

Jean Anderson

Jean Anderson (1907-2001) was an English actress. Notable roles include Mother in the BBC *Railway Children* adaptations in 1951 and 1957. She then went on to play Mary Hammond in BBC drama *The Brothers* (1972-1976) and Lady Jocelyn Holbrook in *Tenko* (1981-1985). Her films included *A Town Like Alice* (1956) and *The Lady Vanishes* (1979).

Announcer: The copyright of this recording is vested in the ACTT History Project. The subject is Jean Anderson, actress, performing in radio, TV, motion pictures and the stage.

Interviewed by Margaret Thomson, and John Legard, 12th November 1991, File 224, side one.

Margaret Thomson: Jean Anderson – can you tell us to start with, a little bit about your own background; your personal background, and how you came to be an actress, and did you have any other aspirations before you became an actress?

Jean Anderson: Yes, I was brought up in Guildford mostly, and until I was about 17, I thought I was going to be a violinist, and I was at a little private school in Guildford; day school. And I was allowed to give up Latin and Algebra, so that I could practice more. I used to practice about four hours a day. Then I joined a very a very excellent orchestra, in Guildford County Orchestra, and rather a famous conductor called Claude Powell, who eventually became my father-in-law. However, just before the time when I was about to apply to the Royal College of Music, I was suddenly seized with the idea that “I don’t think I’m going to be good enough at this to make it my life work”, and although I’d enjoyed working at it, I thought “do I just want to be an orchestral player? I’m not going to be good enough to be a soloist I don’t think, and....I’d always liked (the dreaded word) elocution at

school, and the drama that we did, and I was supposed to be rather good in it. I thought –“I think that’s what I’d like to do”. So that’s how I went to the Royal Academy, and I think when I went there, I was thinking more of a teaching degree. But I very soon realised that that was what I liked, and I hadn’t; there was no theatrical background to my family, except that my mother would have loved to have gone into it herself, but it wasn’t the done thing then. So she was very pleased. My father who was very much the Lord and Master; a real Scot, and a lot older than my mother, I expected him to protest about this, but he didn’t, and I went through the Academy rather slowly; I was (as I say) rather a slow slogger! And I wasn’t one of the favourites of Sir Kenneth Barnes¹, who then ran the Royal Academy. There was sort-of one type of student that he used to like, and promote, and they were all rather extrovert. And I was quite the opposite. At one stage, he wrote to my mother and said that perhaps, I should give it up. But I didn’t. Then, to everyone’s astonishment (and my own most of all) when it came to the diploma, exam at the end of term, I won three prizes, and I was a character lady. And in those days, if you were tall (and had rather a low voice) because of the shortage of men (just between the wars) I was very often playing men! In fact, I can remember Celia Johnson and myself playing Quince and Snugg for a public performance, and nothing could have been more feminine to look at than Celia Johnson at that stage.

Margaret Thomson: Would you give a date now?

Jean Anderson: Yes, I’m going back to 1927-28. I had one very embarrassing thing, because at the end of that, I was sitting in a very scruffy common room it was then, it’s not the magnificent place it is now. And we were waiting breathlessly to hear, you know, whether

¹ Sir Kenneth Barnes (1878-1957) was the director of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA) from 1909-1955)

we'd got our diploma. Someone came down and said "you've got THE prize". I said "what do you mean?" Apparently, there was a prize given by Ann Mahal, (who I worked for later) for the best single performance. I had played (for my diploma) the friar in *Romeo and Juliet*, the old friar. Mrs Pargeter in a West Country play by Masefield, called *The Tragedy of Man*, and she had a strong dialect, and was a nasty old thing. I was summoned into Mr Barnes' study with the judges to be congratulated. I went in, and I changed – I'd got on a sort-of cotton frock, and rather nervously opened the door, and there was a deathly silence. Then "mutter mutter mutter" between them and one of the judges says "I don't think this is the girl." So of course (laughing).

Margaret Thomson: How marvellous!

Jean Anderson: But, you know, it was of course. They didn't recognise me from the friar. Then, I was lucky (tape cuts out momentarily) from RADA, with Robert Morley², Max Adrian³, The sister of David Nivens called Grizel Niven⁴, who gave it up shortly; became an eminent sculptress. But we got this job with a director, I mean an impresario you could say, who sent out first tours, who was notorious for two things; paying the lowest salary and going after the ladies in his office. I can remember my first interview with him. I was so innocent, you know, even at that age in those days. I can remember going into his office, which was in Dean Street, and getting this job, and I was frightfully thrilled. Then I realised there was this wandering hand going up my skirt, and I had done the thing that one was warned not to do – at least, they assumed I knew. I had shut the door as I went in;

² Robert Morley (1908-1992) was an English actor known for films including *Marie Antoinette* (1938) for which he was nominated for an Academy Award and *The African Queen* (1951)

³ Max Adrian (1903-1973) was an Irish actor and signer. A founding member of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre he also appeared in films including *Henry V* (1944) and *The Devils* (1971)

⁴ Grizel Niven (1907-2007) was an English artist best known for her sculptures. Notably she created the sculpture that serves as the award for the Women's Prize for Fiction

apparently his door was always kept open! Anyway, we got over that and I signed a thing that after that year you couldn't do – for a 50 weeks tour, and we all did; for three pounds a week.

Margaret Thomson: And this is Rep really was it?

Jean Anderson: No! It was a very good play called *Many Waters* by Monckton Hoffe⁵. It was an episodic play, what was I then? I was just 21, literally just by a month. I was playing an elderly Jewish farrago, and a Cockney Charlady in the registrar's office, and scrubbing the floor and Robert Morley was the registrar. He incidentally, looked exactly the same at 20 as he does now, and was exactly the same personality.

Margaret Thomson: Can I ask you, you're talking about a number of dialects. Did you get taught them when you were at RADA, or did you pick them up from people? You must have a great facility for them.

Jean Anderson: No, we weren't taught. Yes, I think I had very good ear. That particular piece, Maysfield wrote in dialect, but since then; I'm not one that can turn on a dialect and give imitations immediately. I have to know the character first, and why they speak that way somehow. Then in my recent years- I worked in Dublin before the war. When I came back to England, it was wartime, and there were no Irish actors in London. I did so much work with Irish accents on radio, and it wasn't (oddly enough) 'til sometime after that, that I got a lot of Scottish parts, which of course, by descent, I am a Scot!

Margaret Thomson: Just tell us a little about the Scottish background will you? About where your people came from?

⁵ Monckton Hoffe (1880-1951) was an Irish playwright and screenwriter. His plays include *The Faithful Heart* (1921) whilst his films include *The Bishop Misbehaves* (1935)

Jean Anderson – Yes, well

Margaret Thomson: Excuse me, shall we finish our coffee; shall we break now?

Jean Anderson: What a good idea.

---BREAK---

(Unidentified voice) We're running.

John Legard: Jean, although you didn't pursue your musical career, presumably you can still play the violin pretty well, and you're musical?

Jean Anderson: No, strangely enough – I did something very foolish that I regret in a way. But the moment I made the decision that it was the stage for me, I never touched the violin again. I couldn't play a scale now, I don't think.

John Legard: How sad.

Jean Anderson: Yes, it is sad. On the other hand, I often say, that if you're an indifferent pianist, you can give a lot of pleasure to a lot of people. If you're an indifferent violinist, you really give a lot of pain!

John Legard: Interesting point (laughing).

Margaret Thomson: And your love of music must have had a great effect on your, on your...

Jean Anderson: Ah yes. I have a theory that (particularly with the arts) if you switch from one to the other, it's never a complete loss. You know; sometimes I hear parents complaining about their children switching from this and that when they're young, and I

think when you're young, it doesn't awfully matter because I think you should gain something out of everything you study.

Margaret Thomson: Absolutely. Like people that take degrees and then don't use it! They can leave all that behind them. Anyhow, now you're in this play, West End play...

