BECTU History Project Interview with Diana Morgan - actress, playwright, screenwriter

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Interviewers: Sid Cole, Alan Lawson

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SIDE 1

(Preamble)

SC: Diana, it's lovely to be interviewing you. As I was saying let's start at the beginning – when and where were you born?

DM: I was born in Cathedral Road, Cardiff, May 29th 1908.

SC: Ah the same year as me.

DM: A good year, a vintage year.

SC: And that was Rhondda?

DM: No, Cardiff.

SC: Were your parents connected with the entertainment business?

DM: No, my father was the Principal of a training college and my mother before her marriage had been headmistress of a big girls' school. Academics.

SC: Ah, academic background. So what got you into ... finally … after your schooling? Did you go to university?

DM: No I went to a very good school called Howell's School, Llandaff. And we did an enormous amount of… we did a play, a Shakespeare play every year for a week, for the public. And the Cardiff theatres provided the scenery. And we were very fond of acting, we had a very good choir, and a good orchestra. And still have I believe.

SC: And did you play important roles?

DM: Malvolio (laughs), *Twelfth Night*. Things like that, you know.

SC: Were you good?

DM; Not bad.

SC: So what got you professionally then into the business?

DM: I went… an uncle of mine was headmaster then you see of a school in Barry, and he had an Eistedfodd, which you know what that is? And a woman called Elsie Fogerty, who ran a dramatic school in London [Central School of Speech and Drama] came down to judge, and I won a lot of prizes, so she said she'd like me in her school.

SC: So when was that? Roughly, in terms of age and date?

DM: '27 would it be? I should think so.

SC: So when you were 18, 19?

DM: About that.

SC: And did you go through the whole course?

DM: I took a training course, Sweet's [?] training course, and there was also a stage course which I longed to belong to but didn't. And then one day, I'd been there about two and a half years, a whole list of audition cards for *Cavalcade* were delivered at the Central School and one girl said [affects an upper class voice] 'Oh my father wouldn't let me do anything like that.' So I took her card and went down to Drury Lane with it. And there was a long enormous queue of people waiting to be interviewed. Then my turn came and they looked me up and they said 'You're not on the list.' And I said 'No, you see I wanted to go on the stage so I stole this card.' And C. B. Cochran turned to Noel Coward and said 'She's in, Noel.' And after that Cochran became a great friend of mine. They always said 'You see Diana, crime does pay!'

SC: So it was Coward and Cochran doing the test.

DM: Yes. I learned far more from watching Coward direct for three or four weeks than I ever learned at the Central School!

SC: What were you actually doing in the cast?

DM: Everything. I was one of the… and as I was there for a year you sort of moved up as it were, from being bottom crowd to being top crowd. Being front girls, you see.

SC: And you were there the whole run were you?

DM: Yes.

SC: Which was how long?

DM: A year. It was an extraordinary cast because you see the Theatre Royal are allowed to call upon the Brigade of Guards to provide so many guardsmen for each production, if we needed them. Well, we had two delicious lots of guardsmen in *Cavalcade* who used to see us girls through the market, through Covent Garden market every night after the show to the tube station, for protection. They were lovely men, and we danced with them every night. And they played the band, you see.

SC: Were they different guardsmen from time to time, or the same ones?

DM: I don't remember.

SC: They were just guardsmen.

DM: They were very nice guardsmen.

SC: Tall and handsome.

DM: Oh yes. Very glamorous.

5 minutes 55 seconds

SC: So what happened after the run of *Cavalcade*?

DM: Well I went into Rep.

SC: Where?

DM: Newcastle.

SC: That seems a long stretch from Drury Lane to Newcastle. Had you become a member of Equity then?

DM: Yes. You see *Cavalcade* was really the beginning of Equity, it was 1931. I joined then.

SC: So you went up to… How long were you at Newcastle?

DM: Six months, and then I came down. Somebody saw me in something, I scored a big success in a play at the Vaudeville and I was terribly frightened. It scared the life out of me so I ran away. And went on tour in Wales, playing Molière in Welsh. Which was rather complicated.

SC: Because you kept your Welsh and you still speak it don't you?

DM: Yes, badly.

SC: Where were you playing in Welsh?

DM: All round South Wales.

SC: There were more people then in Wales were there who could speak their own language?

DM: No, there are more people now.

SC: Are there?

DM: It's essential in schools, you have to know it. I was back home last year and everybody was speaking it.

SC: So what happened after you'd finished touring round South Wales?

DM: I did a few other things. [Guthrie ??] saw me and I went into the Festival Theatre in Cambridge.

SC: That's a nice little theatre isn't it?

DM: Lovely. And I played all kinds of things from *Alice in Wonderland* to a Japanese Noh play. I don't remember a word of it, I didn't understand what I was doing. But it was lovely up there because you got involved in the university, and the Footlights. And met all kinds of people, like Robert Hamer.

SC: Who was in charge of the theatre at that time?

DM: I can't remember his name. It'll come back. It had a wonderful long bar. And you could have anything you liked in the world to drink. And you met everybody who was up at Cambridge and who came back... it was very chic.

SC: Very enjoyable then?

DM: Lovely. I had a gorgeous time.

SC: How long did you stay there?

DM: About six months. I generally would stay six months. I got so tired, I collapsed at the end of six months.

SC: You'd been working too hard?

DM: I met my husband there.

SC: Tell me about Bobby.

DM: Well Bobby had been a Scholar at Balliol. And he'd come over to study theatre production at Cambridge. And he stayed, he enjoyed the company. And that's how I met him.

DM: That's nice, yes. Were you playing in parts opposite each other?

SC: No.

DM: No? So what did you in fact play? What was the biggest part you played at Cambridge? Can you remember?

DM: Minnie Williams in *A Comedy of Good and Evil*. By Richard Hughes, who wrote *High Wind in Jamaica*. And I played that afterwards at the Gate, at the Arts, on television, I played that all over the place. And then Richard Hughes says it must never be played again unless I played it. I don't think it's been played yet.

SC: I didn't realise that it had been dramatised actually, apart from the film version which Sandy Mackendrick did, many years later.

DM: This wasn't *High Wind in Jamaica*, this was called *A Comedy of Good and Evil*.

SC: Oh, that one. I remember seeing that, so I must have seen you. At the Arts, I remember I saw it.

DM: Well you might have seen me playing a small part there and afterwards I played the lead, a woman with a bad leg.

SC: It kept kicking.

DM: Yes.

SC: Yes, I remember that.

DM: Do you?

SC: If that was the part you played at the Arts I certainly saw it. So after that?

10 minutes 52 seconds

DM: After that, various things, I played in a play at the Ambassadors, with George Grossmith, [with Siler??] I played in a play at Wyndhams. And I got married.

SC: When did you get married?

DM: 1934. And that year Bobby joined the BBC. And Noel Marshall sent for us and said 'I'm doing a revue, will you work on it?' And we'd never done anything like that before. So we said 'Certainly', and that was the first Gate Revue. Nobody came on the first, second, the third… the fourth night it was absolutely full and Noel Coward had to stand. It was an enormous success, for us and Hermione Gingold. So after that I stuck to writing.

SC: I was going to ask you about that. So that's where you started writing, on the Gate revues?

DM: Yes. I'd written all my life but that was where...

SC: And were you writing in conjunction with Bobby?

DM: Yes.

SC: You had an enormous success didn't you? Because how long..? There were several Gate revues, weren't there?

DM: We had a revue every year. And then we went up to the Ambassadors and we ran about a year or so there. And then we did *Swinging the Gate*.

SC: I think I remember that.

DM: We had an amazing cast. The chorus boys were Michael Wilding, Peter Ustinov... all kinds of people.

SC: There was a young Peter Ustinov?

DM: Yes there was, a young slim Peter. The great thing about Peter was he always went on too long. So they instructed a blackout on him after three minutes.

SC: Did he mind?

