there were so few examples really.

Yes, yes.

So they all left. They, when they were script adapters they were sent to every production to help time and help see how the studios worked and then they were really meant to go off and do their own thing, you know, and write.

Yes, yes. So we're now in to the '60s?

Mm.

And Television Centre, the studios at Television Centre had been built.

Oh, had been built by then, yes, yes.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

So, so presumably had moved on to the fourth floor or the fifth floor or...?

Yes, absolutely. I was on the fourth floor with the spiral staircase in between.

Yes, yes.

Wonderful, fifth and fourth, yes. And also we'd set up, mm, we? I mean Donald Wilson had the, in the Scripts Unit a few years before, and as you know it's always very difficult finding producers, script editors, where do you get them? You know, train and with potential all sorts but it's so, a thing was set up called the Survey Group I think, I can't remember some silly name, mm, but we were all, even me, sent out to look at new plays or read new books. And I remember reading a new novel called *Beat on a Damask Drum* by called, somebody called Troy Kennedy Martin and I remember saying to Donald 'Oh I think he would know how to write plays I think'. Because he, it's, I don't know, how do you know good scenes, he could write scenes and good dialogue and so Troy came in to be one of the script adapters.

Mm.

And John Hough.

That must have been...

That was a little earlier, you see I'm getting in a muddle about...

That must have been, that must have been in the late '50s because of course, he was the originator of it in... [Inaudible A 23:12]

Of it, it was, it was the late '50s. Yes, I'd forgotten that chunk.

Yes.

But I thought it was, it, you know, finding writers was the order of the day.

Yes.

And, you know, and John McGrath had come in. I mean he was obviously, he'd done things before he came to The BBC, as people did in those days.

Yes, yes.

They all had something to offer didn't they?

Was he a general trainee perhaps or, or because I worked with him...

He, no...

In open drama.

That's right.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

To direct the dramatisations. We did a programme called, I was a designer in those days.

Yes.

And we did a programme called 'Bookstand' which didn't Harrisons [ph A 23:48] produce?

Oh yes, I remember, yes.

A young man called Dennis Potter.

Yes.

Was the presenter.

Yes.

With a man called Dick Taverne, who went on to be...

Oh, an MP, yes, yes.

And there were sort of guest young men, directors, from Drama Department?

Yes, that's right, yes.

To do the drama, dramatisations?

But, yes.

Mm, Peter Hammond was one.

Yes.

And John McGrath was one and that's when we became acquainted at that point.

Yes, became friends, yes, yes. Yes, I'm not sure. I think John may have gone on a general training course but he had done an awful lot of drama in Vesti [ph A 24:21] hadn't he?

Mm, yes.

And had little companies himself even then I think.

Yes, yes, yes.

Oh, and Peter Hammond there's a name, I worked with Peter so much. I always thought he was the poet of television. I don't think I ever worked with anybody more exciting than Peter, he could get marvellous things.

Were you able to do 'Count of Monte Cristo'?

Yes.

Which he did rather spectacularly?

Oh it was beautiful.

Despite of Mr Alan Badel.

Oh nightmare. [Laughter] Lovely man, a nightmare. Lovely, a wonderful actor.

[Laughter]

And I remember years later. I mean I suffered on *The Count of Monte Cristo* because of course, he, you know, about actors and scripts and things. And, mm, many, many years later when I was working with Jonathan Powell we did *The Woman in White* and as we were casting it, mm, the suggestion came up that Alan Badel should play Count Fosco, and I think I went pale even after all those years and I said 'Well, don't tell him I've got anything to do with it'. [Laughter]

[A 25:24]

[Laughter]

And of course, when he appeared he was delightful. He was mellow and great and so clever, such an actor.

Yes, yes. Mm, so who was the producer of the Classic, was there an overall producer for the Classic Serial?

Oh the one, yes, I worked with the one who had been there for years, a man called Campbell Logan, who talked very gruffly and knew the theatre backwards, he'd been in, he'd worked in theatre all his life. And he, he was tremendously encouraging and he did, he just loved telling stories and he'd been a good director himself I believe. I hadn't, mm...

Now was this the beginning of, mm, or the beginning of the '60s in my memory is, is the division between producer and director, suddenly there was a producer and also a director.

Director, yes, yes and Campbell...

Mm, different fields but presumably...

And Campbell who, they had a producer, an overall producer.

Yes.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

Because, you know, there was an awful lot to find, you know, you had to...

Yes.

And they tended didn't they to, mm, make the older, mm, what had been producers but were really directors. The older ones like Ian Atkins, John Jacobs. No, no, John Jacobs was with Ian. Ian Atkins, Campbell Logan, Stephen someone, oh I must, sorry about this.

And Harrison?

Harrison, that's right. Yes, they all became producers I think.

Yes, yes.

Mm, and then gradually they left and, mm, it, you know, whoever who was about seemed to become the producer then. [Laughter]

[Laughter] But, but there were still quite a hefty contingent of staff people wasn't there?

Oh indeed.

There were indeed staff people?

Yes, yes, the staff was the backbone to it.

Yes, yes.

I can't remember when it, how it all changed. It changed...

I think it changed gradually.

Gradually didn't it, yes.

And, and there were still the staff people around in the '60s.

Yes, I was the very first staff script editor because after me, and then I think Lennox Phillips was allowed to be. No, they had to be, they had to be freelance.

Ah, ha, mm.

Mm, but I was, you know, the old, only one who, you know, came with the furniture. [Laughter]

Yes. [Laughter] Mm, can you, do you want to say anything about the individual serials that you can remember? I mean I have a list here, 'Children Of The New Forest'?

Oh yes.

'Martin Churzlewit'?

Yes.

*'Tale Of Two Cities', 'Count Of Monte Cristo', 'Elusive Pimpernel', 'Ivanhoe',
'Hereward the Wake', 'Black Tulip', '[Inaudible A 27:48]', 'Dombey And Son'.*

Oh, oh amazing.

I mean it goes on and on and on.

It's tremendous isn't it, amazing.

Yes. Some great...

I remember, Joan Craft did a lot of them and Joan was a lovely director who cast beautifully, I think she was always, you know, my mentor again, I remember how Joan used to work at it. And I think, I don't know if I told you, mm, when we did, and we had very little money, it's always in Studio D and we had Joan, we had *Storm the Bastille* with eleven extras. [Laughter] And John Woodward, Sidney Carlton and very fine it all was too. And I always remember, it was Peter Hammond though who used to really give us heart attacks because he, he, his shooting was so ambitious and so wonderful. And I remember when we were doing *Hereward the Wake*, you know we used to, you remember those old days you used ten minutes film insert if you were lucky, but we...

That was budget?

That was budget more or less. And also film wasn't used was it? I mean it was very, used very sparingly. And at one point one whole episode was the, no not the whole but pretty well, the Danes sacking the abbey at Peterborough and we did it in Studio D. And he had a big cross on the wall and to show they'd lost, you know, the cross slowly tumbled down [Laughter] and crashed on the studio floor, we all ducked. And Peter would be, be sort of urging the cameraman to give of their best and going 'Back, back, back', crash in to the studio wall, you know. [Laughter] But he was very inspiring and, mm...

And very ambitious.

Oh, but all in the cause of drama really.

Yes, yes, right.

Wonderfully, not for himself, mm.

And, yes, because it was those studios in Lime Grove which had been a film studio of course.

Mm, yes, yes.

And had great success.

I used to love Lime Grove, yes, mm.

Mm, okay. Mm, Studio G and Studio D?

Mm, D. They mostly used D, yes.

At Lime Grove, yes.

Mm.

Was used for the drama?

Yes.

Can you, can you sort of paint us a picture there of Lime Grove in those days?

[A 30:00]

Of Lime Grove? Well, it was a rabbit warren wasn't it? I, you, I always remember being so excited because it had been Gainsborough Studios and all that and, but I could never find my way to the canteen because there always seemed to be enormous iron staircases and I was always getting lost. But once again there was, there was in those days a tremendous spirit between people who were working together. It, you know, everybody knew everybody and if you got yourself into trouble [Laughter] on a production there was always somebody to help you, people would rally round. It was terrific spirit.

Mm.

I loved it and...

One thing I remember.

Mm.

And I didn't really see it in its full strength until I went to ITV much later on...

No, yes.

Was the enormous resources of The BBC.

Oh yes.

In every department you could think of.

Yes.

Music.

Yes.

Research, mm, mm, libraries.

Mm, the lot, yes.

Engineering.

Yes.

I mean everything you can think of.

Oh everything, yes.

There was, there's always someone to help you there.

Help you, yes. And I, I always used to say when I was in The Reference Library, you know, in my early days that I learnt then that you could find out anything, if you made lots of phone calls round The BBC there would always be somebody who knew the answer to any obscure question and somebody would be an expert on it wouldn't they? And I, I always, I did sort of pipe my eye a bit when I read that The BBC Libraries had been sort of disbanded and chucked practically in paper, black paper bags, or sold for something like twenty thousand - the books. I just thought 'All of that history, all that tradition, all that knowledge what a waste'. And of course, I mean I expect you're like me do you about the pronunciation that goes on now. I listen to the pronunciation, I cannot bear, I can't bear it. I heard somebody on the other night on the television talking about The Duke of 'Arandel', and I heard, it was even on Radio Three too, something about light music and there was this famous composer who was an obscurity and, and he was Albert 'Kettleby' and I thought 'Oh I've never heard of him'.