Jean Anderson: Yes, and what is interesting is that during that year that we were on tour, all the theatres – what were they number one dates in bigger towns – all because of the success of this new thing called “the talkies”, they lost their theatre for tours, and converted it into a talking house. Therefore, so many of these middle-sized cities that were very good theatre dates lost the theatre and those theatres didn't come back until they'd built these great Odeon's and palaces. Then that theatre generally became a Rep theatre.

Margaret Thomson: Ah, I see, so that's the process.

Jean Anderson: So that the touring, the tours whereas on paper, the stage used to have a whole page of touring theatres, it got smaller and smaller through the years. And now I think your average tour is about ten weeks probably.

Margaret Thomson: Nowadays.

Jean Anderson: Yes. You try and say eight weeks, and then they say they can't get their money back, and then you agree to do ten, but that's about the average I should think, eight to ten. But we had the most enormous fun, and lived on three pounds a week, really quite well, and had a lot of fun. And thought how lucky we were.

Margaret Thomson: Yes. And did you have to do chores as well as acting?

Jean Anderson: Not then, if you tour now, it's a very different situation. If you're playing a leading part on tour (which I hope I won't have to do again), I'm not talking of a few weeks out of London before coming into the West End, but say taking a successful play on tour. If you're a lead, you have so much pressure; you have to have a press call? You arrive in a town after a pretty exhausting weekend, you have to drive by car, because you can't get to some of these places by train on Sunday now, and you've probably driven 200 miles on that Sunday, you get to the hotel, you've got to get used to a new room, and you're pretty well knackered after your two performances and packing up on Saturday nights. On Monday morning, you have to go to the theatre; you have press photographs, press-call, then during that week you've got two matinees. You probably have to visit hospital; which I mean, you're willing to do, but it's all very exhausting. Then you go on local radio to promote it, local television, and they probably come to your dressing room and say "will you do a tape for the local hospital?" and it's all those things that really wear you out. Because there are no lovely theatrical digs in these days, you have to stay in hotels, and even though they pay you what seems a lot of money, you come back at the end of a tour with very little in the kitty. Yes, and at my age, you need your comforts, you know, you a good bed and your own bathroom, and that is very expensive in England.

Margaret Thomson: Enormously. That's an aspect we don't hear about.

Jean Anderson: But I have enjoyed touring in the past, I did several tours for a setup called 'Candida Plays' which George Baker⁶ ran. He had an Arts Council allowance, (which is very rare) for himself to take companies on tour. And they were very well done, again, there- we did have a lot of fun.

⁶ George Baker (1931-2011) was an English actor. He was well known for his role as Inspector Wexford in *The Ruth Rendell Mysteries* whilst his films include *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977) and *The Thirty Nine Steps* (1978)

John Legard: And how long ago was that, that was sort of?

Jean Anderson: That was after the war, yes. We came into the West End, one of them *The Sleeping Prince*. We came to St Martins, and that was with George, a lovely girl forgotten her name. Now playing in *The King and I*, very lovely girl. Never mind.

John Legard: Not Virginia McKenna⁷?

Jean Anderson: No, because I worked with Virginia in films quite a lot. No, Virginia McKenna also played it, so, no, can't remember.

Margaret Thomson: So at the moment, in a chronological sense, you left (indistinct), you got into your first production, and can you go on from there?

Jean Anderson: Yes, then you see how lucky we were in my young days, to have these Reps, where you really tried yourself out, so being a character lady, of course I played all-sorts of incredible people. One thing that I think not many people alive remembers doing; I played in a very good Rep company, at the lovely Richmond theatre, when we did twice nightly, weekly Rep.

Margaret Thomson: Good heavens.

Jean Anderson: Looking back, I mean, I don't know how you did it. Three performances on Saturday and the matinee...

Margaret Thomson: (interrupting) What time did you start then?

⁷ Virginia McKenna (1931-) is an English actress and wild life campaigner. Her films include *A Town Like Alice* (1956) and *Born Free* (1966)

Jean Anderson: I think it was something like 5 and 8. Twice nightly, you were rehearsing the other play; we had a wonderful leading man, an Irishman called Breffni O'Rourke⁸, and he laid down the rules – you didn't rehearse on Thursday for learning lines, and somehow, we got these plays on, a very good standard – you never expected to dry – I can't think how one did it.

Margaret Thomson: Were you all young?

Jean Anderson: I was young, yes. Then, I suppose my happiest, and most exciting days in Rep was at a famous art theatre; again, not many people remember now, which was a top experimental theatre, it was called then in Cambridge, called the Festival Theatre. I was engaged as assistant stage manager and understudying the leads, going on in many crowd scenes and small parts, and quite a cast. Flora Robson⁹ was the leading lady, Tony Guthrie was the young director, and Robert Donat¹⁰ was the young juvenile, (laughing) so that was a good round. And I used to watch rehearsals absolutely entranced. At the end of that season, they did a sort-of end-of-term frolic which was a sort-of melodrama, which Robert Donat was allowed to direct his and he gave me the leading girl. So that was a step-up for me, and he was extremely nice to me, and you know, he was lovely to work for. I don't remember any asthmatic troubles in those days, but I did work with him on, I think his one-but-last film when you know, he was a pathetic invalid, and it was very upsetting for everyone really. Then what happened?

John Legard: What year are we at? 30s?

⁸ Breffni O'Rourke was an actor whose work included *Knocknagow* (1918) and *Turas Tearnaimh* (1954)

⁹ Flora Robson (1902-1984) was an English actress. Her films included *Saratoga Trunk* (1945) and *Black Narcissus* (1947)

¹⁰ Robert Donat (1905-1958) was an English actor whose films included *The 39 Steps* (1935) and *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (1939)

Jean Anderson: Yes.

John Legard: At what point did you get involved in the Player's Theatre, because that was a very important...

Jean Anderson : It was before that ah again, Rep. Yes, now at the Festival Theatre we did two plays by Irish playwrights; one by Lord Longford¹¹ about Swift, an extremely good play called *Yahoo*, in which I played Vanessa, and also, a wonderful play called *The Moon in the Yellow River* by Denis Johnson¹²

Margaret Thomson: Hmm. Yes, that was a famous film.

Jean Anderson : And they both came over and saw these plays, and we had one Irish actress with us at the festival, who'd come from the Gate Theatre, where Lord Longford, had been the producer, the money for Hilton Edwards¹³, and well I'd heard a lot about the Dublin Gate Theatre, and again I thought, "ooh, wouldn't it be wonderful to go to that theatre; it was three weekly Rep, which to us, was you know, incredible after weekly classical Rep. Because the festival theatre had been classical weekly Rep; I mean you 'd be playing Millamant one week and rehearsing it and playing Candida at night, that sort-of thing. Quite extraordinary, but again, one did it, and loved it and could only think about how lucky you were. Well sometime after that, The Gate Theatre, and I came and then there was what's called 'The Great Split'. Hilton and Michael, who had really made it artistically and were fantastic as a pair, they had an invitation to take two plays to Egypt. Lord Longford (who was

¹¹ Edward Pakenham, (1902-1961) was an Irish peer and chairman of the Gate Theatre from 1930-1936

¹² Denis Johnson (1901-1984) was an Irish writer who wrote plays including *The Moon in the Yellow River* (1931) and *The Dreaming Dust* (1940)

¹³ Hilton Edwards (1903-1982) was an English born Irish actor. He appeared in films including *David and Goliath* (1960) and *Victim* (1961) and was also one of the co-founders of the Gate Theatre. He was also nominated for a Tony award in 1966 for his direction of *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*

the boss) didn't think it was a good idea and said no. Well the boys (as they were known) said they wanted to go. They got up some backing and went. During that time, Lord Longford and Denis Johnson decided to keep the Gate running with the nucleus of people behind that didn't go to Egypt. In Dublin in those days, a lot of leading parts were played by, what I can only describe as professional amateurs; very good actors that worked, you know, with the Abbey and the Gate frequently. They had a great success with *The Moon and the Yellow River*; Denis Johnson did the *Yellow River* and Edward Longford's *Yahoo*. They had such a success, that they decided to bring this company funnily enough to (Alan Hall's – indistinct) he had built in Westminster, and they brought these productions and had a great success in London and the leading lady of Eugene O'Neill's¹⁴ comedy. Have we stopped? One thing they brought over (apart from the Irish plays) was a wonderful comedy by Eugene O'Neill called *Ah, Wilderness*; probably his only comedy I think it was. During the run at the Westminster, the leading lady (being an amateur) her father died, and she said she had to go back home. Now, I was very young for this part; I was about 40, the mother should have been, oh I wasn't 40, I was younger! I think I was about 35, but was so used to playing older parts in those days. They had both seen me work at the festival theatre, and I won this part on the transfer. It was transferred to the Ambassadors. I've got the date – it was 1936, now I find it hard to believe that Cyril Cusack¹⁵ was my teenage son. (Laughing) We had a great success there, and then, my (then) husband had been stage-managing for the company at The Westminster. He had directed at the festival theatre, and again, Lord Longford and Denis Johnson had seen his work.