DM: He couldn't, he had nothing to do, he had to just go off hadn't he?

SC: So you must have enjoyed writing.

DM: Oh it was lovely. And it was very nice about five years ago to have it rejigged up at the King's Head.

SC: Oh yes.

DM: Called *Meet Me at the Gate*. And that was a great success. Extraordinary how after 50 years it wasn't out of date. Most extraordinary.

SC: So when did you get ... pre-war, did you get involved at all in films?

DM: No. Bobby and I wrote a successful play for Vivien Leigh and Lilian Braithwaite [*Bats in the Belfry*]. We were playwrights. And then the war came. And I had a play on at St Martin's.

SC: What was that called?

DM: *A House in the Square*. With Margaret Rawlings, Lilian Braithwaite, Stewart Granger, and Derek Farr, whom I took out of *Swinging the Gate* and shoved into that. And that was where Sergei saw me.

14 minutes 5 seconds

SC: So what happened in the war years?

DM: I went to Ealing.

SC: You went at the beginning of the war. You didn't go to Ealing at the beginning of the war...? I suppose you did, because you worked on *Ships With Wings* didn't you?

DM: I did, that horrible film!

SC: Why was it horrible?

DM: I suppose it was really the last of a terrible… have you seen it, Sid?

SC: No I never saw *Ships With Wings*.

DM: Well you should, it's an education. It had a wonderful cast, I don't know what it cost. Winston Churchill was the only person who liked it.

SC: Well his taste was er ...

DM: Questionable.

SC: Yes, that's the word. So when *Ships With Wings* was… 1941, it came out anyhow. I assume it didn't have much success with the public, if you say how bad it was.

DM: I don't think so. It was very big and impressive, it had a wonderful cast. And it was all about the Ark Royal.

SC: Oh yes. So what did you actually do on that?

DM: Well I was engaged to write the love interest, but I wasn't allowed to.

SC: So why was that? Who was directing it?

DM: Sergei Nolbandov. Because Pat Kirwan who was also a writer on it said to me 'I'm going to write the love interest, and you're going to write the Battle of Matapan.'

SC: With your extensive knowledge of warfare, of course?

DM: So that made me angry, so I said 'Alright I will.' So I asked for *Jane's Fighting Ships*, a naval adviser, an atlas, and some newspapers for the period and I did it. I can't remember a bit about it now.

SC: Pat Kirwan must have been annoyed, was he?

DM: No he was very amused! He was a nice man, a lovely man. Very attractive, very good looking.

SC: Then there seems to be a gap according to the official credits before *Went the Day Well?*

DM: Yes there was.

SC: Were you doing..? Were you still at Ealing in that period?

DM: No, I left after *Ships with Wings*. I wrote a polite letter, thanking them so much for having me. It touched their hearts, they had me back immediately. And they put me on to *A Foreman Went to France*.

SC: Charles Frend directing. Tell me about your experiences on that.

DM: Well I write quote a lot of it, especially the stuff for Tommy Trinder. And interesting thing is Roger McDougall… wrote quite a lot of it but I never met him and he never met me. I don't know who got the credit for it.

SC: I can't remember. Not you or Roger, I'm afraid.

DM: No. But it was a very good film.

SC: It was a good film, and very successful. And that was in er... I don't know what year. But

were you on the staff then?

DM: Yes, I was on the staff.

SC: Because Balcon liked to have everybody… at that time I was supervising editor and I think we were on all yearly contracts, which were renewed.

DM: Yes I was.

SC: So after *Foreman*, what did you do then? Because there's still a big gap before *Went the Day Well?*

DM: I don't know what I did, quite honestly. I think I worked on whatever was going.

SC: Yes… but anyhow the next important thing was *Went the Day Well?* That was '44.

DM: That was the Cav epoch wasn't it? And he made a great difference to Ealing, you see. Enormous.

SC: Yes, tell me about him.

DM: Well you see when I first went they were making these heavy, commercial epics like *Went the Day Well*, they'd gone for them you see, with *Convoy* and *Went the Day Well?* I mean *Convoy* and *Ships With Wings*. Then when Cav came he introduced a more documentary style, didn't he?

SC: Yes. Well he'd come from the Crown Film Unit.

DM: Yes. And he had no patience with the heavy, spectacular… *Ships With Wings* was dreadful. I wrote some lyrics for it and everything. We had some songs, and they were terrible. I still get some money from them.

SC: Really? That's very good.

DM: I think *Ships With Wings* is played in the Outer Dominions, or something.

19 minutes 22 seconds

SC: But tell me in more detail about *Went the Day Well?* Because you were interviewed about that particular film fairly recently weren't you, by Penelope Huston for a book, a sort of monograph about it?

DM: Yes.

SC: So tell me about your experiences on *Went the Day Well?* If you remember.

DM: Oh, let me think.

SC: I mean did Cav co-operate… were you cooperating closely with Cav on the writing?

DM: No, not really. You see we were supposed to… the story was originally written by Graham Greene.

SC: That's right, yes.

DM: And we never read it. We never read the story at all, ever. So when I arrived there was a kind of a script, which I think Angus and John Dighton had done, hadn't they?

SC: Yes I think he had.

DM: And it was pretty dire, quite honestly. Because Angus was a great wit and a lovely man, and a very good story editor, but he wasn't much of a writer. I mean he was comedy, but nothing else.

SC: He used to write the Will Hay scripts.

DM: Yes, very well. And I got on very well with Angus. And I got on very well with Robert Hamer. And we used to have lunch together every day. And Angus evolved a frightfully difficult and very highbrow kind of game, which we played, because we thought if we had lunch together every day for a long time, we'd get so bored with each other. So luckily through my academic background I was able to cope you see, with Angus and Robert and Charlie Frend. So I think honestly that was the reason they kept me on.

SC: So reverting to *Went the Day Well?* I'm interested, what happened on the script, because you were saying the script you read when you went on to it wasn't very good so what did you… you worked with Angus on a revised version did you?

DM: I think I humanised it. They didn't generally like actors there, did they, or actresses? They hated actresses at Ealing anyway.

SC: Yes, but there were quite a number of course in *Went the Day Well?*

DM: Yes. So I had to write – re-write –the scenes between the people. I had to make these stock characters people.

SC: I think you succeeded.

DM: I hope so.

SC: I remember a remark… in the monograph that Penelope Huston did, your remark when she said there was a difference in the script that she'd read and the actual film about the Marie Lohr character, the sort of 'gone down' character who actually finally was killed in the film. And Penelope Huston asked you why you'd done that, why you'd decided to kill

Marie Lohr, and I was very amused to read your answer which was you said 'Well, we just liked killing people.'

DM: I think we'd got into the killing frame of mind by that time, we had to kill somebody and there was Marie Lohr, great big woman, bang!

SC: *Went the Day Well?* I'm still talking on because I personally edited it but also because Penelope Huston had been doing this monograph on it, and she couldn't understand why it had become a sort of cult film. There are all sorts of theories about it and after talking to… Penelope… and after talking to you, me and various other people still finished up by saying she couldn't understand it, and there was a theory that Cav did it as an anti-war film and I said well I didn't think there was any idea of that at all.

DM: No.

SC: Only in the sense that it's certainly true that I think Cavalcanti wanted to show that everybody including ladies, aged ladies like were in the film, were quite prepared to kill people like anybody else, and I suppose you could interpret that as a sort of anti-war thing. But you didn't have any... I mean Cav was just interested in making a good film, wasn't he?

DM: A good film yes. And you see it was wartime then, wasn't it?

SC: Yes.

DM: And it wasn't easy to make those films, with bombing all around you. It was a very difficult time.

24 minutes 20 seconds

SC: So after *Went the Day Well?* the next thing I have down is an interesting film, the same sort of year I think, *Halfway House*.

DM: Yes.

SC: Now that was rather… you were talking about being Welsh, that was in a sense Welsh wasn't it because it was Mervyn Johns and Glynis his daughter?