[Laughter.

But of course, they started playing *In a Persian Market*. Well, I gather, I mean I may be wrong, I gather the Pronunciation Unit is still there but if you're a programme maker with a tiny budget I think it'll cost you something like ten pounds to ring.

Ring up whatever?

Well, isn't that ludicrous?

Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

Oh well mustn't keep on. [Laughter]

[Laughter] So at the, one Classic Serial, one Classic Serial followed another.

Oh yes, yes.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

So you were listing half an hour a week?

Well, I was, a week, yes. And fifty-two episodes which was heavy going. And after, I don't know I think I was with Campbell two or three years but I just got very, very tired really. And Robin Wade, who was running, by that time head of the Script Unit, needed an assistant and I thought it was a good idea to go back and sort of mm... And something good came out of that because I remember saying to him 'You know we sit here reading the scripts, talking about writers, helping people'. People on the floor, I, I detected a, what I, a schism that people who worked on the floor... And, you know, a script is a strange thing it's not, script writing is not an exact science, but whatever went wrong they'd blame the writers, 'Why don't the writers do this', and, you know, it's all their fault. And I thought 'This isn't, this is wrong', you know, because we had a, a post in the Script Unit for a reader so I suggested that the people, the PAs, the AFMs, all those people, used to be on stand by, do you remember?

Yes.

And I thought 'While they're on standby why couldn't they come into the Script Unit for a month or so and learn about writing and the pressures on writing and try to, you know, then each could understand the other person's point of view', you know. Because I do think when, when things get excitable production staff think it's theirs and, you know, forget that somebody else set it off, you know.

Right.

And anyway that, that proved to be very, very successful actually. And I was a bit naughty with them I made them all dramatise a short story of Elizabeth's, you know, Elizabeth Jenkins or someone. Gosh, and I always remember someone saying to me 'I'll never complain about a writer again'.

[A 35:03]

[Laughter]

'Oh that's alright, that's all, I mean because we're all in it together aren't we?'

Yes.

And it was, it was too much divided before I think so...

Can you remember any particular highlights of that period when you were back in the Script Unit?

Not really. Mm, mm, well, well, I mean...

Was that 'Forsyte Saga' at that time was it?

No, no, that was long after that.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

Ah.

Mm, this was, mm, well, we, as I say, we worked very closely with Drama Department and, mm...

Mm. Which it was now part of surely?

No, it was still...

No, still Resources?

It was still, always Resources, we were always, Ian Atkins and Patrick Ramsey, they were called Studio Resources at the time I think.

Yes, yes.

Yes, we were always a funny little unit. It was the first to go, you know, when the axes came down. Mm, but it was good times because people like, I mean Gerald Savory was running Play Department then and he, I found him very interesting. He always, he used us a lot so we were...

He had been a writer?

Had been a writer. And we, he, he was also a very funny man wasn't he, amusing? And so I think Robin and I had a good time, you know, we, we really felt we were part of it and contributing, and in so much and so far as he then asked me to go and script edit for him for a play, play series, which I did, and it was called *Boy Meets Girl*. And Gerald, it was Gerald...

Whose idea was that?

Gerald, Gerald Savory's totally.

Right.

He, he said 'I want you to find eight novels that can be turned in to plays all on the subject of boy meets girl', I can't tell you how hard it was. I fortunately had been a librarian but my goodness it took me a long time to find them. And everybody kept saying 'You're never going to do anything called *Boy Meets Girl*' and Gerald said 'They think it's a joke', [Laughter] but of course, it wasn't a joke and we did do it.

Good.

And they were moderately successful. But, mm, and I was very flattered, he asked me to stay on in the department but I didn't.

And what happened after that, did you go back to Classic Serials or...?

Well, then I did go back to Classic Serials because, and it was Campbell again, he, mm, he... Now what happened?

'Treasure Island'?

Yes. Michael Voysey, who was, who had to leave, you know, who was script editing so I went back and we did the Peter Hammond, *Treasure Island*. David Turner, do you remember David Turner? He was a fine writer who died too young. Peter Vaughan was Long John Silver. Very exciting time.

Yes.

And I can't remember what came next there were so many.

Yes, I was going to say....

So many.

That must have been about 1963 or so because...

It was all early '60s stuff I think.

Yes.

Yes.

Because what happened then was BBC Two.

Of course. Because I remember having to have, mm... That's right. Now I'm going to get in a muddle about the years but I know I had to have trainees, you know, to help, tell them about The BBC and...

There was a tremendous staff taken on.

Tremendous, tremendous take wasn't there? Enormous.

To start BBC Two.

Enormous, yes.

In 1964 when it started.

Yes, I suppose so. And I had the ex drama critic of *The Daily Express*, a man called John Barber, and I was, I thought 'Why am I telling him'? But, you know, he didn't know about television which was interesting and...

Yes, I remember though that Stephen Bundy had two dozen baby designers.

Did he?

To bring on as most of them had some experience.

Oh they had some experience, yes.

In the theatre or whatever, you know.

Yes, yes.

But there were two dozen of them.

Oh, [Laughter] yes.

Because of that, mm, devastating...

Mm, it was an enormous change wasn't it really?

Yes, yes.

Yes.

I mean I remember in the Design Department, the Prop Department, the Scenery and the...

Mm, multiplied.

The workshops?

Yes.

It was a twenty-four hour day, you know.

Phew.

You know, just in order to meet the, meet the demand.

Yes, in order to meet the demand. And that's where the BBC Two serial began didn't it?

Yes.

The, the classic. I'm sorry I suppose it's horses for courses isn't it you remember your bit? And I did, I wasn't anything, I mean I wasn't to do with it then but Douglas Allen produced it didn't he? And the first one we did was, oh, *Madame Bovary*.

Right.

Nyree Dawn Porter.

Right, yes.

All did, they did them all from Glasgow didn't they? Mm.

Did it all over the place actually.

All over the place were they, yes. [Laughter]

Yes, because they were running out of studios.

Yes, yes. [Laughter] Oh weren't the studios exciting?

Oh yes.

And so sad to think nothing happens in them now.

Well, in, at that time, mm, the studio, the production could actually happen entirely in the studio?

[A 40:00]

Absolutely, yes.

I mean there might have been a bit of filming to get the cameras in the dry.

But yes, yes.

But most of the time I mean the screen time was actually in the studio.

In the studio, yes.

And it had a language and it had its...

And it had, it had its own rules hadn't it, yes. I also reckoned that, you know, that television drama was an art in itself. You know, there was theatre, there was radio.

Yes.

But television drama was a thing apart, but it's not like that now, mm.

Yes. And then moving in to the, leaping ahead a bit in to the '70s.

Mm.

We started making big pictures in my, in my...

Well, I deal with it is when I think was...

There was so much of it on location.

Yes, and I, I thought that was a grave mistake myself. I, something went didn't it?

Yes.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

But then there was a short burst later on in the '90s wasn't there when, mm, was it called Simon Curtis produced a thing called *Performance*.

Yes, yes.

With this theatre place, and weren't they wonderful and wasn't it good to see the studios use properly?

Mm, mm, but oh it was, it was.

Yes.

But they had to be particular kind of plays, I mean they did [Inaudible A 41:00] I seem to remember and...

Yes.

And one or two others which were in D Studio and...

They did, yes and Chekov.

Yes.

And, yes, yes.

But...

Tales From Hollywood, remember?

Yes, yes.

They did beautifully, yes.

But, but life had moved on.

Yes, it had. Mm, and I, I mean I, I find this thing about film and, and tape so barren an argument really because film is just, it's a medium, it depends what's on it, how it's used doesn't it?

Yes. But then...

But people get starry eyed. I mean there you, you daren't talk to a film man about television, mm, they think you're nuts, they're not slightly interested are they?
[Laughter]

So what, what I think, certainly when I was a designer in the '60s and then a director...

Mm.

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

In the '70s, what I hated was what I called piebald productions.

Oh.

Which was where you had...

Yes.

Video tape interiors.

Yes, indeed.

And 16mm exteriors.

That's awful, royal telly silly. [Laughter]

Yes. And I, for about ten years I managed to persuade my employers, whichever producer it was...

Oh yes.

The BBC or Thames or Granada whatever to either be all on film or all on tape.

Oh indeed, yes.

And that was, that was quite an achievement.

Oh revolutionary, yes, yes.

And then of course, very soon that became a general rule.

Of course, it did.

I mean you had to have everything on film, you know.

Yes, but some directors were jolly good at it weren't they? I was thinking again of Peter Hammond because when we did *Our Mutual Friend* but, you know, we did a bit of film, but Peter was so skilful, and the people around him but he didn't half make people do things, it was very difficult to tell the change. I would sort of, I mean I knew where the change came because I knew the script but he did it so skilfully.

Mm, mm, yes.

It could be done.

Indeed. Mm, then Bill Slater got to be head of Serials?