¹⁴ Eugene O'Neill (1888-1953) was an American playwright and Nobel laureate in Literature. His plays included *Anna Christie* (1920) and *The Iceman Cometh* (1946)

¹⁵ Cyril Cusack (1910-1993) was an Irish actor whose films included *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) and *My Left Foot* (1989)

That's when this great split came as its known. Because there was such a row, because Michael and Hilton in Egypt; they got hauled over the coals by the Egyptian company that had got them over to say, "What is this? We must have the second company because your first company must be the one in London." Of course, they hit the roof, and I believe the cables and the telephone calls were wonderful to listen to. That's how Longford Productions and Hilton and Michael's company (from then on) divided the Gate Theatre for six months in the year, and the company either toured Ireland, or came to London, and that was a wonderful time, because we were playing classic plays with three weeks rehearsal. One great bonus and change was that costumes were made for you for each show, instead of having them sent up in rather a smelly basket from London; and you never knew what you were going to wear until you actually put these clothes on! I remember one occasion; I think I was playing the Duchess of Malfi at the time and some of the actors when she died, were saying how beautiful she was, everyone leaning over her and they could hardly bear to get near me, because my costume was so (laughing) boring. The wigs they sent you had to be seen to be believed. Now, you used to have a great join across your forehead; I mean no-one would believe the things we had to put on our head. Though you can imagine having beautiful fresh costumes designed by Lord Longford, who was very artistic. That was a wonderful time. That then took me; I played a leading lady for Longford productions up to the beginning of the War. Then war broke out; I did three tours for them, and that was wonderful. We played in the most extraordinary places; touring Ireland, all the capital cities. A lot of them had never had a straight touring company, except for the melodrama, which was taken there by McMaster, and occasional Shakespeare. But he'd been some time before. And I remember one town we were in. there was a poster; "Lord Longford Presents" you know, and a couple of old (Shawley's – unclear) were looking at this. "Ah!" (they said)

“Ah, maybe it’s like Lord Sanger” Lord George Sanger, the circus. (laughing) Yes, but they were happy times. Then I came back to London, eventually I had to finish a tour; my husband came back before. I then got the baby over in Ireland.

Margaret Thomson: Oh yes, tell us about that (Margaret and Jean talk over each other).

Jean Anderson: Just before I got the job at the Gate theatre, and err... we decided, my mother-in-law lived in Swiss Cottage and here was I playing classical roles, one after the other, you know, working all the time really. I did I thing I regret now; left the baby in what was called a ‘baby hotel’, where they trained child nurses, you know. It was run by a matron, and it seemed lovely, and my mother-in-law was very near, and could go over every day to see her. Until I saw what was happening. Well then happened the Munich crisis and we felt that, you couldn’t have the baby in one country, and us in another. So my husband flew over and brought the baby back. So then I was not only learning these colossal parts, but I had a baby to look after and we were going on tour. I used to drive Lord Longford’s whacking great station cart, a huge Armstrong Siddeley, a sort-of six seater. He had a car, especially built, sort-of built round him, another Armstrong he used to drive like this and he was the brother of the present Lord Longford incidentally, and they were utterly different, they couldn’t get on at all, every point of view. Lord Longford’s very Irish. But how one did this; we very often opened on a Sunday. I had to drive this whacking great thing, with probably six artists and a baby. Find digs sometimes, find somewhere, get the baby to sleep, and then go to the theatre. Something one had to compete with, touring Ireland, in those days were the fleas. I can’t tell you; nearly all the digs were infested with fleas, and the poor baby was allergic to them you know, and I used to have her screaming all night. All we had to combat them then was Keating’s powder and you used to shake that all over the bed. Even in the

theatres, we learnt that before you got to bed to get the soap, and go over the mattress with the soap, and you know – we used to compare scores when we got to the theatre.

Margaret Thomson: Do you mean to say the soap would catch the fleas?

Jean Anderson: Yes, they'd stick to the soap and then you could drown them. Oh, unbelievable.

Margaret Thomson: Why is that Jean, because it wasn't clean?

Jean Anderson: Well, animals; I think it wasn't clean, I think you see – a lot of the places you stayed in where probably cottages that had hens and dogs and things. They just weren't clean, and they seemed to be immune to them you see. I can remember one actress called Kathryn Delaney and she had very sensitive skin; beautiful eyes. We were working in a play where we were wearing these sort-of low square period costumes very often, and you'd be playing a scene with her, and you'd suddenly see her do this, and go on talking to you like this (laughing) you know. But you got used to it. Well then, having completed that last tour, I came back to England to join my husband who was then there, and again, because one didn't know what London was like in the air-raids. I left the baby behind with the young nanny and her family in County Longford. She was there for about six months, and came back so Irish, you could cut her accent with a knife, quite extraordinary you know; she went to the little village school. She even won a singing prize for the singing competition for the 'Garden Where the Praties Grow'. (Laughing). Anyway, you know; after that she came back and we were so poor, my husband and I. He was then (before he went into the navy and ARP – Air Raid Precautions) and I had to get a job. He'd got a tiny flat in Scala Street, which I came to, and in the flat above, there were two people (who we got to know well) both

working in the censorship. She was in a particular category; they liked rather artistic people, because they wanted sensitive fingers for some reason, I don't know what, and she said, "oh I think Jean, you'll be fine". So she put this forward; she had a certain amount of influence. Then, terribly embarrassed, came to me one day and said "Jean, I'm not supposed to tell you this, but I'm frightfully sorry, but you're on the blacklist". And I said "ooh, why's that?" We think it was because, you see I'd been working in Dublin, which was a neutral country. German embassy people used to come to the theatre; you'd occasionally meet them at a party, and also – my husband and I wrote practically every day, and I think most married people write in a sort-of code. You know, wouldn't mean anything to anyone else and I think they thought that I was probably up to something. Yes. So I didn't get that job, and then one day, I was walking along Piccadilly, and ran into Leonard Sachs¹⁶, who was then running the Players Theatre. He said "what are you doing?" and I said "looking for work!" and he said "well, there's only one job at the Players, and that is "assistant in the snack bar" to "soup and sandwich maker". I said "Right!"

So that's how I got in, again I think at three pounds a week, as a soup and sandwich maker. Well, there I was, enjoying it. Leonard's right hand there was a lovely man called Don Gemmell¹⁷, who had worked with me at the Festival Theatre all those years ago. We hadn't seen each other since and were delighted to meet again. Well, gradually you see, everyone was being called up round me. The member's secretary thought she ought to work in a factory, and left. Leonard said "would I take on the member's secretary?" and I said 'Leonard, I know nothing about office work – I don't even know how to file things'. So he

¹⁶ Leonard Sachs (1909-1990) was a South African born British actor. His films included *Face in the Night* (1957) and *Thunderball* (1965)

¹⁷ Don Gemmell (1903-1982) was a Scottish actor whose featured in television movies including *Gallows Glorious* (1938) and *Sea Fever* (1946)

said “well, have a go!” so I did, and that sort-of fell on me. I had a very efficient secretary and between us, we worked out, and that was extraordinary. It was war time – there was rationing. I had a bar to run, and a snack bar. And...