DM: It was supposed to take place in an inn in Wales. And we'd used Wales on all kinds of occasions. But this was made in Somerset.

SC: Why was that?

DM: I've no idea.

SC: Well I suppose films have a habit of doing that sort of thing. I mean, you're going to shoot something in Brussels, you shoot it in South Kensington. I mean, that's an actual version.

DM: It was a nice film, that.

SC: Yes, tell me about it.

DM: Well I loved writing for Mervyn and Glynis.

SC: Because of the Welshness?

DM: Yes I think so.

SC: Was that a question of the sort of rhythm of the dialogue?

DM: Yes. I enjoyed that very much. And I remember so well that wonderful last shot. The camera pulled back, and there were Mervyn and Glynis standing hand in hand with the inn burning behind them. And I was talking to Glynis about it the other day and she said she'll never forget that. And Mervyn. Unfortunately he died a couple of weeks ago.

SC: Did she?

DM: Mervyn.

SC: Oh Mervyn did, yes.

DM: And Glynis was unable to come over because she'd broken her leg.

SC: From America? That's a shame. So who directed *Halfway House*? It was Basil Dearden?

DM: Yes, Basil.

SC: How did you get on with Basil?

DM: Very well, very well. Basil was always upset that he'd come from the theatre, he hadn't had the university background that the others had.

SC: Was he? I didn't realise that. I suppose it's true because almost everybody else among the directors and producers came from, had a university background.

DM: Yes.

SC: I don't think Basil needed to have felt that way because people like Charlie Crichton for instance went to Oxford but never managed to get a degree. I think he spent his time talking and drinking.

DM: Lovely man. And Charlie Frend was at Oxford.

SC: Well Basil had one advantage over the others, that he'd had a theatrical background.

DM: Exactly. I liked Basil very much.

SC: I think he was underrated. He was a very commercial director which was good for the studio. I think he helped to keep the studio going with a lot of his films.

DM: He came into his own with *The Blue Lamp*, didn't he?

SC: Yes, that was very successful.

DM: Very good film.

SC: Launched a young actor called Jack Warner on an extended career!

DM: Well Jack Warner appeared in *It Always Rains on Sunday*.

SC: That's right, yes.

DM: A tiny part as a copper. That was a very good film.

SC: Yes. That was… who directed that?

DM: Robert Hamer.

SC: Tell me… you worked on that?

DM: No. But I was always a great friend of his, you see. I'd known him a long time and I knew his family.

SC: Oh did you? I didn't realise that.

DM: Yes they came from a place called Llandegley.

SC: Welsh again!

DM: He was… I think he was a genius, you see.

SC: Pardon?

DM: I think he was a genius.

SC: Oh yes, he was at his best.

DM: But he drank, you see. That was the great drawback for him and Angus. Both brilliant men and they both drank too much.

28 minutes 10 seconds

SC: But in between… after… going back to being chronological, after *Halfway House* you did *Fiddlers Three* didn't you? You wrote something on *Fiddlers Three* with Trinder?

DM: Oh yes. I did a lot on *Fiddlers Three*, I wrote a number *Sweet Fanny Adams*, I wrote *Caesar's Wife*. I did a lot of that. And Harry Watts started directing it and gave it up, and Robert took over.

SC: Yes I think it was beyond… Harry Watt was… he wasn't Welsh, he was Scotch.

DM: Well a musical was beyond him. He wanted to do it, badly. But when he got to it he found he couldn't.

SC: But I think – it's interesting, I'd have to look at one of the books about Ealing but I think he finished up getting the director credit for it.

DM: I'm sure he did. Like Charlie Frend got the director credit on *San Demetrio*. He only did a fortnight on it.

SC: That's right, he did.

DM: Charlie was a dear but he was credit hungry. He was.

SC: Well I suppose that's in the business, isn't it.

DM: I never had it, you see. I didn't care. I suppose one should have.

SC: So how did you get on with Tommy Trinder on *Fiddlers Three*?

DM: Awfully well.

SC: A nice man, was he?

DM: I adored Trinder. He was a lovely man. And Frances Day, who played Caesar's wife. I enjoyed that very much.

SC: I remember that crack that Trinder made about Frances Day. There was a suggestion that Frances Day was going into politics. How did the gag go? Frances Day was going into politics and somebody said 'As what?' And he said 'I think she's going to be the Sexual Democrat for Effingham.' Always full of those sorts of stories wasn't he, Trinder?

DM: Bobby and I wrote a revue for Frances Day called *Black and Blue*, with Vic Oliver. And she had a habit of not turning up. She was known as 'Frances Every Other Day'. I loved her though, she was marvellous.

SC: But she was very good, and a very effective actress.

DM: And they came up from the BBC not long ago for my memories of Frances, she was an extraordinary lady.

SC: In what way? Just diverting from Ealing for a moment. In what way was she extraordinary?

DM: She was this great big glamour queen for years. And then she sort of disappeared. And there appeared in her stead somebody called Frankie Day, who was a sort of modern girl with short hair and short skirts, and when approached about Frances Day she said 'Oh you mean my mother? I'm Frankie Day, I'm Frances Day's daughter.' And she had another career as Frankie Day, singing with groups and things. And you were never allowed to think of Frances Day, you were only allowed to think of her as Frankie.

SC: Extraordinary.

DM: And the man who wrote this thing about her for the BBC didn't know her at all as Frances, he'd only known her as Frankie.

SC: How extraordinary.

DM: So he came up here and said 'What was she like as Frances Day?'

SC: Amazing to get away with that.

DM: And she lived the most extraordinary life of glamour, with diamond bracelets up to here. And we were there one day, Bobby and me, and the telephone went and Bobby said 'Miss Day's butler,' you see, and it was Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. And a little later it rang again and it was Prince Bertil from Sweden. She lived that kind of life as Frances Day. As Frankie Day she was one of the boys in the group.

SC: Amazing. You were saying someone being a princess from Sweden, it reminds me. Were you at Ealing when… Glynis Johns was playing there it must have been on *Halfway House* perhaps, and she had a sort of secretary companion, who was a Swedish girl. Do you remember that? And it finally turned out that far from being a Swedish girl she actually came from Wigan or somewhere, she put on this persona which seems to be the right sort of thing to do you know if you're going to be among actors, of playing a part. And she was very convincing to everybody. I think Glynis was just amused about it when she found out but Glynis had been totally taken in. Anyhow, reverting… we were talking about Robert Hamer and of course you worked on *Pink String and Sealing Wax* with Robert didn't you?

DM: Yes I did.

SC: Tell me about that, you did a lot of that didn't you?

33 minutes 40 seconds

DM: Yes. That was a good play by Roland Pertwee and actually I was able to read the play, which was a rare occasion. And I enjoyed that very much. Awfully good performances and I forget who played the kind of spivvy jockey character that Googie fell in love with. Awfully good.

SC: Who else was in it?

DM: Mervyn.

SC: Yes, Mervyn Johns.

DM: And Googie. I think the usual Ealing regulars, you know.

SC: Yes, well we tended, that is the directors and producer people tended to fall in love with people, I mean platonically, artistically, people like Googie.

AL: But it is also reliability really.

SC: Yes also that you build… I always remember an occasion when I was on a crowded train and a couple of girls sitting opposite me, one was sitting on the other's lap it was rather crowded and they were reading the *Evening Standard* and one of them said 'Cor! Googie Withers, I must go and see that.' And I realised that's the way stars are made because we played Googie in picture after picture.

DM: You see I knew Googie in 1934 when she was in the Gate Revue, way, way back.

SC: Yes then she was mainly a sort of revue lady wasn't she?

DM: Yes and then she played in a lot of British films. Smallish ones. She and Joan Greenwood were the two girls that Ealing kept on time and time again weren't they? Extraordinary thing about Ealing, it really was like a boys' school wasn't it?

SC: Yes, I suppose so. Having been one of the boys.