Oh yes. Now what happened then was, you know, things were going along quite merrily and, mm, Robin Wade, who was running the Script Unit decided to leave and, you know, the job was boarded, or I don't know whether it was boarded but anyway

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

they appointed someone from radio actually to run it. And I thought 'Well, it's time for me to move on', because I didn't, I'd done it all there in the Script Unit and I didn't suddenly want to, you know, do it all over again. And as I was vaguely wondering what to do with myself when Bill Slater, who was then head of Serials, just knocked on the office door and said 'You're coming to work for me', so I did, which was nice. I had, again from the Script Unit I worked with him a bit because whenever he was setting up something in series particularly he would come in and talk about writers, you know, and this is really how we became friends and so I...

Right, right. And can you remember what your first...?

My first one, first, wait a minute what was it?

Film?

Ah, ah, ah, ah. Yes, it was rather alarming really because I had...

Was it Mrs Gaskell?

That's right. I had, I was working, going to work with a producer called Martin Lisemore who had done *The Pallisers* and various other things I can't remember and was in disgrace for over, having overspent on *The Pallisers* and so there weren't any scripts around and, mm, you know, something was needed in a hurry because suddenly he'd, he was, been asked to produce something. So I thought of reviving *North and South*, Mrs Gaskell, and jolly nice it was too with Patrick Stewart [Laughter]and that sort of got us rolling away, you know.

And, and then there was a lovely magic moment because we had a head of Drama who hated Charles, hated Dickens and you won't, wouldn't notice this, the public wouldn't have noticed but there had never been a Dickens serial on BBC Two they were always done on BBC One. And Martin came to me and said 'There's a sudden gap in the schedules', or something, a sudden crisis 'and if we can think of something we can have the slot', but it was in a very alarmingly short space of time. The head of Drama happened to be on extended leave so I said 'Why don't we do *Our Mutual Friend*', which had always been my favourite Dickens, and I remember Martin saying to me 'It's a big book'.

[A 45:45]

Well, it is.

And I said 'Yes but you can always take a line through' and 'pfft', you know. And it was a huge success and it was Peter Hammond again and we had a wonderful cast. Mm, we had Alfie Bass as Silas Wegg, you know, the literary man with a wooden leg and Leo McKern, Jane Seymour in a tiny part. Kathleen Harrison played Leo McKern's wife. It was, it was a delight from beginning to end really, very proud of that one. Mm, and Nick, Nicholas Jones, Warren Clarke in almost his first part as Bradley Headstone. And what else was...? So that was, that was it. So there I was with Martin and I can't, can't remember what we did, we did. Oh, and then of course,

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

we did *I Claudius* because that had, that was brewing. That wasn't my idea, it had been brewing away when I got there.

Do you remember whose idea it was?

I think London Films had come to The BBC actually.

Ah, ha, right.

And wanted...

And London Films in the person of?

Of, I don't know, of two old gentlemen I didn't know. Not, Mark Shelmerdene who was sensible came later but these two old gentlemen I met were not at all sensible. Mm, there was a problem with *Claudius*, a big problem, because we'd got perhaps the best writer in the land on it and the most conscientious but he was...

Who was?

Jack Pulman, the wonderful Jack Pulman. But he was, he was having problems starting it so we were late and it took him a long time to get going and, and production dates were getting terribly near, you know, you already know what it's like. And we'd got six scripts in. Jack got off the ground and the six scripts I absolutely loved and so did Martin and, mm...

Presumably the director was on board at this point was he or not?

Yes, Herbie Wise.

Yes.

Wonderful Herbie. But Herbie, I mean he, he wasn't sort of, he was sort of vaguely on board but not, you know, the way, you know the way The BBC never paid people for what they did, I mean Herbie was working from home or coming in to the odd meeting. And we had to show London Films the script you see, we had to show them the scripts. And we sent them to them and I remember Bill Slater, head of Department, terribly worried because they didn't like them. And I was desperately keen for Jack Pulman not to know this because he was writing against the clock and I didn't want him worried and disturbed by it all so we thought we would, Bill and I and Martin too thought we'd all fight it out. And, mm, I remember this hideous meeting we had with London Films, I couldn't believe it and one of them said 'Well, of course, I've written, you know, I've written drama'. He'd written some, one episode of something on radio years back a bit. And, mm, he said 'Of course, you've got it all wrong it should start with Claudius behind the curtain being proclaimed Emperor and then just one flashback to say how he'd got there'.

[Laughter]

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

‘And you ought to use more’, and *Claudius the God*, and *Claudius the God* is all battles and, mm, and it would have meant we didn’t have Livia - Siân Phillips, Brian Blessed, George Baker, all of, I mean, you know. Well, it was a terrible moment and, mm, the head of Drama had not read the scripts and said perhaps he should over the weekend, and he did, and on the Monday morning my head of Department came in to me and said ‘Well, we’re on our own because he doesn’t like the script’. So I, we had the unenviable task of telling Jack this but I was really feeling, I can actually remember, it was Friday night and we’d got to let Jack know obviously on the Monday and I remember I thought ‘I’ve got an idea, it might not work’, but I found Bill, I don’t know where he was but I know it was Friday evening and I said ‘You know I think we ought to get Jack Pulman in on this if he will come and talk to them as well we ought to have another go’. And we rang him and he wiped the floor with me for not letting him know sooner, quite right really or I said ‘It was in your interests’, and then he, he came in and he had them eating out of his hand in half an hour. But we nearly, you nearly didn’t have, we nearly didn’t get *I Claudius*, this extraordinary thing. Now that was all studio, total studios, you know, thirteen episodes.

[A 50:52]

Yes, yes, yes.

I remember at the end of...

Still selling well on...

Still selling, oh absolutely.

[Laughter]

And I remember at the end of it, and we’d all, it was a happy production, good, you know, fine, a little bit and interesting. But I remember Martin turning to me in the gallery at the end of this and said ‘I never’, at end of episode thirteen, ‘I never want to see another effing toga’. [Laughter]

[Laughter]

We felt like that.

Yes. [Laughter]

And then, so after that we thought we’d, well before it ended obviously, but we thought we’d do something totally different, something you, you, because I mean that was the great art wasn’t it of judging the schedules, you put something frightfully highbrow, intellectual somewhere and then you gave them a pot boiler, you know, so that nobody quite went off the boil. And we, we found a series of, mm, detective novels so I had, I had read them, got them on one side by a man called Colin Watson and we vaguely called them *The Flaxborough Chronicles* and had a detective and a lot of silly murders, mm, and they were fun. Anton Rodgers and various good people, James Grout, good people in them. But alas and alack coloured by the fact that, mm,

Betty Willingale DRAFT
Tape 1 Side A

coming, driving back from Birmingham after a recording Martin was killed in a car crash, so that was a great blow for everyone and we had to soldier on and finish it but it was quite nasty. And, mm, so then the heat was on as to who would produce the Classic Serial in space of Martin. And Graeme McDonald and I, who was head, Graeme was head of Department at that time, we had a very good talk. I said to him 'Can I talk to you as if you're not that, can we talk to each other as two people off the record and once I've said what I think of people or I don't think of them and you too we'll never ever refer to it again'. Because there were various people floating around I think who were wanting the job and I couldn't have stayed in the same room with them, you know, sort of thing. And so Graeme was very good that way so I knew every inch along the way what he was thinking. And he brought in this young Turk from Granada called Jonathan Powell who was many years younger than I was but we worked together terribly well and became great mates, you know. And I taught Jonathan how to be sensible and he taught me how to have a lot of nerve.

Good.

Mm, that it?

Okay, can we halt it there while we put another tape in? [Laughter]

[Laughter]

[End of Side A 00:53:40]

NB: The time codes given here are estimates based on readings from the original cassette recording.

Tape 1 Side B

And so the scripts of *Mayor of Casterbridge* were waiting. They, it, had been, you know, commissioned by Martin and me. And there was a tale because I'd, you know, as ever the great thing was who should adapt what, and I remember suggesting Potter because I thought he would be so good at Hardy, you know, the black side, mm?

Would that be Dennis?

Dennis Potter.

Yes.

Sorry, yes, I beg your pardon, Dennis. And, mm, so we rang him up and I couldn't believe how nice he was because I'd heard tales, you know. And he came in and it was so interesting, he'd got the book in one, you know, he just... And then he threw down the gauntlet, as he was wont to do, and said well, he would, he would not do this episode by episode, you know, we were used to having people, we'd discuss the overall thing and then they'd send in each episode by episode because, you know, we had a, we did a tremendous lot in a year and we had to have, you know, we couldn't have a blank screen. And he would need, I can't remember, six months or whatever it was. And Martin and I looked at each other because, you know, I mean this was a tremendous, you know, it could have blown the whole thing. Anyway Martin gulped and said what did I think? And I thought 'Well, alright then, it's Dennis Potter'. So we didn't hear from him for, oh, more than six months, and the very day I'd got written down that the scripts were due, the Friday, they didn't come. And I was in my cowardly way thinking 'Well, I'll leave it till Monday in case the post is bad'. There was a very, very hot summer that year and about five thirty in the afternoon he rang me up and my heart sank because he said 'I'm terribly sorry to be late on delivery', and I thought, you know, 'What's he telling me'? And he said 'But it's been a very hot summer, you know'.

Yes.

And in those days with his poor distorted hands he wrote with a pen and hand written them all and he said 'But I'm coming up to London on Monday and I'll deliver them

on Monday', and there were seven absolutely immaculate scripts, you could read every syllable all in his handwriting and I kept them till the day I retired from The BBC and then I thought I'd, and he was very pleased to have them back actually because by that time his daughter was typing for him.

Yes.