Margaret Thomson: A baby?

Jean Anderson: A baby, a toddler. Had to find someone to look after the baby at home. Ah yes, and I had a very beautiful dog, that my husband suddenly arrived with at the Player’s Theatre one night, when he was then in the Navy and working on Radar, which was the new thing. He came up and said “I’ve bought you a dog!” I said “a what?!” All the dogs had been evacuated from London with the children you see. Well, you see, one of the officers had this dog you see to keep the baby company, and he thought it was stupid. Well... this dog I must say was the most intelligent, wonderful dog anyone could have had, and it went right through the war with me, never left me. Luckily I could take it to the Playhouse, it was bombed out with me; we went through everything together.

John Legard: What sort of dog?

Jean Anderson: A very beautiful, rather large Golden Cocker spaniel. When I used to go back from the Player’s Theatre on that dreadful last tube, because we used to close at about 11.30pm, put my tin hat on and get to the Tube if you were lucky.

John Legard: Which station were you at?

Jean Anderson: Green Park and I then lived in a Mews, Princess Gate Mews, which was later bombed out, me and my dog. This beautiful dog used to give such pleasure to the people sleeping in the Tubes, these green faces just to wake up, “Hello William!” they’d say, you know, and he loved everybody. And he was incredible that dog. You’d get onto this crowded

tube, nose-to-nose standing, and you'd wonder how you could get a dog on or down the moving staircase, and he learnt to jump up; he's quite heavy, and put himself round my neck like a fur. And that's how we travelled, you know. He was the most incredible dog though. But, they say I had the dog and the baby (laughing)...

John Legard: What was his name?

Jean Anderson: William. When we had these different sort-of bombs descending on us, he so quickly learnt the drill for each different bomb, and he was particularly good with the buzz-bombs; because he'd hear the awful droning noise coming along, and he'd look up to me and say "where're we going?". In other words, if it sounded too near, we'd get down out of the window, under the glass. I'd say "behind the sofa!" and we'd get down. He was absolutely motionless until the crump, then get up! And again, on the occasions that I performed at the Player's theatre, I wasn't a singer, but I did do one or two monologue and used to play in the pantomimes occasionally. On some occasion, William came on with me, like a Yorkshire terrier I had later, no earlier. He understood – the moment the call, he understood my, when I got the costume down that he came on with, you know. Both these dogs would know, and wag their tails – "come on! do their bit and go off again. Quite extraordinary! Yes, and my Yorkshire terrier, again in Dublin my husband turned up with a dog, when I had, you know, of all things. This was a Yorkshire terrier. I'd never had; both these dogs died when I had to leave them because of work, and I've never had another one since.

John Legard: What happened to the actual premises of the Player's Theatre?

Jean Anderson: It survived – we had one very-near miss and Peter Ustinov¹⁸ was performing at the time. He was on-leave, and the nice, oh yes, I haven't told you, of course – after being the member's secretary, Leonard Sachs got called up, and I was asked if I would run it? And Don Gemmell luckily had bad feet and wasn't taken for the Army, and was in the fire service, and worked in shifts. So we then took on running the Players. I'll never forget the night when Leonard was going overseas. I picked him up, oh yes; we'd said all our goodbyes. He was then at Chelsea Barracks I think it was. Leonard was off that night, and I suddenly realised he hadn't given me power of attorney and therefore I couldn't sign (laughing) - I got eight artists regular. So... panic stations! We rang up the Barracks, and somehow got a message to him. I then leapt into a taxi, went and collected Leonard, drove him to the station in the blackout...no we took a taxi – I wasn't driving thank god, and we took a taxi to the station. and by the light of his cigarette lighter, in the blackout – had this enormous paper on two suitcases between us, and we signed this literally in the taxi (laughing) and then after that of course, we never knew. For a long time, we were the only evening entertainment open in the West End, apart from the Windmill. And of course, the Windmill had all the publicity about “we never close!! Nor did the Players, because we didn't come under the Lord Chamberlain¹⁹. As I say, we had one near-miss, and Peter did one of his wonderful quips. He was playing the oldest Bishop in the world. The Bishop of Limpopo, a senile old bishop. and in the middle of all this, this fearsome

[Tape Ends]

Side Two

¹⁸ Peter Ustinov (1921-2004) was an English actor, writer and dramatist. His films included *The Magic Box* (1951), *Spartacus* (1960) and *Logan's Run* (1976)

¹⁹ The Licensing Act 1737 gave Lord Chamberlain the statutory authority to veto the performance of any new plays. This was replaced in 1843 by the Theatres Act 1843 which restricted the Lord Chamberlain's powers and the duty was abolished in 1968

Jean Anderson: Well, one night, when we had the nearest thing we had to a direct hit, and Peter Ustinov was playing a very old bishop, and everyone knew this was a near-one and there was silence. Nobody moved; it was, we were in a basement at Albemarle Street at that time, but our lift came straight down with a thump – bits of plaster fell off. We were waiting for the ceiling to fall (which it didn't) and Peter looked up and said "Ah! The Wright Brothers gone wrong again!" and brought the house down. (all laughing).

When I was running the Players Theatre, of course I was too busy to think of stage work, when they were sending out tours again. I used to do a great deal of radio, which I could fit in. I did so much radio work during those years that people thought I was in the Rep, which in fact I wasn't; they had a very splendid Rep in those days. I did a lot of documentaries, using you know, lots of voices, and I was also in the first radio soap opera, which... now what was it called in those days?

Margaret Thomson: Not *Mrs Dale*?

Jean Anderson: No, no, before – I was in *Mrs Dale*, on and off. It became shown after the War, went on in England called *The Robinson Family*, it was for overseas radio, and showed how London was taking it. I played (because of my Irish connection) an Irish girl in the ATS, and I went all through the training, and was the chum of the leading girl in it and I had a baby named after me in Nova Scotia; after the 'Jolly Irish girl'. I was Sergeant Barbara Riley in this that was extraordinary, because it was so realistic apparently, that we only had to talk about the rationing and say "sorry, we've run out of tea". Tea would arrive from India. The girl was going to have a baby, and was on leave to have the baby, and a beautiful layette would arrive, you know. Generally, a diplomat brought it over. It had an incredible hold on the public that did. But then I did a lot of documentary, and a lot of poetry readings.

I did a lot of work with Douglas Cleverdon²⁰ on what would now be radio three, I forget what it was called then, and Louis MacNeice²¹.

John Legard: They used to call it *The Third Programme* didn't they?

Jean Anderson: That's right John, and I love radio, I still love it, would love to do more of it. I think nearly all actresses.

John Legard: This is early 40's isn't it? Now we're talking '44...

Margaret Thomson: And was that the time that you began to get to know a lot of documentary people?

Jean Anderson: Ah yes, now in the war also, I did do...I suppose, I started doing a lot of... because of radio, a lot of voice-overs in documentary film-work. All sorts of scientific subjects, I had the most terrible...technical films and films on education. In fact, my first film was for someone (now a great friend) called Jerry Bryant called *Children's Charter*. I suppose we met because I was doing, oh no, we met through the Player's Theatre. But he was doing this little film on education, and said "would I and my dog appear in a little film on education?" which I did, and that was my first film, and I got ten pounds for the making of it!

Margaret Thomson: That was at Crown was it?

Jean Anderson: That was at Crown.

²⁰ Douglas Cleverdon (1903-1987) was an English radio producer who co-created *The Brains Trust*.

²¹ Louis MacNeice (1907-1963) was an Irish poet and playwright. His poetry collections include *The Earth Compels*

Margaret Thomson: And Jean, am I right to say that that film was given a theatrical release? It wasn't just an information film... (indistinct) I think I saw that at the Academy Theatre.

John Legard: Well, they were all done on 35 in those days, and this one certainly was, because it was for general audiences. Made for the Ministry of Education I think.