DM: Very much like that. And the girls were alright in the Red Lion. Lovely, gorgeous but not in the studio. And I gather there'd been women writers before who sort of fainted, and had to be carried out screaming.

SC: Really?

DM: More or less. As the story goes anyway. They couldn't take it – they couldn't take Angus and Robert and Charlie and everybody, you know. Because you had to be tough enough to take what they said about you.

SC: Well of course all stories get improved don't they, as the years go by. To the point where… I mean Harry Watt had a story about meeting me, and his version was very different from my memory of it but Harry's version was so good that I decided to make it my version. And I think everybody does that.

DM: I remember Angus saying to Robert 'You must admit, the bitch is well-read.' And Angus said 'Not well-read, *widely*.' And then another day Angus said 'Don't you think we ought to have a nice, fresh mind?' Meaning instead of me and Robert said 'Might as well keep the stale one we have.' So you had no pride, I mean if you thought you were anybody you were slashed down at once.

37 minutes 20 seconds

SC: Tell me about – I remember script conferences which were always fun in the way you've just been saying, really. Tell me about the ones you were at, you must have been at a number when Michael Balcon, the studio head, came in, can you remember any incidents with Michael?

DM: Not really. I remember them more with Angus you see, but not with Mick so much.

SC: Well I think probably why you don't remember about Mick being there was because my memory is that he was very unassertive about scripts, and would read and make… he usually would come in to a script conference and make a few very broad general points and then leave it to Angus and the writer, whoever the writers were at that time and the associate producer to get on with it and you sometimes had to interpret what he'd said and find out what he really meant.

DM: I think the wonderful thing about Mick was the way he let Corny, when Corny went in and said I want to do a film all about boys and Mick said 'Alright, get Charlie Crichton' and the result was *Hue and Cry*.

SC: Yes, Cornelius being – you mentioned Cornelius, you said Corny, Cornelius wasn't it who was one of the directors.

DM: He wasn't there very long, was he?

SC: No he was there less long… I think what happened with Cornelius was that after he made another film after *Hue and Cry* with Crichton he did *Passport to Pimlico* which was very successful.

DM: Lovely film.

SC: But went way, way, way over schedule and budget, partly because of weather but partly because in a way I think on the site they had down on the Thames somewhere they were enjoying themselves so much. The story I heard was that Cornelius went to Mick and said he thought perhaps he should go away for a while to think up his next subject and Mick exploded because he thought it was time Cornelius really faced up to the fact that he'd been over cost and over budget. And that was the end. But anyhow that's getting away from Diana Morgan.

DM: Well there was *Run For Your Money*.

SC: Oh yes that was much later wasn't it? Oh that was the next one, that's quite right, according to that. You'd been doing bits and pieces I think after *Pink String*?

DM: Yes I had been. They used to send over to West Lodge and borrow me on something.

SC: West Lodge being where the script department was.

DM: Yes that's right.

AL: The main gate, wasn't it?

DM: No.

SC: No, the other end of the studio, roughly where the back exit now is at Ealing. The building's still there.

AL: That's right, yes it is.

SC: It had the stills department in it too. So tell me about *Run For Your Money*, now that was very Welsh.

40 minutes 44 seconds

DM: Very Welsh. And that was Alec Guinness' first film for Ealing. He played a reporter, do you remember?

SC: Vaguely, yes. Cos Alec wasn't so famous then was he, by a long way?

DM: No he wasn't. He played a gardening reporter who's put on to follow the match at Twickenham.

SC: That's right, yes. It was a very funny film.

DM: It was funny. Hugh Griffith was wonderful.

SC: Oh Hugh was yes, fantastic. Another Welshman!

DM: Wonderful singer. You see the story was about two Welsh boys who were Meredith Edwards and what's the name, Huston..?

SC: David… Donald.

DM: Donald Huston, who was also Welsh, coming up to London to see the International at Twickers. And they never got there. They were waylaid by Moira Lister's wicked vamp.

SC: Yes, very nice.

DM: It was funny.

SC: Who else was in it? I remember a scene, did you write it? A scene in a tube train about how to get to Twickenham. And everybody in the carriage making different suggestions.

DM: Yes. I knew Griffith had a great thing of getting out of it with his harp. Do you remember?

SC: Yes. And finally didn't they if I remember rightly they arrived at Twickenham just as everybody was leaving?

DM: I don't remember them ever arriving, I think it was just all over. I don't know, they had to go home.

SC: I mean they arrived when the match was all over.

DM: They didn't see the match at all.

SC: No, that's right. So you must have enjoyed working on that.

DM: I did, enormously.

SC: You did a lot of… did you do the whole script on that? Well I wasn't actually – Charlie Frend put down that he'd done it, but he didn't. It was one of those Ealing jobs, you know.

DM: Yes. So after that you were – *Dance Hall*?

SIDE 2

SC: *Dance Hall*.

DM: Two sides Morgan.

SC: You were saying about *Dance Hall*.

DM: The thing I remember most about it was working on the script with Sandy Mackendrick. I found it enormous fun. I'm very fond of Sandy, and he's a very complicated intellectual Scot, as you know.

SC: Yes, I know.

DM: I remember one occasion when we got Donald Huston on top of a roof in the early morning, and Sandy says 'He's committing suicide.' So I said 'How do we know?' And Sandy said 'Oh, everybody knows.' I said 'How? Does a balloon come out of his mouth, saying "I'm contemplating suicide." ? How's the audience to know? They don't know.' It went on all day, sat all through lunch, all afternoon, and at 5 o'clock in the afternoon Sandy says amid roars of laughter 'The bitch is right, we don't know!' So we went over to the Red Lion.

SC: The Red Lion was a great…

DM: It was a disaster in many ways.

SC: I suppose so, yes. People drank too much.

DM: They did, particularly on *Whisky Galore*. Do you remember when we had that case of awful whisky called Red Hackle?

SC: Yes. Wartime whisky was terrible. We were exporting all the good whisky to pay for some clapped-out destroyers. Yes, I remember, from America. Tell me more about *Dance Hall* as a script.

DM: I really don't remember much about it, you know. It was Diana Dors, and Geraldo.

SC: Geraldo was a famous name then, wasn't he, and his orchestra?

DM: I knew Geraldo for a long time, because during the Blitz his orchestra did a lot for the BBC you see, and I used to come up and meet my husband at the BBC and were caught by the Blitz, and we all used to sleep in the concert hall. So I used to sleep on the floor next to Geraldo. So I always say I slept with Geraldo, and I did! Bad reputation I got.

SC: What did Bobby do during the War? Was he with the BBC still?

DM: He was with the BBC. He'd got asthma, so he couldn't join the forces, and he was second in command of the Overseas Programme. He was also a policeman. And he and John Clements worked Trafalgar Square under Sergeant Jack Hulbert. It wasn't very nice, because everything fell on Trafalgar Square and also the two things the Germans were particularly aiming at were Buckingham Palace and the BBC. So it was rather dicey. Of course, they got the BBC once.

SC: Yes, they got the hall didn't they, next to the…

DM: Queens Hall. And Bruce Belfrage went on reading the news.

SC: Well that's just the journalistic tradition isn't it?

DM: Yes.

3 minutes 40 seconds

SC: Were you doing anything with the BBC during the war?

DM: I did something with everything, I think. You see before the war I wrote for every revue in London. I'm, I think I am, the only woman revue lyric writer. They have them in America. There's nobody else over here.

SC: That's probably true, yes that's interesting. America had people like Dorothy Parker.

DM: And Betty Comden. All kinds of people. But here they haven't got anybody. So naturally I got all the jobs.

SC: So you must have written a large number of lyrics in your time. Are any of them still bringing you in cash?

DM: I heard one the other night called *Transatlantic Lullaby*. Played by an organ, the other night on the BBC. That's a perennial, thank goodness.

SC: Was that originally for a Gate revue?

DM: Yes. They all crop up, you know.