But it was a wonderful sort of adaptation because we scarcely changed a word.

And wasn't it one of the first to be done...?

OB.

On location, on location?

Outside broadcast, yes, it was.

Yes, yes.

Yes, it was. And we had, you know, David Giles who'd done *The Forsyte Saga*, directed it and again it was a great success. Alan Bates played...

Anne Stallybrass?

And that's right the lovely Anne Stallybrass, yes, and Janet Moore, yes, Anna Massey, yes. [Laughter] So there was that. So that was, so while that was being done, I mean Jonathan was producing by then because Martin had died but, mm...

Just, just to go back slightly to Casterbridge?

Mm.

At what stage would it be decided that the whole thing was going to be done on location on tape and not in studio?

Oh I think we were lucky enough, I mean we were learning by then. Although you couldn't always get your own way, we, we endeavoured not to go to writers at all until we knew what resources we could have.

Sure.

Because I had a, a bit of a battle some years later when I produced *Mansfield Park* and it had been written for outside broadcast, OB and all that, and then suddenly about a couple of weeks before we were all setting off I was told it was all going to be done in the studios. Well, the scripts would have been not useless but wrong, so there was rather an explosion, anyway it was done on OB. But, mm, yes, there was that and then I can't remember what was the first production after that that Jonathan and I did. Mm, [Pause] but it was, but things, you know, the world had moved on and there was a lot more film effort wasn't there?

Yes, yes.

And Jonathan...

I mean as I said earlier I mean you were either all on film or you were all on tape?

Mm, yes or on tape, yes, yes.

And that became the rule then.

And Jonathan was an all film person because...

Yes.

I mean he really didn't like the studios much, you know. Well, you know...

Mm, 'Pride and Prejudice', 'We, The Accused', 'The Bell' and so on?

That's right we did, they, now they *Pride and Prejudice* and *We, The Accused*, they didn't come in that order.

[B 05:00]

No.

I just can't remember.

But they were...

But they were studio.

Yes.

They were studio ones and *The Bell* was OB.

Mm, yes, that's right.

Yes, yes.

Because that was happening while I was doing the 'Doctor Who'. [Laughter]

Mm, yes. I loved that. That was a case of shoving in one that, well I mean Iris Murdoch is not unknown but to drama.

Yes, yes.

Mm, it seemed a lovely one to put in, you know, between *Pride and Prejudice* and something else.

Yes. Do you remember anything about the director of that?

Oh my God, who directed *The Bill - The Bell*?

Was it somebody Davis? No.

Oh how awful of me.

No, it's alright, it's alright, it's alright.

I just can't, oh dear.

I just dimly remember that there were, there were, there were scenes I remember but, but...

Lovely Chris Pemsel was our designer.

Designer, yes.

We had a Bristol, oh my God why can't I? Oh, yes, there were scenes, Barry Davis.

Barry Davis.

Yes. Who couldn't direct badly if you paid him but who was what you might call difficult. He was always threatening to pack his bag and go. You would be having a perfectly amicable discussion with him and he had taken offence and he was going. And he had a wife who used to ring him up and they slagged each other off all night and then he was tired, oh, I remember, yes it was a bit of a problem but lovely show. [Laughter]

Right. Mm, 'The Birds Fall Down', 'Old Men at the Zoo', 'Sons And Lovers', 'Tinker, Tailor', Testament?

Yes.

'Serenade' [ph B 06:30], 'Barchester', I mean all, all of these have all been lumped together.

Lumped together. I can't remember the orders.

Is that right, no.

I can't remember the orders but, mm...

Once more you were, you were on the treadmill.

Yes, all on the treadmill, yes. *Thérèse Raquin* we did in the studio and that was terrific with Kate Nelligan

Yes.

But pretty early on...

Was it Brian Cox then?

Yes.

It was?

And Kenneth Cranham.

Yes.

But pretty early on, [Pause] well, a couple of years on, a couple of years on really, mm, there was a whisper, and Jonathan got it not me, that *Tinker, Tailor* was up for grabs because it had been commissioned by London Weekend or one of those companies and they weren't going to do it any more. Mm, anyway with a bit of shenanigans it came our way and, and again was a huge success.

Oh tell us about the shenanigans?

Well, I don't know, I don't know what went on behind closed doors, sort of agents talking for ages.

Right, yes.

I can tell you about the shenanigans on *Sons and Lovers* but I mean because we nicked that off somebody else. [Laughter] But, you know, it seemed such a waste. Because I mean the scripts weren't written of *Tinker, Tailor*, it was just the rights, you know, on that.

Yes, yes.

And so Arthur Hopcraft, you know. It was great, Arthur Hopcraft did that.

Yes, yes. Mm 'Old Men at The Zoo'?

Old Men at The Zoo was, I loved that. That was Jonathan's idea that we should do an Angus Wilson and so we, we put our noses in to Angus Wilson and he came up with that and it was, it was...

Troy Kennedy-Martin?

Troy Kennedy-Martin did it. Do you know it - the book?

No. I mean I remember the serial.

Remember the serial. It was so strange wasn't it? It was futuristic and, mm, all the poor old men at the zoo in cages and things. Yes, I loved it, weird.

Mm, 'Testament of Youth'?

Oh Testament of Youth.

Now there's an award winning show.

Oh yes. Well, that again you see none of these, a lot of these things were not without their problems, mm...

You better tell us who wrote 'Testament of Youth' and...

Oh Vera Brittain, who was Shirley Williams mother, the wonderful Shirley Williams who was so good to us through it all. Mm, and I'd...

And it was her youthful experiences in...?

In the First World War when she came from a quite well off middle class family where girls were not bothered with to be educated and she was passionate about being educated and had a terr..., and managed to get away to be a nurse in the war and had a terrible life because her, terribly sad life. You know, her beloved brother was killed and his friends, everybody she knew was killed. And she came through and became a pacifist and feminist really didn't she at the end of it all? But, mm...

And a writer in her own right?

A writer in her own right. I came upon that one not because it was a favourite book of mine, because I didn't actually think it terribly well written, I shouldn't say that should I but... Mm, but I, there was a reprint from Virago and I, there was a book programme in those days, *Easy, Easy Rider* was it, what did they call it? I don't, a strange thing that Melvyn Bragg did.

Yes.

And they started talking about this book and I thought 'Ho, ho', I thought 'that would make a, that ought to make a good serial', so I rushed out and got it. And then we had to deal with a very funny man who was Vera Brittain's executor who would only meet us at railway stations and things, it was all very curious. And this little man said to me at the railway, at Euston I think it was, somewhere weird in a tea, a tea bar. Mm, well, he didn't know whether he could let us have it because The BBC had already been in touch with him about it and I said 'Who'? It was Ken Trodd and, and I thought this was sort of grossly unfair, as I often did, because play Department could do anything, one offs, not so easy to find books that serialise. So it was whoever pleased Mr Perry, and I'm glad to say I did.

[B 11:00]

[Laughter]

So we got *Testament of Youth*, [Laughter] and then got the wonderful Elaine Morgan to write it and she humanised it so beautifully. Oh, her scripts were, were tremendous and Cheryl Campbell was great wasn't she, brilliant?

Brilliant. At what stage did the director come on board?

Mm, well, I think we'd got about, we'd usually got the scripts before. Yes, we had, no we didn't in that case, again they were late there. We had about three scripts when Moira, Morra Armstrong who did it so beautifully too. That was studio, studio and a bit of film. [Laughter] And it won BAFTA didn't it?

Yes.

And it beat *Tinker, Tailor* that everybody else thought would win. So there you go, life's full of surprises. [Laughter]

Now some point soon you're going to be made a producer?

Oh yes. Now yes, what happened there?

How did that come about?

How did that come about? Well...

You had ambitions to be...

No. I...

A big movie producer?

I never did, [Laughter] I was always I just thought, you know, [Laughter] go, plunge and judder, you know, judder on what I'm doing. Mm, a new head of department came because Graeme MacDonald was made Controller of BBC One, Two?

Two.

Two?

Two.

And a nice man obviously who said 'It's time you were a producer'.

Does he have a name?

David Reid, he used to be at ATV. And I thought that was very nice. So I was allowed to produce, you know, come up with something and produced *Mansfield Park*.

Now how did...?

OB.

Who chose that?

Me.

Right.

Me, yes. Oh, I chose, apart from *Old Men at the Zoo* and *Tinker, Tailor*, which came our way I chose all those books.

Ah, ha.

You know. And I had long nurtured an ambition to do, because by that time we were doing bigger things, you know, after *Tinker, Tailor* was huge and I had always loved *The Balkan Trilogy* of Olivia Manning and we nearly got it off the ground at one point, this was Jonathan and me, but then we had a terrible dilemma because it was by no means, you know, we hadn't, we, we were in discussion with Olivia Manning who was great and, but we hadn't got a script or anything and we, you know, a very difficult one to do.

No adapter for the play sort of thing?

No adapter no, and it needed a lot of, it was going to take a long time to get that together, and the money for it because it was, you couldn't do it in England, you know. And, mm, along came suddenly Arthur Hopcraft was free again and John Irvin who had done *Tinker, Tailor* and I had suggested at some point we'd do *Bleak House*, I mean it was down on the list if we did another Dickens. And they wanted to do *Bleak House*, Arthur wanted to do it. So we had to let, mm...