Jean Anderson: Yes it was, that's right. Then I got, I think I'm very lucky in that learning film technique, (the differences from stage technique), I was given the chance to learn about films under some very splendid directors, through documentary work. After all the sort-of technical and specialised documentaries, I was then lucky enough to play leading parts in two of, I would think the very early sort-of drama documentaries and they were for Crown. The two I'm thinking of in particular was *A Life in her Hands* in which Kathleen Byron²² was the young student nurse for Phil Leacock²³. And it was quite a long film, and I was her tutor in teaching her all the techniques of a baby being delivered. It was a Welsh actor playing one of the surgeons. Elwyn Brooke-Jones²⁴, and this was really an acting film. Kathleen Byron and I both have rather long noses and this became known in the studio, as the 'battle of the noses' because we were so often close-up in profile with me instructing (all laughing) but it was quite a big success. But that was followed by a film called *Out of True*, and that was supposed to be England's answer to *The Snake Pit*, which was the American film about madness.

John Legard: Also made by Crown Film Unit?

²² Kathleen Byron (1921-2009) was an English actress whose films included *Black Narcissus* (1949), and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998).

²³ Philip Leacock (1917-1990) was an English television and film director and producer, His films include *Island People* (1940) and *Tamahine* (1963)

²⁴ Elwyn Brooke-Jones (1911-1962) was an English film and television actor. His films included *Good Time Girl* (1948) and *The Gilded Cage* (1955)

Jean Anderson: Yes, also made by Crown and this we shot in a mental hospital and I was the group therapy psychiatrist. And of course, it was very interesting, and the inmates were so fascinated with...they were allowed to watch us, and of course I had the expert, telling me how she would behave. I've forgotten where it was, but it was a modern hospital by the standards of the day

John Legard: Somewhere south wasn't it? South London.

Jean Anderson: And the one thing I think is strange Margaret, was that the thing that people watching; the patients, the only thing that upset them was that we had sort-of, the people 'acting' them as it were, had rather dishevelled hair and were a bit sort-of strange in their clothes and they couldn't believe that they were like that. And I always feel it shows that the modern ones these days very-much go in for having hair dressing salons and things in mental hospitals. But again, I don't remember the name, so I don't think it's doing them any harm. On radio, twice I know – I played in documentaries about drugs. One of the first times that taking drugs was...and Jennifer Wain, who was one of the top directors in sort-of documentary films that were done on radio, and I met top sort-of of headmasters you may say, for mental hospitals, and I've always thought that I'd be more help to them than they would be to me. I don't know why – very strange. And the man running this mental home was childishly delighted to have actors and actresses particularly, you know. Very naïve sort-of outlook. Well maybe that's good, you know. But, you never see this great mind! So that's why I don't think I'd ever go in for analysis. (Laughing)

Margaret Thomson: Who directed *Out of True*?

Jean Anderson – Do you know, I can't remember. Whether that was Phil again, Phil Leacock, I think it might have been. He was not only a wonderful director to work for, but I have everything to thank Phil Leacock for, because after the war, when people like Pat Jackson²⁵, (who'd been in documentaries), when they first made the break to get into feature films, and Phil Leacock did a film for Grierson²⁶, called *The Brave Don't Cry*.

Margaret Thomson – That was Group Three?

Jean Anderson – Group Three, that's right. That was a great thrill for me; I hadn't a big part in it, and nearly all the cast, I think I was probably the only exception – were Glasgow citizen actors. And it was a true story of a Scottish mining disaster that again was put on the big screen and on television recently; it was a very good film. I was the part of the head of the rescue team that went down, and was one of the older women of the 'wives' and the last scene of that play was when all the wives were waiting to see who came out of the pits. I was left alone as the very last, lonely figure, waiting to see and my chap came up and I had one line that, a complete ordinary film fan said to me once, you know, "you were in that film once, I'll never forget that line of yours". And I'd forgotten it and I said "what was it?" and she said "when your man came up, and you went to meet him, all you said was (Scottish accent) "shows your health's good". Which is very Scottish understatement isn't it.

Margaret Thomson: Who wrote the script? Neil Paterson²⁷ was it? I know who it was - I think it was Marty Slater..

Jean Anderson : You're right, now you say it.

²⁵ Pat Jackson (1916-2011) was an English film and television director. His films included *Encore* (1951) and *What a Carve Up!* (1961)

²⁶ John Grierson (1898-1972) was a Scottish documentary maker. His films included *Drifters* (1929) and *The Song of Ceylon* (1934)

²⁷ Neil Paterson (1916-1995) was a Scottish screenwriter. His films included *Devil on Horseback* (1954)

John Legard : And they had a set for the mine itself at (indistinct) studios.

Jean Anderson : Yes, on the lot.

Margaret Thomson: I wonder who the art director was.

Jean Anderson : Yes, again I can't remember. But it was through that film that I made my very favourite film, called *The Kidnapper* and I was young for it. Philip Leacock was the director, and because of that small part I'd done for him in that, he (I'm sure it was he that fought for me to play Grandma in *The Kidnappers*. That is still my favourite film. And that is where I met Margaret Thomson, who I'm now talking to!

Margaret Thomson: Ah, it was a lovely film.

Jean Anderson: I always remember – I was asked to go down for a makeup test, because I had to be about thirty years older than I was. And had wigs, and makeup, and Phil came to me; I was having tests, and asked if I'd mind working with some of the children. But Margaret Thomson, who was the talent scout for the children, brought down, also to be auditioned, and chosen. At one time, Margaret asked if I'd mind the children coming into the dressing room and just going through the lines with me, and I said, "no, I'd like it". So I think about three or four came in and sat on the floor and we started going through the dialogue. There were the youngest there – incredible child called Vincent Winter²⁸, and if I said a line slightly wrong, "that's no right!" (Scottish accent). He was five and so there were wonderful stories and of course, for the test, they put these children in approximate period costume, and this little chap was the son of a merchant seaman. He must have been a complete imitation of his father I think. He was so masculine at five, even his walk,

²⁸ Vincent Winter (1947- 1998) was a Scottish actor who was successful as a child actor. His films included *Gorgo* (1961) and *Almost Angels* (1962)

everything and he didn't like these (indistinct), he thought they were sissy. The costume man (who became a dear friend to all of us didn't he) and an uncle to Vincent. They still keep in touch I believe. He came to me and said, "do you know what that little one said? 'I dinnae want to be an actor, I want to toss the caber!'" (All laughing). Anyway, we had these tests. And at the end of them, it was rather down to two of them I remember; one was taller and a little older, and he said (this is for the younger boy – the other one had been an actor; Jon Whiteley²⁹, he was chosen and had done a film) but Phil Leacock said "which do you think Jean?" and I said "oh well, I think that little one, he's such a personality" and we all agreed.

Margaret Thomson: He was not only a little man, but he was a baby! He was both together, that was the magic.

Jean Anderson: He was enchantment, he won the hearts of everybody, he was so funny. You couldn't turn the camera on him, without getting something quite remarkable.

John Legard: Can I just interrupt and ask Margaret, how many children did you have to choose from before you came across Vincent?