SC: Well that's the great thing about writing musical lyrics. They crop up forever, don't they?

DM: Yes, they crop up. The main thing I remember about Ealing was, we were all so very happy, Sid. We really were. And there were no feuds, were there?

SC: Not that I remember, no. Why do you think we were so happy?

DM: I don't know. Was it Mick's choice of people?

SC: Yes probably. I suppose he picked people that he thought had some talent, and could get on with. And I don't think among the writers and directors and so on that there was a great feeling of competition, except possibly in a friendly sort of way. I don't think there were great jealousies.

DM: None whatever. You see you had terrific arguments, and said 'I disagree and that's absolutely so and so, that's nauseating'. That was the great word at Ealing wasn't it, 'nauseating'? Then we'd pack it all up and go and have a drink. It was all over. But it was very happy. Everybody liked everybody really, didn't they?

SC: Yes I think they did.

DM: I think so. They might disagree with them. And they might either belong to the Cav lot or the Angus lot. Cav had a great influence on several of them, hadn't he?

6 minutes 20 seconds

SC: Yes. Well I think Cav would be better as producer in a way than as a director. Although certainly on *Went the Day Well?* perhaps his best thing as a director although it finished up not being liked by Mick actually, the film, but is one of the cult films that has survived.

DM: Yes, it's extraordinary. It's very simple.

SC: Not in a way very believable either, in some ways.

DM: No. It's very, very English.

SC: And being directed, which is interesting, by a Brazilian. A French Brazilian.

DM: A Brazilian in a Million – do you remember Dani's cracks about everybody? And he was a great marvellous little man Dani, wasn't he?

SC: Danischewsky, Monja Danischewsky, who started of course as the publicist there and then became a producer.

DM: He was very witty. Another thing was, they were nearly all very witty people. I mean, Angus was a brilliant wit. So was Dani. So was Robert.

SC: It was a very stimulating atmosphere in those years.

DM: Very stimulating.

SC: Everybody was in the best sense educated, that was a reason. And one of the other reasons why we were happy I think was because within reason Mick would let you do what you wanted.

DM: Yes. Why he let Robert do *Kind Hearts*, I mean I don't know. Because that was completely out of the Ealing cannon wasn't it?

SC: Yes. Particularly with the women in it, and the sexual relationships.

DM: And all kinds of things that Mick never noticed were there.

SC: Such as, can you quote?

DM: When Louis spent the night with Sibella, and she was married the next day. And Louis says to her husband 'You're a lucky man, believe me.' You know? That kind of thing, all the way through.

SC: Well I think that was an example of – Mick had as it were put his money on Robert and he was prepared to accept what Robert came up with, up to a point. Because do you remember there was a novel that Robert was very keen on, *The Wind Cannot Read*, which I think the Studio actually did buy because Robert wanted to make it. And then Mick – whether he read the novel, the complete novel or merely a synopsis of it I don't know but he then changed his mind, because of the sexual implications I think of the story.

DM: Another one Robert wanted to make was *A Pin to See the Peep Show*.

SC: Yes, the Tennyson Jesse.

DM: I think we bought that didn't we?

SC: I think so yes. What was that about?

DM: That was about the murder, the Thompson Bywaters. Very good book. By Tennyson Jesse.

SC: Fascinating case.

DM: Fascinating.

SC: I suppose in those days even apart from Ealing it would have been a little difficult to make it because we did have a film censor and that's the sort of subject that the censors… It's extraordinary looking back, the thing with the censor one used to have in those days. So many things you weren't allowed.

DM: It was worse in the theatre. It was terrible.

SC: It was ridiculous in the theatre because you had someone who didn't know anything about it, what was he, the Lord Chamberlain?

DM: Yes.

SC: What did he do apart from…?

DM: Well he just sort of – we had to submit everything. And every play that Norman Marshall put on at the Gate was censored. Eventually there was a big fight with the Lord Chamberlain and all the plays like Oscar Wilde and *The Children's Hour* went up to the West End, but it was a terrific battle.

SC: It's extraordinary, looking back. What did the Lord Chamberlain do apart from preventing good plays getting on the stage?

DM: I've no idea.

SC: He must have had some Court function I suppose.

DM: I always think of a Lord Chamberlain as walking in front of a procession with a stick.

SC: I suppose because that was all he did originally, walking around with a stick on ceremonial occasions that they had to find him something to do otherwise.

DM: Probably. But I can look back on my years at Ealing with great pleasure, great happiness. I made a lot of friends, and well, I loved it. And when I went to Hollywood I hated it.

11 minutes 46 seconds

SC: Tell me about going to Hollywood, when was that? Soon after Ealing?

DM: I think so. I'm very bad about dates.

SC: Well we can always check dates. What did you go to Hollywood for? I mean what company and for what film?

DM: Marcel Helman and the Millish Brothers.

SC: And what was Marcel going to do?

DM: It was a sort of remake of *Jeannie* by Aimée Stuart. And it had been written by an English writer. Then it was re-written by an American. And I went out to Hollywood to re-write it in English again.

SC: And what happened?

DM: Well I did it. And wrote some numbers with the great Sammy Cahn.

SC: Sammy came back into public notice fairly recently didn't he, he came over here. How did you get on with him?

DM: Very well. I got on very well with all of them.

SC: What happened with the film? Did it get made?

DM: It got made, yes. Some of it was made over here.

SC: Who played in that? I can't remember.

DM: Vera-Ellen and Tony Martin and Bobby Flemyng. Those were the three big parts.

SC: Did you get a credit?

DM: Yes I think so. And Bobby Flemying played a character I invented called The Mackendrick, a Scottish laird who's after Vera-Ellen for her money I think. He turned out to have a heart of gold anyway. And she married Tony Martin.

SC: So was that the first thing you did after Ealing?

DM: No, I did a film… I did lots of films that weren't made. I worked on an American film which I never saw the other writer. Wesley Ruggles. And it was for Bing Crosby, Sid Field, it was never made. And then I did a film I liked very much, called *Hand in Hand*. For Columbia. And it was a simple little film but I was very, very pleased. And it won eight awards. What they were I don't know because the producer woman took them all to America with her and died. I haven't been able to find them, because one was a beautiful silver gondola, we won at Venice.

SC: At the Venice Film Festival.

DM: Yes. I'd have liked that for my granddaughter. They've all disappeared. Directed by Philip Leacock.

SC: I haven't heard of that. *Hand in Hand*, was it called? Phil was a nice person.

DM: It was a very nice film.

15 minutes 2 seconds

SC: And that was made here, rather than America? Well, reverting to Hollywood, you said you didn't particularly like Hollywood?

DM: No I didn't. I was terribly homesick.

SC: Was that the main reason?

DM: Yes I think so. I wanted to be back with my husband and child. And I'd been used to Ealing. I didn't fancy the way they did films over there.

SC: Was it not so chummy? Much harder, tougher?

DM: Yes. I could cope with the Ealing boys. I was so bored actually with all these parties and this going out. I met Gary Cooper though, that I did do. That made my life!

SC: You liked him?

DM: Oh I love him.

SC: He comes over… you can't always trust of course the screen image of an actor or actress can you in real life but one always felt that with Gary Cooper that it must be… the nice chap he usually played was really him. And you found that? Who else did you like?

DM: I had a very funny evening with Judy Garland. She lay on one bed, I on another. It was at Sammy Cahn's house. It was some party, and we got bored with it, and we talked about English nannies. That's my chief memory of Judy.

SC: She must have been a very strange person really.

DM: Yes. Very attractive.

SC: But probably too much pressure I should think, in her early years.

DM: Much too much. She had one of these terrible mothers you see, who forced her into it all. And she had Sam Goldwyn who chased every starlet possible.