'Fortunes'?

The Olivia, *Fortunes* go, but then we did manage to pick it up again some years later, [Laughter] Gratefully.

Then it was produced very splendidly.

Yes.

And...

By *moi*. [Laughter]

Yes.

Yes, yes, yes.

And it cost?

Six million I think. [Laughter]

But let's go back to your first...

I think round about, yes.

But that was, that was the published cost?

Yes, [Laughter] I think it was, yes.

Mm, let's go back to your first production which is?

Well, *Mansfield Park*, mm.

Yes. Tell me about the pitfalls and the horrors and the things that you did, never do a producer did and...

But, in a funny way, you know, it wasn't all that different from what I'd been doing really. Mm, and once again I think the art is to choose carefully. I don't, people who make waves and are hostile and temperamental as far as I'm concerned they can forget it, I just don't think, I think life is too short really. And I mean obviously one wanted good people about but again it was a very happy production and everybody was, mm, everybody pulled together, you know, and we all loved being down in Dorset and all over the place. So, so I'd, I mean there wasn't, it wasn't a kind of sudden conversion on the road to Damascus, I didn't say 'Oh my God now I am a producer, I must be a producer forever', I was quite happy to go back to what I was doing.

[B 15:21]

So you did? I mean....

I did. I went back to the script editing with Jonathan.

Right, yes, yes.

And then but of course, that all...

Just give us some more detail on 'Mansfield Park'?

Yes.

I mean obviously you, we, remind me who directed it?

David Giles.

David Giles, again.

Who had done *Casterbridge*.

Yes.

Yes.

Yes. And that obviously was your choice?

Yes.

And you cast it together?

Yes.

Yes.

Yes, absolutely.

Yes.

Sat down, interviewed people, you know, saw all the actors.

Yes.

Mm, mm, David got, managed to get Alan Bates, you know, because he'd worked with him before I think. No, and the rest we just did between us, yes, mm.

Mm, and it was all on the road as it were?

All on the road, yes, yes. All down in Dorset. All, much the same as where the book is set really, mm.

And were you well received, I mean were you...?

Yes. Well, I, we did have a very good team and the, the locals enjoyed it enormously, so much so at the end of it all they gave us a party. [Laughter] Everything was...

Now something that I've always noticed in my fifty years in the business.

Yes. [Laughter]

Is that the show exists as you're doing it.

Oh yes.

I mean it's a palpable, it's a tangible thing.

Yes, it's a thing isn't it, yes, yes.

Mm, and then it...

It gets out of place sometimes, yes, yes.

Yes, and it becomes something that you can almost touch as it were.

Touch, yes, yes.

And you can, and you can.

And you never know who's going to be the best person on the unit do you?

No, no, no, quite correct.

Sometimes it can be the dresser that saves the day, you know.

Yes, yes, yes.

You know it's lovely.

But that's, that's, that can be it then?

Mm, yes.

And then you finish it and you, you chuck it out there.

Yes.

And you wait for...

And you wait, yes, you did.

[Laughter]

You did.

What we've not talked about...

Is reactions, yes.

Is reaction to, to things that you've done.

Yes.

Now, now that you're the producer surely you're, well, I mean you're obviously interested the whole time how, how things are to be received.

Yes, yes., yes.

And appreciated and all the rest of it?

I'm also very arrogant Darrol. If I think it's good and the critics don't I don't care.

Right.

[Laughter] But now, but I, one can't afford to be like that now, you know.

No. But can you remember the reaction to 'Mansfield Park' when it came out?

Mm, muted.

Yes.

Muted I think. And I think because we didn't, well, I mean we had very good actors in it but they weren't quite starry. I mean it didn't, it didn't hit the headlines or anything like that but then we were very taken for granted, you know, most of those classic serials didn't hit the headlines, you know.

Yes, yes. And they weren't promoted.

No, oh no.

In the way that they are now.

And no, nn, and no money was spent on them, you know, and...

No. I mean in, in my days with The BBC and of course, almost as much as yours...

Yes.

Mm, I discovered that the Press Department, the Publicity Department and the Press Office were convinced that their job was to keep The BBC out of the papers.

Oh I think so, yes, yes. I know what you mean.

Not to promote anything.

No, no, no, no.

I mean the problem was dealing with people who complained about things.

Of course, indeed, indeed, yes, yes.

And tried to sue us or whatever, you know.

And if you remember too Darrol because you were doing series and serials weren't you as well as plays? But we sort of, we had much smaller budgets, in a sense we were subsidising Play Department. Quite rightly actually because I think the single drama is the most important but they weren't the ones that made the money for The BBC were they?

No.

Or necessarily their reputation, [Laughter] mm.

So, mm, let's talk a bit about, more about 'The Fortunes of War'?

Fortunes of War. Well, I had a...

Which is, you can start with the, with calling it 'The Balkan Trilogy' and then tell me how it came to be called...?

Yes, yes. Well, there was a sort of little thing in between it called *Tender is the Night*.

Oh yes.

Which was a...

[Laughter] Yes, another success.

It will be on my heart when I'm, when I die. Mm, I, I was the script editor but Jonathan was promoted, my producer, to be head of the department and therefore he gave, had to give up doing this, or he may... Yes, it was head of, it was head of, it was Head of Serials first wasn't he before he was Controller. So he asked me to produce this and I said 'Not on your life, I'm not'. Well, it would actually have been letting him down because, you know, I, I knew a lot about it so I rather, I, I took it on and really I don't think I slept for a year because it meant flying out to Hollywood.

It was an American co-production?

It was an American co-production and they'd put in a lot of money but not as much as The BBC. But I mean my life in Hollywood was just, well we haven't got two hours to tell you all about it but everything...

[B 20:07]

Yes, we have, you can be as long as you like. [Laughter]

[Laughter] Everything you've ever heard is, I couldn't believe it, you know. The casting for instance, they kept...

Were you got at by agents?

Mm, no, no, it was Showtime, you know, the people who've put in the money.

Ah.

They, we saw so many good actors and they wouldn't have them, you know, they wanted someone who was hot always, I mean, you know, it's ridiculous the things they do. And I couldn't, I couldn't believe it the people they were suggesting until I tumbled to the fact that something called *The Hollywood Reporter* comes out every morning and I think they looked at that. Because one day I went in and they suggested that we got Jeff Goldblum to play Dick Diver. And I took a deep breath and said 'Well, as I understand *Tender Is The Night* Dick Diver is the epitome of the American wasp and he's not called Dick Diverstein'.

[Laughter]

Well, of course, momentary offence was taken, but how else do you talk to people like that?

Right, right.

Who were suggesting these ridiculous things? And so it got, [Laughter] yes, it got nasty, I remember me saying 'I don't know why we're doing this great America, it's your great American classic why am I trying to save it'?

Yes.

'You should be doing it yourselves properly'. And they had the audacity to say to me 'Oh no buddy, no, no, no, we haven't got the writers'. And I just said 'Oh yes, you have you just treat them so badly'.

You...

But I must say it was Dennis Potter again and he had done a beautiful adaptation.

Yes.

That's what sold it to everybody really. But then when we set off to do it we still hadn't cast the smaller parts. We had a certain amount of money to use for Americans, people, and then the smaller parts for Americans who lived in England, and we hadn't cast vital parts and I had to keep flying out there and...

They, they demanded approval did they?

Oh absolutely. Oh none of the smaller parts.

No.

They didn't mind that, no it was the bigger parts.

Yes, yes.

And they did, and I, I can't imagine they go on doing this, maybe they do. We had a tiny part of the film star's mother and she only had two or three scenes and in one big scene she had no lines at all and they wanted me to ask Elizabeth Taylor.

Yes. [Laughter]

And for the heroine's father, you know, the one which has just been inset they wanted Burt Lancaster. Well, to my horror the agents apparently said they'd evinced interest. Well, what I didn't know in my naively was that they all say that and then it's got nothing...

And it leads to everything...

Yes, and if they've got nothing else to do, you know. But I didn't think they were right, [Laughter] so argued about that. And in the end out of sheer temper because we were getting, it was, I mean the costume supervisor was giving me hell because she hadn't got an actor to, you know. Just because I knew he'd been a bit of trouble I said 'What about Ed Asner'? And so we had Ed Asner, [Laughter] who was terrific actually.

A marvellous actor, yes.

Yes.

Yes, yes.

And so nice. He, he really...

And he was the, the...

The father of Mary Steenburgen.

Oh yes, yes. No, no but...

Oh sorry, sorry.

Yes, but off screen he was the Chairman of the Actors' Guild.

That's right, Actors' Guild.

The Actor's Guild.

And had given all these people hell you see.

Yes, yes.

Which is why I rather mischievously suggested him.

[Laughter]

It was great about that. And then we got a very good woman to play the mother, Piper Laurie, so that worked. But by this time they, I mean I unfortunately couldn't be out, I couldn't get to Switzerland because I was in America so much so I came rather late to the production and it was really we were extraordinarily unlucky with weather.

Right.

We had appalling weather.

But weren't you in the south of France as well?

We were in Switzerland and the south of France.

Yes.

And we went from, [Pause] the western part of the south of France, Le Lavandou all the way through to Menton, which we used for Italy. And of course, the weather was, as they always tell you, *exceptionnel*, you know, with gales and so on. And when we were to do the fabled beach scenes, you know, the golden days of the Divers, the wonderful south of France. Oh I don't know, I looked out of my window at six o'clock in the morning thought 'If we were doing *Peter Grimes*'.