Margaret Thomson: Oh, well, actually – couldn't count! What I used to do in those days, was to go to the primary schools, the infant schools and say to them, "I'm looking for a little boy of five to take part in a film, and could you put the children through a... what. What do you do? Do you do any acting? Do you put on acting situations? Could I see them?" And then I'd just watch, and then perhaps interpose other thoughts I had, and let them try those and so-on. So I might see two or three classes in a day and I was five weeks looking for

²⁹ Jon Whiteley (1945) was a child actor and is now a respected art historian. His films included *The Little Kidnappers* (1953) and *Moonfleet* (1955)

them. So goodness knows how many children. But I brought twelve down with their mums from Aberdeen; that was nearly a carriage-full. But luckily Vincent had a very remarkable mum. Vincent really looked after her and she never interfered unless she was asked to, and a most delightful woman. We had one bit of trouble with Vincent, one only and mother said she had been afraid of it and that was, again, this sort-of curious masculine streak. At one point, I had to bathe him in this little tin bath. One day, the assistant was carrying him on, in his night shirt which had to come off when he went to the bath and you saw this child, who was always like this, coming in white, and miserable. and Iris happened to be near Phil, when he went up, and said "what's the matter Vincent?" and he wouldn't speak. Then his mother came up, and she said "I'm afraid, erm... he's got this modesty thing, and he won't be seen naked and Phil quite rightly (it was so obviously genuine) and at five! It's remarkable. And Phil held up everything, until someone went into the village and got some little trunks, and put them on, and we had to make the water so soapy so we didn't see, and so he was happy. We had the same thing again when I was putting him to bed once and had to put a night shirt on him. But I had my moment. We had an exterior scene at Seddley that was cut in the end. Owing to the illness of the older boy John Whitely. And they'd tried to fake it, and it didn't come off. But we were in a caravan. And that was Vincent and his mother and probably Margaret I don't know, and it was a terribly wet day and they were waiting for things to get better and the rain suddenly stopped and I wanted to go out and get a breath of fresh air. I saw Vincent whisper something to his mother and he came out after and I forget what I was meant to be doing and Vincent had obviously asked to spend a penny, and I heard "Grandma, Grandma, I can't get my Peter out" and I went over to help. Now this same Vincent Winter is now one of the top production managers at Pinewood, whether he still is I don't know. Whenever I've been to Pinewood since he's always come on

the set to say hello, he's a strapping great chap now, very important.

John Legard: That film was about Canada wasn't it, but you shot it in Scotland?

Jean Anderson: Yes, we used Scotland for Canada.

John Legard: And I imagine there were a certain amount of interiors as well? At Pinewood?

Jean Anderson: Yes, yes there was, and a lot of it we did around that lake in Black Pond, I didn't go to Scotland, Theo Bikel³⁰ went and Duncan McRae.³¹

John Legard: Yes he played your husband didn't he?

Jean Anderson: And after that I was into films in the fifties, and a lot at Pinewood.

John Legard: What did you do after *The Kidnappers*? Was that the one that Pat Jackson directed?

Jean Anderson: I think it was *A Town Like Alice*, with Jack Lee³².

John Legard: Another ex-Crown director

³⁰ Theodore Bikel (1924-) is an Austrian American actor, singer, musician and composer. His films include *The African Queen* (1951) and *The Defiant Ones* (1958) for which he was nominated for an Academy Award.

³¹ Duncan McCrae (1905-1967) was a Scottish actor whose films included *Whisky Galore!* (1949), *Kidnapped* (1960) and *Casino Royale* (1967)

³² Jack Lee (1913-2002) was an English film director. His films included *The Wooded Horse* (1950) and *Robbery Under Arms* (1957)

Jean Anderson: Yes, funnily enough by my American expert research on films, *White Corridors* was the same year that I made *Out of True* and *Life in her Hands* all in 51. Yes, this comes back to me and my career in documentary films up 'til those features was nearly all in hospitals as matrons talking nurses into going to distant places to fight typhoid. I was a psychiatrist, in *White Corridors* you see all this led up to me being in *White Corridors*. I got so used to being in a nurses uniform or a white coat, I felt so at home, all the time I had visitors asking for help, I really felt I belonged in hospitals. The first time I had to play someone who wasn't in uniform I felt lost, I didn't know what to do with my hands, extraordinary. I mean all these things you have in your pockets, I got so used to it and then *White Corridors*, that was a lovely film, a lovely director that had come from documentary Pat Jackson³³, that wasn't made at Pinewood, that wasn't a rank film, I rather think that was Shepperton. My next Pinewood film was my second favourite film was *A Town Like Alice*. I did little ones between *The Kidnappers*, one with the Children's Film Foundation in 1953 that won an award; with a Scottish actor called Moultrie Kelsall³⁴, there again we shot Scotland for Switzerland.

John Legard: They showed that quite recently on the cable, was it *Jonny on the Run*?

Jean Anderson: Yes, it was a delightful film now that was directed by Lewis Gilbert³⁵ and it

³³ Pat Jackson (1916-2011) was an English film and television director. He worked as a production assistant on *Night Mail* (1936) before directing feature films including *Western Approaches* (1944), *What a Carve Up!* (1961) and directing television programmes including *The Famous Five* (1978-1979).

³⁴ Moultrie Kelsall (1901-1980) was a Scottish actor, radio station director and television producer. His films included *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951), *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness* (1958) and *One More Time* (1970)

³⁵ Lewis Gilbert (1920-) is a British film director. His films included *Reach for the Sky* (1956), *Alfie* (1966) and *Educating Rita* (1983). He also directed three Bond films including *Moonraker* (1979)

was one of his very early films. Moultrie Kelsall and I were the mother and father. It was based on those Epistle films and we ran this with this gang of children of all different nationalities and that was a wonderful film we worked in all different parts of Scotland, Loch Earn and St Phillips, beautiful parts of Scotland and it was a good story .

John Legard: They made some very good films the Children's Film Foundation

Jean Anderson: I still run into Lewis Gilbert and he said that was his favourite film. And that was Scottish, Scottish films have always been very lucky for me.

John Legard: And at that time you were making quite a lot of films.

Jean Anderson: Mainly films, yes. *A Town Like Alice*, then *Heart of a Child* was with Clive Donner³⁶

John Legard: Just to go back to *A Town Like Alice*, that must have been quite a difficult film?

Margaret Thomson: Were you on location?

Jean Anderson: No the only people who went to Australia were Peter Finch³⁷ and Virginia

³⁶ Clive Donner (1926-2010) was an English film director whose films included *The Caretaker* (1963), *Vampira* (1974) and *A Christmas Carol* (1984)

³⁷ Peter Finch (1916-1977) was a British born Australian actor. His films included *The Power and the Glory* (1941), *Elephant Walk* (1954) and *Network* (1976) for which he won a posthumous Academy Award

McKenna³⁸; they meet each other at the end. It was then considered the most remarkable back projection and it was. They mainly used army wives for this back projection and we were looking at the rushes, we were allowed to see them then, and you'd suddenly think when did I do that, my double even had my long large hands, they were completely convincing that was of the features of that film. I can watch that film now, and I still forget it's me and I'm so moved by it, it was a lovely cast but we did have some pretty hair-raising times. At one point we six leading character ladies waded through a stagnant lake in October, we had to carry really heavy stretchers, with heavy rifles on them and children in this. There was Renee Houston³⁹, Marie Lohr⁴⁰ and Nora Nicholson⁴¹ and I'll never forget those days. The cold, the difficulty of keeping your feet. At one time, Marie Lohr, slipped and tilted the stretcher and a baby fell into the drink and this was about take five and they'd said we've got to get it in this time, none of us dare do anything the only one who rescued the baby was Jack Lee, we were laughing over that quite recently. There was another dreadful time- night shooting in the scene where Peter Finch is more or less crucified and they'd made the women and the soldiers watch and it was so cold that night and Nora Nicholson had to kneel in this, in rags and they spray you with ice cold glycerine for sweat and I remember we were made to walk past these soldiers and they had to press against each others shoulders to keep from shivering, but we could go to a caravan and be given rum but I don't know how these extras ever got warm again.

³⁸ Virginia McKenna (1931-) is an English actress whose films include *Born Free* (1966), *Swallows and Amazons* (1974) and *Sliding Doors* (1998)

³⁹ Renee Houston (1902-1980) was a Scottish actress whose films included *Happy Days are Here Again* (1936), *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1958) and *The Phantom of the Opera* (1962)

⁴⁰ Marie Lohr (1890-1975) was an Australian actress whose films included *The Rakes Progress* (1945), *Anna Karenina* (1948) and *Small Hotel* (1957)

⁴¹ Nora Nicholson (1892-1973) was an English actress. Her roles included *Tread Softly* (1952), *The Captain's Table* (1959) and *Say Hello to Yesterday* (1973)

John Legard: This wasn't one night's shooting; this went on day after day?