SC: I remember, did you ever see a short film that was made, it must have been made a little while before the war and it was the story about two girls singing at a bandstand in a park. And the two girls were Judy Garland and Deanna Durbin, and it was made by one of the big Hollywood companies. They weren't sure which of these two youngsters they were going to take on. So they decided the simplest way would be to… in their different styles, Deanna was singing something more classical as opposed to what Judy Garland sang to make up their minds, and they chose I don't know which. It was an interesting film I can't remember its name, I thought you might have possibly seen it.

DM: I haven't seen it.

SC: Who did you most dislike in America, in Hollywood?

DM: I didn't dislike anybody.

SC: Just the general atmosphere, and being homesick?

DM: I was homesick. And I tried to walk up one evening to have dinner with James Mason whom I'd known since the Gate. And I was stopped by a police car, who said 'You don't walk in this district.'

SC: For fear of being mugged?

DM: I don't know why. And I said 'Well why not?' And they said 'Oh, you're a Limey.' I said 'Yes' and they said 'Jump in, where are you going?' I said 'To have dinner with my friends the Masons.' And they said 'Oh, we know.' So I jumped in and arrived at the Masons in a police car.

SC: And they wondered what you'd been up to?

DM: What on earth has Diana been up to? And then I think James wanted me to stay on for I think it was *Jane Eyre*. Which I'd have loved to do but I couldn't do it over there. I couldn't do it away from my family.

SC: What was James Mason doing at that time?

DM: I don't know. He was living in a very grand house. And the funny thing was I first knew him in a play at the Gate called *Parnell* and when it moved to a new theatre, James was left out because he wasn't good enough. The things that happened to people.

SC: Well that often happened didn't it. I remember seeing a Priestley play in Glasgow with a lady called Molly Urquhart, did you ever meet Molly Urquhart? She was Scottish and I thought she was terrific in this part and then later when Priestley must have been working at Ealing, the play came in to London and I was astonished and I said to Priestley 'Why aren't they playing Molly Urquhart?' and they wanted a name. The rather terrifying thing about the acting profession I should think because you never know when that sort of thing is going to happen.

DM: Well I've got a play now that the King's Head are frightfully keen to do, but it's very difficult to cast. Because they've got to have a name. So just searching around for one.

20 minutes 25 seconds

SC: So you came back from Hollywood, back to your family, Bobby and your daughter. Did you go on working then? Was there a stage when you were just sitting back and being a wife and mother?

DM: No, never.

SC: Always working?

DM: Always working. I did a lot of BBC work then.

SC: Radio?

DM: Yes. I went on all those panels, you know. We took the Ealing game up to the BBC and we used to play it on Sunday afternoons.

SC: What did they call it?

DM: Who's Who?

SC: Do you know exactly how the game went? You were talking about doing it over lunch at Ealing. What was it?

DM: You were something, and they had to find out what you were. And there was some unknown character and 'Might an ignorant person think..?' And they had to find out first of

all whether you were male or female, fact or fiction et cetera et cetera. And then they'd say… if you decided to be say Boadicea one of the… Charlie or Robert would say 'Might an ignorant person suppose you to be part of an old necklace?' And you said 'I'm not the Venerable Bede'. You had to be pretty quick. And then they found out your sex, and you would change quickly from Boadicea to… And it went on for years as you know. And Tommy Trinder and Stanley Holloway used to do a very good impersonation of it. But it ended up with Angus who was the Amarative [?] Absolute. And after that we gave up.

SC: How long did the radio version of it run?

DM: I don't really remember. A couple of months, I think. I think it was a bit too erudite!

SC: So did you do, did you write more plays in this period?

DM: Oh yes, lots more plays.

SC: I thought you did. Can you tell us the names of some of them?

DM: Well the most successful of them was a play called… we rejigged the title… *After My Fashion*, at the Ambassadors. And that was very successful.

SC: Was that drama or comedy?

DM: Drama. With Sonia Dresdel and Valerie White. And then I had various plays… I had a play that went on tour which broke all records at Blackpool, even broke the Gertie Lawrence record in *September Tide*. It came back and changed directors, he made the acts think it was a disaster. Actors should never think you know.

SC: What was that one called?

DM: They changed the title all the time, I can't remember what that one was eventually called.

AL: It started off as *September Tide*, you say?

DM: No, that's what we beat. But it was Daphne du Maurier. Then I just had a very successful tour with my adaption of Daphne du Maurier's *My Cousin Rachel*.

SC: Ah yes. That was a big, big success as a book wasn't it?

DM: Yes. We'd done very well on tour. With Anita Harris playing Rachel. Thank God for it, I've been able to set up a trust for my granddaughter's education. I've done a lot of adaptations of Daphne du Maurier which have never seen the light of day.

SC: How did you get on with Daphne du Maurier?

DM: I never met her.

SC: You never met her? I suppose it sounds like she didn't bother about the dramatised versions of her books, she just took the money and ran.

DM: She became a hermit. She went off to Cornwall and wouldn't see anybody. And we had the same agent. And he never saw her. She just retired from life and the world and everything.

25 minutes

SC: Did you do more films after that? Or were you concentrating on writing for the theatre?

DM: Theatre. I had a play called *White Eagles*. I had a play called *Your Obedient Servant*, which Margaret Lockwood did at Richmond. I had a lot of things going round and round. *After My Fashion* was a big success. And then Bobby died, as you know.

SC: Yes, that was sad. What year was that?

DM: '64. And after that I just wrote odd bits. I wrote two novels then.

SC: What were they called?

DM: They're Welsh novels. One was called *Delia*, which is about my mother's life which was quite successful, and one was called *Thomas the Fish*. Which I think was very funny, and that was quite successful. I mean, they reached paperback, which in those days was quite an achievement.

SC: They were incredibly cheap, the selling price of those paperbacks in those days.

DM: I know, unbelievable.

AL: Half a crown.

SC: Or less. No, half a crown I suppose. I mean compared to now, paperbacks are about £6. £5.99.

DM: And then I wrote… I went on to *Ward 10*. *Emergency Ward 10*.

SC: And were you on that a long time?

DM: As long as it lasted, yes.

SC: That was very long.

DM: Quite long. I loved that, adored that.

SC: Did you like the challenge of writing what in some ways is a constricted medium isn't it, for television?

DM: I think so. I always liked that kind of order. Like in a revue you had to write to a running order. You know, I think I rather liked it.

SC: I ask because I've found that a lot of people have done, have produced a lot of television things, films. I think people like Charlie Crichton who directed a good many things for me and everybody, tended to like what you just said, this sense of order. You really have to work to a certain time, which after all is basic to the theatre in a way.

DM: Yes, it's the feeling you have when you get to the middle of the last act. My God, you got a lift, you know? Very challenging and exciting.

SC: So when did you… well in a sense you haven't stopped writing or have you?

DM: Not really. But it's very difficult now because I can't see to write.

SC: What you need is what's called an amanuensis.

DM: I do.

SC: Who would take down your slightest utterance.

DM: I've got… a friend of mine I gather, secretly, has bought me a wonderful recording thing, which she's bringing up on Thursday. Maybe I'll be able to speak into that.

SC: What does that do?

AL: It's a little personal recorder. I mean they're very, very useful. I see Katie Boyle walking through the wood in the area where I live with one of these in the hand doing her column.

SC: What a good idea.

AL: It's a dictating machine.

SC: Sorry, I didn't catch that. That's a very good idea, yes.

DM: I have one but it's not very… This one, the new one is from the Institute for the Blind, which I gather is a very good one. Being blind more or less, it's very awkward you know. It's terribly restricting, you're so dependent upon people.

SC: Can you watch television?

DM: No.

SC: How well can you see Alan and me for instance?

DM: Vaguely. I can see… Have you got a white jacket?

SC: It is pretty well a white jacket.

DM: I can see Alan sort of sitting there. I can see people, outlines of people. Have you got a green pullover?

SC: Yes.

DM: I can see that. But I can't see anything here. When I eat, it has to be cut up because I can't see.

SC: Can you see things in mid-distance better?

DM: Much better. And I always see them though a veil of tears, which is rather horrid. It's as if you're crying all the time.