[Laughter]

'It might be alright'. Oh it was terrible, but I mean it, we, we were very unlucky that way.

Yes, indeed.

And it was a huge production and not only me but all the units we weren't used to huge productions like this.

[B 25:00]

Mm, yes.

And so we were six months abroad.

Yes, yes.

And because of not wishing to upset Equity or not being, we couldn't film in England you see because we'd got all these big Americans and...

Yes. How did you arrive at the director?

Well, do you know I believe Jonathan chose him.

Right.

Because, mm, you know, I was having nothing to do with it. [Laughter]

Yes, yes.

And Jonathan had set it up.

Oh I see to begin with, yes.

So he, to begin with, yes. And, mm, well, I think we all remembered. I, I christened it 'Tender is the Nightmare' the first week, you know, I was there I just... And we had all the, we had such a silly system of well, it was the way things were done but, you know, so many lorries coming out from England.

Yes.

And because we were going from country to country there was never anybody by the directors help, I'd say 'Where's the designer, where's the...? Never there because they were all looking at their carnets to make certain that they'd got the right thing.

Oh yes, yes.

Oh it was. Anyway...

I've forgotten who the director was.

Rob Knights.

Rob Knights?

Rob Knights, yes.

Of course it was, of course it was, yes.

So I thought 'If ever I do anything again like this, which I never will, I'm going to go and work in a shop'.

[Laughter]

Mm, we won't do it this system and we didn't unfortunately or we, we, we bought there and we just sent out everything air freight, we didn't have any of those ghastly lorries, or only a few. *[Laughter]*

Mm, mm. So was there anything in between 'Tender is The Nightmare' and, and 'Fortunes of War'?

No, no, I don't think there was.

Right, okay.

Because they didn't half take a long time.

Yes, sure.

Both of them, mm.

Yes. So let's go on to 'Fortunes of War' then?

Oh, *Fortunes of War.*

And, mm, start off, it was 'The Balkan Trilogy' we established.

Well, yes. It was seven books by Olivia Manning, and the first three are set. It was about, I decided, because I mean it's, sorry to keep saying 'I' but, you know, I mean it was me.

Well that's what happened.

Mm, somebody said to me 'If you, how many episodes'?

Right.

And I said 'Look, this could be twenty-six episodes, it could be a hundred, it depends what we do with it, we can't do it all', because they're very sprawling, I mean lovely books but I said 'I think the only thing that we can do like *Our Mutual Friend* is take a line through it and this is the story of a marriage and the background is the war'. Ostensibly it's the story of this couple and people won't know where Romania is and what happened to Romania in the war, and they didn't. So I found it all very exciting, you know, to, to take that line and I thought 'What is it worth and what can we afford'? You know, you have to do that. And I mean I don't mean I, and how heavy is it?

[Laughter]

But I was looking for a, a drama, I mean a writer who I knew knew what to select, one who wouldn't be fazed by the hugeness of it, and Alan Plater did it superbly. And we decided, which we had to, that it would be seven episodes I think. Four of which would be that *The Balkan Trilogy*, and she had also then written *The Levant Trilogy* and those books I thought would, would make three episodes. That was Greece and, mm, Egypt and then we had trouble with the co-producers who...

Who were?

Well, they weren't even co-producers.

Okay, fine.

There was a man called David Elstein.

Ah, ha.

And Eric Abrahams, who were called, were they called Brook Productions? They were with Richard someone or other.

Yes, yes.

They owned the rights and they seemed to think they could do quite a lot of dictating of how it was done and who, who did it. Now Jonathan had kept this from me but, you know, I would have to face these people because I think he knew I wouldn't [Laughter] have, you know. And, and they came in one morning to Jonathan's office and Alan Plater and I were summoned to talk to them about, and David Elstein breezed through the door, and he's, as you know, a very, very clever man. And he'd

got Alan's breakdown, because I did get Alan to do a breakdown because we needed, you know, to see if it all worked.

Yes, sure.

And I promise you the last three books were one chucked, almost chucked a book out because she went wandering round going to different countries, pointless, nothing to do with our drama, but they fell beautifully in to three episodes. And he'd, he came in and looked at the breakdown, ignored me totally as he continued to do so, talked to Alan and said 'Why did you divide it this way? There should be much more of Egypt and much more of Greece', and I thought to myself not this man is a fool because I knew he wasn't a fool but I thought this man knows nothing about drama. [Laughter] And Alan was wonderful because, as I say, he was addressing all his remarks to him. 'And why did you do that', you know, 'four episodes here'? Of course, Alan said 'The book is twice as long as the other one and she told me to'. [Laughter]

[B 30:45]

[Laughter]

So we had a laugh about that, they didn't. Mm, anyway we got over all that, and we had too really, and it was set up beautifully. Had a marvellous, mm, production manager Richard Cox, mm, who went ahead and did the recces and Tim Harvey designed. Well, they had wonderful recces, they went all round the world several times.

[Laughter]

And but it was all beautifully planned from their point of view.

But how, how did you shoot it in the end?

We shot in, mm, Egypt, Greece and Yugoslavia. We recced Romania but of course, they wouldn't have them, Olivia Manning's a dirty word there, and also it was so poverty stricken and awful, we couldn't do it. We, we went there just to see it, you know, and we paid for Alan to go for, and his wife to go for a week. And he was so sweet when he came back he wrote me a long essay on 'what I did in my holidays'. [Laughter]

[Laughter]

And so we found the locations in Yug..., Yugoslavia, Bled and Ljubljana we were mainly, and Tim Harvey made it look wonderfu,l you know. And Jim and I had, it was very funny. We had, the director Jim Cellan Jones. We, both of us thought that it would be lovely working in Greece, we finished in Greece, Greece would be the cherry on top. We were a bit worried about Egypt although we wanted to go and of course, we were never more wrong because the Egyptians were wonderful filmmakers and everybody loved, we had a marvellous time in Egypt and everything went smoothly. Greece wasn't easy. Having set it all up with Madame Mercuri saying, you know, looking down and, you know...

She was Minister of the Arts, Melina Mercuri?

The Minister of the Arts then and so we'd gone all through her, done all the right thing and we had ten Greeks that we didn't need but we had them as you have to. And the day we started shooting the trade unions came out and drove their cars around and nine hours of discussion, whole day of discussion. And I'm afraid we had to take more people on, and I said to them 'Even though you know that the people we've got will not be fully employed'. So I rang Madame Mercuri and do you know what she said? 'It's the film business'.

[Laughter]

So I said 'You mean you break contracts and treaties and so on'? 'Yes'. I think I said something ridiculous like 'Well, I can't imagine The BBC will ever be filming in Greece again'.

[Laughter]

You know, as you do in the heat of the moment, but it was deplorable wasn't it? And it was a happy experience other than that but, mm, but one doesn't expect people to behave that badly. So we had all these people sitting around doing sod all then, [Laughter] oh.

So you came home?

Came home.

And then people joined it together?

Yes, the edit.

And was it all on film or was it all on...?

All on film.

It was all on film?

All on film and it was filmed from the word go.

Right.

Tariq joined it together.

Yes.

Lovely Tariq, yes.

Yes.

And Jim. Obviously yes, we edited all.

Yes. And then you started to see assemblies or...?

No, I just saw rushes out there... Oh yes, yes, Tariq....

You might like to stay, I mean...

Oh no, we didn't get home. Tariq, we got Tariq out once or twice.

Ah, ha.

And then he would do assemblies and send them to us, so we knew we were kind of on the right lines, you know.

Yes, yes.

And it seemed only fair to get the editor out to see, I got him out too on, on *Tender is the Night* because huge job when, you know, we were out of the country for six months.

Yes, yes.

The edit, I mean I know I could fly but I couldn't find it.

Yes.

We had some dramas on *Fortunes* though because I, we were filming in Yugoslavia and the Egyptians had said all was well, you know, and, and hotels had been booked at huge cost as you, well you know millions we were pouring in. And I happened to be ill with bronchitis in Yugoslavia when the blow fell that, mm, we were not going to be allowed to shoot in Egypt because our script hadn't passed the censor, and the Egyptians had told me all would be well you see. So I had to get up from my sick bed and I thought 'How am I going to talk to the censor?' I'd, because it was so palpably not anti Egyptian the whole thing.

[B 35:20]

No.

I can't, I didn't know what...

It wasn't going to be shown in Egypt anyway.

No, no, I mean necessarily.

Not necessarily.

But, mm, and I thought 'I need some advice here, I don't know what to do'. So I rang the British Ambassador in Cairo, and I can only say I think those diplomats earn every penny of their money.

Right, right.

He was great. He had the scripts for a couple of days, he then carted me round to see all sorts of ministers and he said 'You, you must understand that the', to the Home Secretary he took me, he doesn't speak in English so Sir Alan did it all but he said 'the censor must not lose face', so I had to play those games.

Yes, yes.

And it was a whole, I, I don't think I've ever had such a tiring day because the censor was a woman and she'd got, she was flanked by two, you know, one was with a wimple and dark, you know, all that.

Oh yes, yes.

And another one all in brown, real old boot the one in brown, and Mrs Hamdi was nice the censor but motherly but, don't bank on it, you know. And Richard came with me as, as, you know, production manager.