Jean Anderson: Yes, and then there was another fearsome time when we all got poisoned the scene where Peter Finch steals us a chicken from the Japanese officer and there was the plucking scene where again we were all in rags, and we were plucking these birds and we got covered with chicken fleas, but the next three days we had to eat this chicken and I remember getting the most fearsome headache and suddenly saw one of us be sick, one person pass out and it was called out and we'd all got food poisoning and the next three days we had to do it again with new chickens.

Margaret Thomson: What studio was it?

Jean Anderson: Pinewood

John Legard: What was Jack Lee like to work with?

Jean Anderson: He was very tough, but never dull to work with, he was very inventive. If he wanted a child to cry he'd be pretty beastly to it

Margaret Thomson: That's the very thing that Phil Leacock refused to do, he'd only tell them a fairy story, what a difference

John Legard: I imagine if *A Town Like Alice* was shot in colour you wouldn't have got away with all that frost, it would have shown

Margaret Thomson: Was there a link between that film and *Tenko* which you made later on?

Jean Anderson: Well, that's fascinating, I made that in 85/86 and in a way I played the same character but older, I was always being punished for arguing back, it was very strange that. I did another film with Jack Lee called *Robbery Under Arms* based on the Kelly Gang, again with Peter Finch wonderful he was, and Laurence Naismith⁴². I had two sons- David McCallum⁴³ and someone else and oddly enough I'm playing the son of David McCallum again now in *Trainer*, the television serial. On the film David married Jill Ireland⁴⁴ and she was rank starlet. They sneaked off to get married without telling the studio, and I think got into a certain amount of trouble because rank starlets were meant to do what they were told. I then made *Lucky Jim* in 1957, and that was a nice film. It was supposed to be directed by Charles Crichton⁴⁵ and it was a splendid book and an excellent script that really kept the feeling of the book. I have a lovely interview with him and a woman producer and we started work. Ian Carmichael⁴⁶ was in it as well, then suddenly after three days of shooting we found out that the Boulting⁴⁷ brothers were taking other themselves and sacked Charlie Crichton and took it on themselves and made a film that was a success but the satirical side

⁴² Laurence Naismith (1908-1992) was an English actor his films included *Sink the Bismarck!* (1960), *Jason and the Argonauts* (1963) and *Diamonds are Forever* (1971)

⁴³ David McCallum (1933-) is a Scottish actor. He is best known for his role in *The Man From U.N.C.L.E* and currently appears in American television series *NCIS*

⁴⁴ Jill Ireland (1936-1990) was a Scottish actor, her films included *Hell Drivers* (1957), *Carry on Nurse* (1959) and *Death Wish II* (1982)

⁴⁵ Charles Crichton (1910-1999) was an English film director, his films included *Hue and Cry* (1947), *The Lavender Hill Mob* (1951) and *A Fish Called Wanda* (1988)

⁴⁶ Ian Carmichael (1920-2010) was an English actor, his films included *Trottie True* (1949), *I'm Alright Jack* (1959) and *Heavens Above!* (1963)

⁴⁷ The Boulting Brothers, John (1913-1985) and Roy (1913-2001) were film makers who made many films under their own production company, Charter Film Productions. John Boulting directed *Lucky Jim* (1957)

was lost, it was turned into more a joke film. I would have loved it to have been the original. Kingsley Amis⁴⁸ wrote it.

Unidentified Voice: I think they did it on LWT a few years ago as a straight play but the director had never done TV before and we had to show him the way as far as the editing was concerned

Jean Anderson: I had to do one of these extraordinary things on television films, you often have to do something you'd never be asked to do on a feature film. I had to ride a motorised bicycle across a field, just missing two lovers, well I ride a bicycle but had never rode one with these machines on them. We were laughing about and Terry Thomas⁴⁹ had to ride a Vespa, and this Welsh actor was riding pillion. They had to come up to the line having come up the drive of this house. Well I've never seen a motorcycle buck before. Second time the camera is knocked over. I managed to just miss these lovers in the field. but at the end of the film there was this race to this little wayside railway station and one of us had to get there first and had to be passed by Terry and it was hysterical. The cold was so intense we were sent to the stationmaster's office where there was a bottle of gin; it was so dangerous we were swerving. In the end they dressed up the crew as doubles of us.

Margaret Thomson: We've come to 57 have we?

Jean Anderson: Yes, I come first to *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, remake, in colour. Lovely

⁴⁸ Kingsley Amis (1922-1995) was an English writer. His novels included *Lucky Jim* (1954), *The Green Man* (1969) and *The Old Devils* (1986)

⁴⁹ Terry Thomas (1911-1990) was an English actor. His films included *Helter Skelter* (1949), *The Wild Affair* (1963) and *Arabella* (1967)

cast John Gielgud⁵⁰ , Virginia Mckenna. I had the lovely part of Wilson, Bill Travers⁵¹ was Browning and Jennifer Jones⁵² played the lead. I had saw Jennifer Jones in films and thought she was an acting star, rather than a film star- well I couldn't have been wronger. We had George Sidney⁵³ directing who had directed the original film. When I went to interview him I had just come from the first screening of *A Town Like Alice* and I went to this interview convinced I hadn't a hope of getting the part because in the previous film it had been done by a little lady, who did something I always disapproved of, making period clothes look funny.

Margaret Thomson: Wilson, was a personal attendant, a maid?

Jean Anderson: Oh yes. To my surprise I got this part and the atmosphere quite extraordinary. Jennifer Jones had to have the set like a cathedral, no one was allowed on the set. She had to be told every thought the character should think and then she could do it well. George Sidney was very patient and he used to do six takes, and then I realised he didn't like to be rushed. It was extraordinary because every day he would have to say, remember Wilson is your friend. She also knew nothing about dogs, I remember this spaniel licked her face when she was very distressed in a scene and she was horrified, and the director said remember you like the dog. Bill Travers was lovely, but not the sort of urbane character. Gielgud, this was one of his first big parts and we thought he was wonderful on

⁵⁰ John Gielgud (1904-2000) was an English actor, singer and director whose films included *Julius Caesar* (1953), *Oh! What a Lovely War* (1969) and *Chariots of Fire* (1981)

⁵¹ Bill Travers (1922-1994) was an English actor, screen writer and director. His films included *Romeo and Juliet* (1954) and *Born Free* (1966). He was also involved with animal rights activism through the Born Free Foundation

⁵² Jennifer Jones (1919-2009) was an American actress, her films included *The Song of Bernadette* (1943) for which she won an Academy Award, *Madame Bovary* (1949) and *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing* (1955)

⁵³ George Sidney (1916-2002) was an American film director. His films included *Holidays in Mexico* (1946), *The Three Musketeers* (1948) and *Viva Las Vegas* (1964)

the set but it didn't come off on the screen. Oh the atmosphere was just terrible; sometimes Jennifer Jones would just get up and leave the set. There was this horrible, referential atmosphere and towards the end his patience was going and he was giving directions to her, and we got very fond of the director after being very anti him to begin with, and said, "Wilson you know what you're doing, don't you?" And I said, "yes I think so", so he said, "Well do it." It was a disappointing film and I met John Gielgud, recently and he said it was a troubled film.

John Legard: George Sidney was famous for musicals wasn't he?