SC: Yes, I appreciate because I've had some problems with my eyes, not as bad as that yet. It is a great disadvantage. It's difficult to move around. Looking back on your career so far – I say that because if you're still writing, and going to have a recorder to speak things in to…

30 minutes 19 seconds

DM: Yes, I've got a play I want to write.

SC: Yes, good. But you sound as if you've really enjoyed your life, professionally.

DM: Yes I did.

SC: You'd not rather have done anything else? Other than being a writer and an actress?

DM: Oh, no. You see I started writing when I was a little girl. I wrote a [?] when I was eight on the Welsh Outlook. And I went on writing and writing. My first play was done at the Arts, by the students of Miss Fogerty's school.

SC: Really?

DM: That was a musical version of Euripides' *Electra*.

SC: You started very modestly!

DM: It was called *Sin Electra or the Bella Mycenae[?]?* I played Clytemnestra, which is a very good part.

SC: I'm sure. Did you sing?

DM: Oh yes.

SC: Were you a good singer?

DM: Yes. I was offered a scholarship to Rome. And I turned it down because you see I haven't got perfect pitch, and I can't read music. And I thought I can't start to learn that at 20, you know, I'm too old.

SC: So you learned everything by ear.

DM: Yes. I've got a very extraordinary memory. I remember lyrics and poetry, and I forget what I've done myself. I remember what other people have written, I forget myself. I think I wrote at such a speed.

SC: Well it shows that you're basically quite a modest and not a self-assertive sort of person probably.

DM: I don't know. All actresses, we're really show offs aren't we? I was a terrible show off as a little girl.

SC: I suppose… I've never made up my mind. Tell me about acting, because having spent my professional, personal life connected with acting, I've never quite understood the whole acting ethos.

DM: No, it's very strange, why you have to do it.

AL: You want attention.

DM: I suppose so. The show off instinct, really. And if you find that you do it rather well, and if you find you can get an audience, if you find you can make them laugh, let them laugh let them laugh, that's wonderful. But it's also very frightening. I mean when I had a wonderful notice from an agent who said I was 'a little genius' I was so frightened I ran away.

SC: That was too much?

DM: I thought I can't live up to this.

SC: Do you remember John Slater?

DM: Yes.

SC: I remember John saying he played in a touring version of *No Orchids for Miss Blandish*. I remember meeting John, he'd left the cast and he said he'd left because after six months' touring he was beginning to be worried about what the part was doing to him. Because it was a very horrible, unpleasant character he was playing and I suppose… did you ever experience that? You played a part that you didn't like the character you were playing?

DM: No, I never really played one long enough. I only played rather nice people. Of course in Rep you played all kinds of things, I mean I played Tondelayo in *White Cargo*.

SC: That's an extraordinary play. I'm sure I saw it, it was an enormous success but these days people would howl with laughter.

DM: I know. Everyone kept on saying 'God it's hot!' It's a wonderful… at the end of the first act you appear for the first time, you stand in a doorway and say 'I am Tondelayo.' Curtain. It was wonderful!

[Laughter]

SC: Well there you are – laughs. Reverting you know to the whole thing about acting I suppose you're right that it is in a way self-assertion but it takes different forms. I mean some actors, one imagines are very modest in their general behaviour, and I'm thinking particularly for instance of Jack Hawkins. Did you ever play…?

DM: I never played with Jack, no.

SC: But you knew him?

DM: Yes.

SC: He was a very modest person, but I think that was because he'd been around for so long as a reputable, reliable actor before people started making him into a star. So that perhaps Jack found that he could ride any situation because he'd known… but it must be awful for someone who, a young person projected into a big part… very difficult.

DM: It's very frightening. Because I had this in this play called *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, written by Charles Morgan the critic's wife [novelist Hilda Vaughan]. And I brought down the house. And it was terrifying. Because I was too young for it.

SC: How old were you at that time?

DM: I suppose I was about 20. But it was too early.

SC: It's an enormous responsibility I suppose too, isn't it?

DM: Terrible. You see as an actress, I'm either very good or very bad. I can be terrible. And I have been absolutely terrible. And yet I've been awfully good. And I never knew which I was going to be, which was rather unfortunate.

SC: You don't know until you get a reaction?

DM: Fortunately people engaged me. They didn't know.

AL: But isn't that also something to do with the part you might be playing?

DM: I suppose so.

AL: I mean you can be sympathetic to it and perhaps give, and be unsympathetic to it and not give.

DM: Well I had an awful trick you see of making unsympathetic parts sympathetic. But you know a play by O'Casey called *The Silver Tassie*? Well you know the part of Susie Monican?

SC: Yes.

DM: Well I played Susie Monican and for no reason she got all the sympathy.

SC: Who was playing the…?

DM: Bobby was playing the...

SC: Who?

DM: My husband. It was at Cambridge, you see. And all the Cambridge people said that's what O'Casey meant but it wasn't at all, I couldn't help doing it. I liked the audience on my side, which is vanity. That's what it is.

SC: (Laughing) Did you ever play Lady Macbeth in that case?

DM: You mustn't mention that name.

SC: The Scottish play.

DM: The Scottish play. No I never did.

SC: I was only thinking that's the sort of part you would have made very sympathetic.

DM: Yes, it's terrible! I was never cast as a… you know in Rep 'It's a lovely part but it's a [?]?, we can't let her do it.'

38 minutes 5 seconds

SC: Reverting to Ealing, how would you summarise your years, what you said were happy years, the time you were at Ealing Studios? If you had to summarise them, which I'm asking you if you could now.

DM: I learned a lot. I was extremely happy. I loved the atmosphere of friendship and argument and general atmosphere of Ealing. I can't describe it. But it was quite different from anything else I'd ever imagined the film industry to be like. And then when I went to Hollywood or… I did some other films I can't remember what they were, it wasn't the same. Ealing was home. It was rather like the academic atmosphere I'd been brought up in, in an odd way.

SC: As a team sort of thing?

DM: Yes. Everybody was doing their best, it wasn't one big ego.

SC: Anything else you'd like to say while we're…

DM: You made friends there who remained friends all their lives and your life. I mean, Sandy rang up from Hollywood at Christmas.

SC: Sandy Mackendrick?

DM: Yes. And Robert's family were wonderful when my husband died. And I'm awfully fond of Angus. And I loved Mick. There was nobody I wasn't very happy with. And Charlie Crichton I loved.

SC: A happy time.

DM: It was a happy lot wasn't it? It was a Band of Brothers.

AL: It's a nice note to finish on, that.

SC: Thank you Di.

DM: I feel it wasn't very good, my memory's not very good you see.

SC: I think it's pretty good I must say. How old are you, I forgot to ask?

DM: How old am I? 84.

SC: You're the same as me. You got there slightly before me.

SIDE 3

16 February 1993 (continuing from 1992).

SC: Well Di it's lovely to see you again and talk to you again.

DM: Lovely to see you.

SC: We're here, apart from the pleasure of meeting you again, because since the last time we were here there were extra things that you hadn't remembered then that you'd like to record and I think one of them is connected with a film is it, called *Hand in Hand*?

DM: Yes.

SC: Tell us about that.

DM: Well there's a woman called Helen Winston, she was an American. She came over here and was determined to make a film. And she had a very beautiful story about a Catholic boy and a Jewish girl. And she got hold of me I don't know how, through my agent I suppose. And I wrote a story about how these two children, how their families were against… really a sort of *Romeo and Juliet* story, called *Hand in Hand*. And Columbia took it up and we made it at Pinewood and it had Sybil Thorndike, was it… Gregson?

AL: Jeffrey Gregson?

DM: No.

SC: John Gregson.

DM: John Gregson, and various other people in it. It came out very well and won an enormous amount of awards. From the Catholic Society, Protestant Society, it won an award at the…

SC: Venice?

DM: Yes, Venice and various other places like that. I thought we won eight awards but [?] said we won 18, which horrified me. Is this Roger?