Yes.

And I said to him 'I don't want you to say a word because I want to do this with Shahim [ph B 36:52] the Egyptian man but I said 'I want you here because if you see me getting ratty for goodness sake you know stop me because I...'

[Laughter]

And then he was very helpful of course, Richard. I mean he, I could refer to him for everything. But it was every blooming line we had to fight for. I mean the boot, no not the old boot the young one, the young pretty one in her and in her Islamic gear stuff...

Yes.

Said to me 'There is not one Egyptian woman in this in any position of power'. I said 'It's not about an Egyptian woman it's about an English woman, and anyway tell me who was in a, tell me which English, which Egyptian women were in positions of power in Nineteen...?'

During the Second World War?

In Nineteen..., yes, yes, in 1942. Well, I don't know how that went but I thought 'That's not a very good start', but it was like that all the way along.

Yes.

Betty Willingale DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

Every line was fought over, and I... But I remember at one moment thinking I must keep cool because this is no worse than it was in Hollywood.

Yes.

And they're not in it for money. [Laughter] I mean, you know, they just didn't know our ways.

Yes.

I mean we had to delete every word, we didn't lose it much but the leading character in *Fortunes of War* is a socialist and occasionally sort of took, addressed people as 'comrade'. That seemed to be the sin of the world, you must never use the word 'comrade', and just silly things we wouldn't understand. And, mm, and, you know, people kind of said to me 'Why don't you send out a second unit', because we had, no when we, when we were doing it. And I said 'I can't do that behind, I can't do that in The BBC's name anyway and delude the censor' because you'll be sent to prison. We had, you always have to have a, a censor with you, you have to pay for them to be in the hotel.

Yes, yes.

You know, all that.

Yes, yes.

So, I mean finally we, we got it through but it was a very long day.

Yes.

And I, you know, I was not sanguine about it. And just as I was leaving the old boot, the third woman, jumped up and said 'Ah', she'd found something else. We had a line in it from Robert Stephens saying his wife was to come out and sing *The Holy City* to the poor bloody troops 'Oh this is mocking the Holy City'.

[Laughter]

She went on and on and on and I think I said 'Oh for Christ's sake let's call it *The Lost Cord*, she can sing *The Lost Cord*'. But do you know it was as, it was as tiny as that.

Yes, yes.

Everything on this. And, and some things which you and I wouldn't, you couldn't possibly think were offensive in any way but, mm...

Yes, mm. I had exactly the same story in Tehran but I won't...

Did you?

Yes.

Well, well, you know then don't you?

I'll tell you afterwards.

Yes, yes, oh do.

[Laughter]

I'd love, long to hear, oh yes. Well, I mean one did sort of feel in fear and trembling at the beginning.

Yes.

But once we started every, oh yes she, she Mrs Ablar [ph B 40:00] did stop the filming twice. She, we had, all the scripts were stamped, we had permission.

[B 40:10]

Mm.

But there's one scene inn which Emma, you know, the lead.

Yes.

Goes in to the mosque and an Egyptian says 'You must cover your head', and she said 'Why'? 'Well, because your hair will inflame all the men', I mean this was...

Yes.

But that scene had been passed because she put her, and then Mrs Ablar [ph B 40:22] obviously was very frightened so I can't remember what kind of discussion we had but we got on. But there were such silly things. Mm, we did a scene in the street, in a restaurant and in a, it was a hubble bubble or whatever they're called, you know.

Yes.

She stopped the filming. 'This did not happen in Egypt'.

[Laughter]

I said 'Mrs Ablar [B 40:50] every shop I've seen in Egypt has one in the window'. 'No', I was wrong. [Laughter] So we couldn't do that. And we had another one. We went up to, oh this is a row, this was a censor row. There's one scene in which two women go up to spend a holiday in Luxor and they're amazed because it's all so quiet and so on, and not one of them realises is that there's a plague, that people are dying. There's a funeral they see. A nice scene, nice bit. And, mm, the censor said to me 'No, no plagues in Egypt'.

[Laughter]

And fortunately the Egyptians came out with the cuttings of the year and the plague in Luxor.

Yes, yes, yes.

So somehow got through that one. Mm, but then when we came to do it, mm, and Jim was, you know, wonderful at this. All these women, you know, walking towards the feluka and all the bodies ululating the whole time.

Yes.

She stopped it, 'Stop, No, no. Nobody ululates in Egypt any more'.

[Laughter]

I said 'That was the first sound I heard in Egypt'.

Yes.

'No, no didn't do it'. So they weren't allowed to ululate except of course, they did. They couldn't, I said to Jim 'Don't, let's not fight this one we can always put it on, you know, when we get back. I know it's not satisfactory but we can get something out, you know, if needed'. But no, all these, all these women told not to. So we said 'Well, you'd better tell them what to do Mrs Ablar [ph B 42:24] you tell them'. And of course, they took no notice, they were all, they all did their sounds. [Laughter]

Yes, yes, yes, as they always do.

Yes. But, and another time she stopped the filming because Tim Harvey, our designer, had designed the most wonderful street, we took over an old film studio.

Ah.

And all through, it was just for that scene and we called it the Burka. Now that, that had, that had been another thing, the Burka was the red light district and so, you know...

But it's also what they wear isn't it, I mean...

Yes, but they didn't but they said... No, this Burka is a different thing.

Ah.

They said 'No red light district in Cairo ever'.

[Laughter]

I said to the Egyptians 'I think it's up to you really'. And I said 'Well, all my uncles and everybody I've ever known who was in the war talked about the Burka', but somehow we got through but she was edgy about it. And Tim was designing a, a rather sort of flashy brothel bar place, and all through Cairo anyway, you know, you know the symbol of three little pyramids with Coca Cola usually.

Yes, yes.

But Tim didn't put Coca Cola but he, we had three little pyramids. And Mrs Ablar [ph B 43:48] was very, very short about four feet, under five feet I should think, and you know how tall Tim is and suddenly there was an altercation. And I went up and I heard Mrs Ablar [ph B 44:00] screeching at him about these, these were the holy symbols of something, and she said it was bringing Egypt in to disrepute. And Tim in his mild way said 'The only thing bringing Egypt in to disrepute Mrs Ablar [ph B 44:10] is you'.

[Laughter]

Bang the filming stopped again. So I had to disappear and have long talks with her and oh. Well, but it was, it happened.

Is that, that's the arrows.

Yes, of course, it is, absolutely.

Yes. [Laughter]

And I said 'And usually Mrs Ablar [ph B 44:30] it's got Coca Cola under it', so, you know. [Laughter]

Yes.

Daft isn't it?

Right. So again how long were you abroad on that one?

Well, it was about six months too.

Again, yes.

But, but then we did move from, you know, we did move from country to country.

Yes.

And, you know, we came back to regroup. Oh, and we did a little filming in England.

Oh so you did come back?

Which was nice, yes. And, and we actually broke the deadlock with Lime Grove. No, I know, Ealing.

Yes.

You remember Ealing was out of commission a long time because they wouldn't do long hours, do you remember?

[B 45:02]

I did remember that. I knew, I knew it was.

Yes, it was so. And we said alright, we'd do it in the day's hours and it was fine. Yes, it was fine, and it was so nice to be back there.

Yes. So then the thing was completed?

Completed.

Again how was it received?

It was received very, very well indeed, it was a huge success, really terrific. And I mean I do think I ought to get some kind of mention for having introduced Kenneth Branagh to Emma, Emma Thompson, [Laughter] and they got married soon after if you remember, yes.

Indeed, indeed.

Yes.

Then, mm, what happens to a production after it's been transmitted, mm, as far as the producer is concerned? I mean in terms of foreign sales, cassette sales, whatever, is that, that's a totally different department isn't it?

Totally different. And also I mean my being on the staff it wasn't as if I got any residuals from anything, you know, ever so I didn't know what happened to it. But I knew it, it went down well and it continues to sell. I don't think it sells as well as Dickens, say, you know, as well as *Bleak House* perhaps. But, strangely enough, the one that sold best I, I had a very sweet letter from Enterprises when I retired and they said, they thought I might like to know how the productions were doing and they listed all the sales, which were pretty, you know, impressive but the most was *Tender is the Night*. I was very surprised really. I don't know why, mystery, [Laughter] But, so that was that and that was my swansong.

Oh it was?

Mm.

Oh I hadn't realised, hadn't realised, mm.

Mm, because I'd stayed on over sixty.

Yes.

Because, because I was in the middle of it you see.

Yes.

So then I retired to Tarrell [ph B 46:50]

Right. And then life began?

And then I was, yes.

[Laughter]

Then I was rung up by a man called Brian Eastman, you know, who has the film company?

Yes, yes.

Built his own company, mm, and, mm, and I suppose I'd retired about six months and he said would I perhaps go and talk to him because...

What did you, sorry to interrupt.

Mm.

What had you planned to do?

I don't...

I mean presumably you weren't looking forward to retirement, I mean you were or were you?

No. Well, I was actually, I thought I was, mm, because I thought 'Now I'm going to have time to read all these books for pleasure and to travel and so on, and like everybody else I don't mean I was...

But what had you been doing? Reading books and travelling.

Travelling.

[Laughter]

Yes, and it wasn't that I was desperate to get back to work, I really wasn't. And I wasn't one of those who thought that I'd die in the saddle ever. Mm, but I did miss the camaraderie very much. So I was fiddling around and I was, I'm not a, I'm not a person who gets bored because I can, I always read and go to theatres and things and see friends. But, mm, when Brian Eastman said he needed, he would like help anyway with writers particularly and I, my first reaction was 'Oh no'. Then I thought well, but then my first reaction always is that. I thought 'I wonder if I can work anywhere

except in The BBC', I'd never worked anywhere else. So I went to work for Brian for a couple of years and really enjoyed it because he's always doing things, you know, and...

He just had an office somewhere, he wouldn't have a studio.

He had a house, a very, no he had a very. Premises, he's very canny. He had a lease on a big house in Soho in Newman Street but he didn't have cutting rooms or anything but just offices, you know, and things. And he was in the middle of doing *Traffic* then, do you remember that big thing he did? And with him I *did Jeeves and Wooster* and something called *Forever Green*, and loved it all but I was beginning to think after a bit...

Can we just go back to 'Jeeves and Wooster'?

Oh yes.

And, mm, can you remember about the rights and the funding?

He'd done all that, Brian did all that.

Ah, I know.

I mean he, he...

That would be the Wodehouse estate and...

Yes, absolutely.

Yes.

He'd done all that and he'd got, he'd lined up Clive Exton to write it, Clive did it very well, and also Stephen Fry and Hugh Lawrie to do it, you know.

Yes.

So, mm, but, you know, Brian is extraordinarily efficient and clever at the job.

Mm. Because I worked on the, one of my last jobs as a designer was the...

The Wodehouse at The BBC?

Yes, yes. With Dennis Price and...

Dennis Price and Ian Carmichael.

Ian Carmichael.

Oh yes.

And, mm, Michael Mills of course, and Richard Waring.

Yes.

I have a feeling that that was produced in association with...

Picture Partnership, it might have been.

Some film company or other.

It might have been, yes.

But I assume the rights would have expired and reverted and all the rest of it, yes.

[B 50:00]

Yes, interesting, yes, absolutely about that. Mm, but I was getting sort of restive because Brian is so clever and he's almost a one man band.

Yes.

And I thought to myself 'I'm not, don't think I'm contributing enough', and the old working class ethic, you know, I'm getting paid and if I don't work I feel uncomfortable.

Yes.

And at that, just at that juncture he was changing offices anyway because the lease on the house in Soho couldn't be renewed but he'd already found, he bought a burnt out drugs pub in Notting Hill and had it totally refurbished and he has wonderful premises under the new title, Carnival, and he's got cutting rooms, the lot there, you know. And so I knew that was going to happen and I thought perhaps this is my cue to leave. And then I was rung up by a friend who ran a company called Friday Productions, a little independent company of which Jim Cellan Jones had directed *Fortunes of War* was a member then, and she wanted to do a Mary Wesley novel. They had the novel, I got the writer, Andrew Davis, to do it and then she asked me to produce with her because she hadn't done a drama production before, was good at money but nothing else as she, that's what she said but, so that was nice and that's, I worked, we worked with Joyce Nettles. And that, that was very successful *Harnessing Peacocks*.

Mm.

So it was time for me to go back to Brian, and it was one of those funny things because how was I going to tell him I didn't really want to go back? And, mm, but he had moved on and had, doing all sorts of other things so he didn't need me, and that was fine, you know, we were both happy about that, and we've stayed friends which was lovely. Because before when I tried to leave I'd tried to leave when he was going to his new premises but, mm, no, he arranged it for, because I said the travelling was too much, he arranged for his chauffeur to pick me up every day and take, and bring me home. [Laughter]

Now, so you did, the Mary Wesley novels where you actually produced?

Yes.

It says here.

Yes, mm, mm. With Georgina really I should have said.

Yes.

The first one, yes.

Mm, now...

I tell you how the second one came about because we had a production manager on *Harnessing Peacocks*.

Directed by?

Jim Cellan Jones.

Yes.

Yes, sorry Jim. And the production manager was called Brian True-May and he, after it was over, found himself as so many people in television he couldn't get any work and was wondering if, like everybody else seemed to be doing at the time, if he should set up his own production company. But he knew, he's wise enough to know that he doesn't know anything really other than being a good production manager really. So I just said 'Well, what you need is a lot of projects and you have to keep bashing away', because in the meantime I'd been working... No, I hadn't been working for ITV yet. Mm, so he said would I go and be his, you know, literary lady or whatever they call them now and I said no, I wouldn't, I didn't want to get involved in anything. But I'm quite happy to help people if they want, you know. And he'd got a nice girl who, doing his scripting and I rang and said 'Look I've read these novels I think they might be rather fun', and, you know, threw the matter and I didn't want anything for that, it was nice. Mm, well, she left and then he kept coming back to me would I produce, and I thought well, actually again, you know, I kind of wanted to do it because it was tricky stuff and I just thought 'I wonder if I can make this work'. And, and again I was able to choose whom I wanted, you know, because again I don't think I could work in any other way.

And what did that turn out to be called?

'Midsummer Murders'.

[Laughter]

And uproar with Network Centre who by that time, you know, the Network Centre has to... Am I sure I'm not talking too much?

No, no, no, it's useful. Five minutes promise, yes, okay.

Okay. Mm, we'll cope with that. Mm, I think, *Midsummer Murders*, yes.

[B 55:00]

Network Centre

Because Network Centre, she'd liked the idea, because if you remember there weren't any things about the, all the police series were crash, bang, wallop and Miss Marple had gone, you know, and I just thought this would be nice for the audience and I also thought it would be nice to bring back John Nettles. They didn't.

Mm.

John Nettles wouldn't do anything. So anyway won that one and the rest is history isn't it? I mean John Nettles is extraordinarily popular. [Laughter]

Yes. And I'm sure it sells all over the world.

Sells all over the world.

Yes, yes.

It's a huge success. It's gone on for six years. And, you know, I, I kind of said 'Why do you think The BBC kept *Bergerac* on long past it's sell by date'? Because John Nettles was such a pull.

Yes.

He's also an extremely nice man.

Yes.

And people like working with him. So all that...

And also it harks back a bit to Miss Marple.

It does.

Because of the...

It's the Agatha Christie isn't it?

Yes.

Yes, yes.

It's not only in the style of the stories.

Yes.

But in the view of the English countryside and it's...

Absolutely. People love it don't they?

Abroad, and I mean that's how it is?

Yes. They think this is how we live, yes. [Laughter] A murder a day.

Yes.

Yes, yes. [Laughter] Oh and before that I'd worked for the Network Centre when it was set up.

Yes.

With, for Vernon Lawrence and Jenny.

As an advisor or...

As, yes.

Yes.

And reading for them and all that, yes.

Right, right.

So...

Did you do make any discoveries for them or, or did you have to fight any particular battles?

Not really, no, because they, no, no battles there.

No.

They were real great friends, you know. And it was, I found that very interesting to see what was, what was suggested and it was just like being back in the Script Unit, you know, most of the scripts were terrible, [Laughter] but some were very good. And I discovered, I, I didn't discover him, I mean he'd been discovered long ago but a writer called Michael Chaplin who was new to me I thought terribly good. So that was all very worthwhile.

And, and you're still involved with 'Midsummer'?

I'm still, yes. After a few years, I mean I'm now getting on now, I'd, I said I didn't want to, to do it totally. I mean I, when I was producing for The BBC I used to like to

Betty Willingale DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

be there all the time and I can't do that all over the country, you know, and Brian True-May was doing the money side of it so I was having it a bit of my own way. Bnd but even so that got to be a bit much - the scripting and everything - and so I, I said a couple of years ago 'Look I can't do this any more but I'll find, find you a good script editor', that's, that's what takes the time 'but I'll do all the rest', which I do. So that works very merrily and I'm just called the consultant producer. [Laughter]

Wonderful, wonderful.

So yes, do what I want.

Thank you very much, thank you very much.

That's it.

That's it, right.

I can't think this is of interest to anybody. It's funny.

Oh it's of great interest, great interest to many, many, many people.

[End of Tape Side B 00:58:00]

Transcript Queries – Betty Willingale

Page/Time	Query
Tape 1 Side A	
2 04:20	'Keiker Gurd'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – context uncertain.
11 23:12	...originator of it in... [Inaudible]
11 23:48	'Harrisons'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – producers?
12 24:21	'Vesti'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Film Company/Theatre?
14 27:48	Black Tulip', [Inaudible], 'Dombey and Son'. Classic serial
23 41:00	...they did [Inaudible] I seem to remember...
Tape 1 Side B	
32 06:30	'Serenade? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Classic Serial.
50 36:52	'Shahim'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Egyptian re Fortunes of War
52 40:00	'Ablar'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Egyptian censor – Fortunes of War.
52 40:22	'Ablar'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Egyptian censor – Fortunes of War.
53 42:24	'Ablar'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Egyptian censor – Fortunes of War.
53 43:48	'Ablar'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Egyptian censor – Fortunes of War.
54 44:00	'Ablar'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Egyptian censor – Fortunes of War.
54 44:10	'Ablar'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Egyptian censor – Fortunes of War.
54 44:30	'Ablar'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Egyptian censor – Fortunes of War.
55 46:50	'Tarrell'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Retirement location.