AL and DM: Hello Roger.

[Roger MacDougall?]

SC: Roger, how are you?

DM: It was directed by Philip Leacock.

SC: Phil Leacock?

DM: Yes. He did it beautifully, it was a very nice little film. And I'd love to see it again. But I don't know how to achieve that. Do I apply to Columbia? Helen Winston is dead. And I tried to get some of the awards and find out what they were. Because she took them all back to America with her. She died, I wrote to her husband, no reply, and I rather gave it up. The one we won at Venice was a charming little fake silver gondola, and I'd like to have it for my grandchild, you see. But I don't know how we get about that. We had it for a run once up at Pinewood by somebody who had been at Ealing. Who might that be now, Sid?

SC: I don't know. One of the directors at Ealing?

DM: No one of the people at the staff there or something.

SC: Not a director?

DM: No. I've got in my room a poster of it, I'll show you afterwards. And then there was another film I did… this I had forgotten all about - *Poet's Pub*.

SC: Eric Linklater.

DM: Yes. And that I had completely forgotten.

4 minutes 40 seconds

SC: When was that made? Can you remember?

DM: No.

SC: Well tell us anything that you do remember about it anyhow, Di.

DM: Nothing.

SC: I remember reading the book. Which was very pleasant as far as I recall.

Roger: I remember having lunch with Linklater. With who's his name…?

SC: And discussing that subject?

Roger: …No…I had lunch with Linklater, with…He was a writer and coming up and spent money…and had a butler…Who the hell was that?

SC: I don't know. Roger you'd better keep your thing because we'll be doing you as a separate recording.
So you don't remember anything else about that one? Any other films, or anything else you didn't record before? Now's your chance.

DM: Now's my chance.

SC: By the way I'm sorry to tell you Phil Leacock has died, you probably saw the obituary.

DM: Yes I know. I liked doing that, I'm rather proud of it. It's one film I'm really rather proud of.

SC: The *Hand in Hand*? Yes of course. Well it was on a worthwhile subject wasn't it?

DM: Yes it was. And the children were enchanting.

SC: What were their names again?

DM: And they brought out a book about it, a thin volume. And I had it but I don't know where it is. I've moved about so much, I've mislaid things. I think those are the only forgotten films.

SC: I hope you got royalties from the book did you? I suppose you didn't write the book but they must have used your script?

DM: Yes. No I don't think I did.

AL: It was probably the Publicity Department was it?

DM: Now why would… do you know a man called David Deutsch?

SC: By name only, yes, David Deutsch.

DM: I have a vague feeling he was involved in it.

SC: He was a distributor, so maybe he was working for Columbia.

DM: Could be.

SC: I don't remember now. That sounds highly likely.

DM: Was there a new method of making a film that they brought out that didn't do very well?

AL: A new method? Independent Frame.

DM: That's it.

SC: Was it Independent Frame?

DM: I think so.

AL: *Hand in Hand* was Independent Frame?

DM: No, *Poet's Pub*.

SC: No, Independent Frame didn't last very long because the directors found that they were too inhibited by all the pre-planned set ups, instead of being able to change their minds when they got on the floor. It was designed by an art director anyhow, David Rawnsley.

DM: Yes, it's a name I remember.

SC: David Rawnsley, yes. He was well known. He was a nice person, but very wrong-headed in devising this Independent Frame scheme.

DM: That's probably why I don't remember it.

SC: Is there anything else you do remember? That you didn't record previously?

DM: I don't think so.

9 minutes

SC: I think it probably was with the *Hand in Hand* film, because it obviously was important to you, and winning awards and being an interesting subject.

DM: And I liked it. I was very pleased to do it. And I liked the girl Helen Winston, she was very strange but I liked her.

AL: What was her background, do you know?

DM: She was an extraordinary character. Because after my husband died I felt I ought to go abroad or do something and I went and stayed with her in America. And she had a husband called Solly Goldstein. And she quarrelled with him the whole time. And they had terrible rows at mealtimes. So I used to take my food and go to the kitchen. Well they had a butler, who'd been Tallulah Bankhead's butler and he told me these wonderful stories about Tallulah. I had no idea what they were quarrelling about in there, but I ate all my meals with Tallulah's butler!

SC: Can you remember any of the stories that the butler told you about Tallulah Bankhead?

DM: No. They were just all Tallulah's stories, you know. Coming down and there she was starkers. 'Come in, darling and who is it?'

SC: Wonderful. Anything else connected with the film? Like the butler?

DM: No. And then… she was very strange but I liked her. And then she died suddenly. Quite young, attractive, and they had a house in Connecticut. She used to come over and see me when she was over here. And she suddenly died just like that and I heard no more. I heard nothing from Solly. And I don't know what to do about those medals and things. I'd like to know what they were worth.

SC: Well quite a bit because they were probably gold medals and things were they?

DM: I don't know what they were.

SC: Oh well.

DM: I think that's all the films I'd forgotten.

SC: … We thought you wanted to add… You did do a lot about theatre but...

DM: I didn't. I've done a lot in the theatre. I've done many plays, quite a lot of straight plays, heaps of revues.

SC: All the Gate ones.

DM: The Gate ones that went to the Ambassadors, *Black and Blue*. I worked with five or six other revues. And we've just had this revival up at the King's Head. Then of course we did *Three Waltzes* for Evelyn Laye.

AL: You wrote the book?

DM: Book and lyrics. My husband wrote the lyrics, I wrote the book. And Dan Corbett [?]'s got a play of mine now which he's going to do in the summer.

SC: Great, what's it called?

DM: *The Dark Stranger*. It's a black comedy. And I just had a musical, a children's musical on up at the King's Head. So I'm busy. So I think I'll be the oldest writer writing, at 85.

SC: I'm sure you are, because I can't think of anybody else.

AL: You don't write the music as well do you?

DM: No. I've got a very, very nice new young composer, and he's charming. It's ridiculous because I could be his grandmother, you see. It's a very funny combination, we get on frightfully well.

SC: In the summer we must know about that.

DM: I will.

SC: Good. Anything more?

14 minutes

DM: Radio. Adaptations and things.

AL: You didn't talk very much about radio.

DM: Well I've been tied up with radio ever since Savoy Hill.

SC: That is early isn't it?

DM: Yes.

SC: 2 L. O.

DM: Yes. And the last thing I did for it which was about four years ago was an adaptation of *The Green Hat* – Michael Arlen. And the Daphne du Maurier adaptation I did of *My Cousin Rachel* has just been on tour, it's done awfully well. Full houses everywhere. I even went to see it.

SC: Where? Where did you go?

DM: Well all these masses of new theatres, aren't there? A big theatre, somewhere in Essex. Great big theatre. Very beautifully laid out, everything was wonderful. I don't remember quite where it was. The thing is you know I don't remember things I've written myself. I remember things other people have written far better, and people quote things and lyrics to me and I think 'That's rather good, who wrote it?' And they said 'You did!'

SC: That's nice. That's lovely.

DM: And I've got a girl coming up on Sunday, Saturday who wants all my revues, sketches and lyrics for some book she's getting out about revue writing and I can't remember them.

SC: You haven't kept them?

DM: Some I've kept. Some have been kept by the management. But I remember the names. And one or two I'm very fond of. My husband wrote… we used to write together you see…– sometimes I used to do it all, sometimes he used to do it all, sometimes we don't know which did what. One song called *Transatlantic Lullaby* is still very popular, it's done on the radio a lot. I could probably think of a hundred… You see I've never stopped working in one medium or another, I'm [?] them up.

SC: Something about radio? Because Bobby was radio wasn't he?

DM: Yes he was indeed.

SC: So you had a lot of radio experience on and off over the years.

DM: Yes. I'm *Picture of a Woman Thinking*!

SC: By Rodin.

DM: I think you ought to talk to Roger.

SC: OK, thank you very much.

DM: Thank you.

END