Jean Anderson: Well you know, I think I might have got the wrong number, did he direct *Half a Sixpence*? Because that was a musical

John Legard: We'll have to look that up

Jean Anderson: I may be wrong about that; all I know is that he had the nickname steak and kidney so he was either something Sidney or Sidney something. All I know is that he was a really a daddy of film. And then I worked with another, in 59 I did my first epic biblical in Spain. And that was something, firstly the casting was odd, Maude Spector was casting and they'd already been filming the battle films. It was called *Solomon and Sheba*. There was a character called Takyan and every minute they changed her mind about what she should be until they were getting desperate in Spain. In the end the Maude said I'm sending out Jean

Anderson. It was a United Artists film, I was the only English woman with Harry Andrews⁵⁴, there were only about three of us, Larry Naismith again, we go out there, again was one of the daddies of Hollywood with the wonderful King Vidor⁵⁵, Lollobrigida⁵⁶ and Tyrone Power⁵⁷ and that was the film that Tyrone died in when we were a quarter of the way through it and of course that was a dreadful time. Before we had the change of cast one realised that Lollobrigida was quite difficult in that she made her own rules, Harry and I were taller than her so we were sent back a few paces and I as her attendant must be careful not to put her arm around her even if it says it in the script. Harry Andrews always had to give knowing looks to each other rather than to her, which was very funny. Then, one of the reasons I'd took that part because there was a nice scene at the end where she told me she was pregnant. It should have been a moving scene, as scripted she should have put her shoulder on her lap so my face would be in the scene but hers wasn't, she said no she wouldn't want pity, the director said no it's good, people will be crying for you and she said no, that was a bit of a disappointment.

JL: Can I just interrupt to say that *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* was directed by someone called Sidney Franklin⁵⁸.

Sidney Franklin, I knew it was Sidney something. Now, I'd been working with the two of

⁵⁴ Harry Andrews (1911-1989) was an English actor whose films included *The Red Beret* (1956), *Sands of the Kalahari* (1965) and *The Four Feathers* (1977)

⁵⁵ King Vidor (1894-1982) was an American film director, producer and screen writer. His films included *Hallelujah!* (1929), *The Champ* (1931) and *War and Peace* (1956)

⁵⁶ Gina Lollobrigida (1927-) is an Italian actress, photojournalist and sculptor. Her films included *The White Line* (1949), *Beat the Devil* (1953) and *Never so Few* (1959)

⁵⁷ Tyrone Power (1914-1954) was an American actor. His films included *Jesse James* (1939), *The Luck of the Irish* (1948) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1957)

⁵⁸ Sidney Franklin (1893-1972) was an American film director. His films included *The Actress* (1928), *The Dark Angel* (1935) and *Duel in the Sun*

them the night before the scene where Solomon carries Sheba up the temple steps and she's a hefty girl and he'd carried her this awkward way and that's the last thing I'd done. I was getting my hair done in this salon in Madrid and the phone rang and it was Larry Naismith and he said, can you believe it, Tyrone's dead. Apparently because he'd carried her, he'd got this terrible pain in his shoulder, everyone thought it was a strain. He went to work the next morning and wasn't well, the dresser asked if he could rest then he died before he got to hospital. He had a quarter share in the company and his wife was pregnant in Madrid. We were all dismissed as an act of God and called back two weeks later and Yul Brynner⁵⁹ was there with his entourage to take over and you couldn't have had a more different personality. George Sanders didn't come back; King Vidor had asked Harry Andrews if he knew anyone could take over the role of Adonijah. This actor came over; he had been an actor at the RSC. They stayed with us in a small hotel, and this actor, Jack decided to bring his family over for Christmas. We got the room ready and they were late, I went and asked if there was any news and the second time I went the man at the desk said that the wife had died on the plane on the way. It was just one of those films.

John Legard: How much did you have to reshoot?

Jean Anderson: They kept the battle scenes, they had to, they couldn't re-do those. They did wonder whether to recast the whole of it, and they kept the same cast. We'd got through about a quarter of the film. By then the film had become very expensive, I'd been given a contract for £800 or more than that and then was given a daily rate, I was meant to be on set for 8 weeks and was there for 5 months. I think we counted there had been eight

⁵⁹ Yul Brynner (1920-1985) was a Russian born, American based actor. His films included *The King and I* (1956), *The Magnificent Seven* (1960) and *Futureworld* (1976)

deaths connected to the film, so that wasn't the happiest picture though it made a lot of money.

John Legard: It did well at the box office didn't it? Though I don't remember it getting good reviews

Jean Anderson: No it didn't. Then in 1963 I did my first Disney film, *The Three Lives of Thomasina* that was delightful. Susan Hampshire⁶⁰, she was the lady who was in that play that transferred to the West End, I've remembered her name. She was in *Thomasina*. That was about cats, and there you learnt about the cruelty that goes on with animals in films, Patrick McGoohan⁶¹ was the other lead, he was a fairly new actor and he was a lovely man. I played a Scottish housekeeper that was a lovely film. Then I come on to my first musical film, *Half a Sixpence* that was with Tommy Steele⁶² and that was great fun, in the musical in England she was an ordinary Mrs Botting but in the American film she had to be Lady Botting, I had to give away the awards at Henley Regatta when Tommy's team won the cup and then one very splendid week, I was the owner of Blenheim palace, and we had the dinner and all the extras were quite well know because they all had to look like diplomats and aristocrats, there was no expense spared.

John Legard: That film was directed by George Sidney?

⁶⁰ Susan Hampshire (1931-) is an English actress. Her films include *The Long Shadow* (1961), *Vanity Fair* (1967) and *Bang!* (1977)

⁶¹ Patrick McGoohan (1928-2009) was an American born and Irish and British raised actor. His most notable roles include in the television programme *The Prisoner* which he also co-created as well as films including *Escape from Alcatraz* (1979), *Braveheart* (1995) and *A Time to Kill* (1996)

⁶² Tommy Steele (1936-) is an English entertainer. His films include *The Happiest Millionaire* (1967) and *Where's Jack?* (1969).

Jean Anderson: That film was directed by George Sidney and George Sidney was only interested in the musical numbers which made the film too long. Tommy had been playing it in the theatre for years and he didn't get any help at all to bring it back to film, no help from the director and he's so intelligent you know he'd be the first to be able to take in. I've just comparatively recently done another remake *The Lady Vanishes*, I was the baddie, the Baroness. That was a bad experience, for me for everyone, our director was Anthony Page⁶³ and he did the most extraordinary things. He'd had terrific success in the states in a small cult film something about a rose in the title. The Americans thought he was a wonderful director, but the crew and the others. We got grossly behind schedule, filming in Austria and he would never stop rehearsing and changing his mind and even when the cameras were ready to go there would be changes, even changes in script. It was a form of madness.

Margaret Thomson: Because that was one of the most lovely films (the original)

Jean Anderson: It was a lovely film, why bother to remake it. He even changed the plot these splendid little English cameos which we had very good character ladies playing them. And one was a very English lady who altered the signals and stopped the train, well in the American film; he thought the star should stop the train so Cybil Shepard⁶⁴ stopped the train so their parts were reduced to almost nothing. Now my part as the baddie was good, wardrobe went to town, I had terrifying purple lips extraordinary clothes and black veil and really looked like she was the baddie, and in the old film everyone knew she was. Tony Page

⁶³ Anthony Page (1935-) is a British director, his films include *Absolution* (1978), *Bill* (1981) and *My Zinc Bed* (2008)

⁶⁴ Cybil Shepherd (1950-) is an American actress, her film roles include *The Last Picture Show* (1971), whilst she has appeared in television shows including *Moonlighting* (1985-1989) and *Cybil* (1995-1998).

had this idea she should be charming. I'd worked quite hard at the accent, and so had this other women and she wanted it to be played that everyone thought she should be sweet. In the end I'll never forget my shock, luckily I couldn't go to the gala opening of it, but I did go to the press showing and to my amazement it was a charming little Austrian accent, it could never had come from the character. And he had dared without me knowing to dub my voice and I went back, and I said do you know that voice reminds me of someone, Lily Palmer and it wasn't Lily Palmer but it was her sister. But anything more absurd

Margaret Thomson: Would he be allowed to do that legally?

Jean Anderson: No, I mean we could have sued but does that do you any good? My agent said, oh forget it.

Unidentified Voice: Was there an apology?

Jean Anderson: No nothing, terrible way to treat people and even if it had been a good dub it would have been bad enough but it could never had come from this character but that I think is about my film career

Margaret Thomson: Now I don't think we've said a word about your long career in television Jean

Jean Anderson: No, that does go back a long way, in fact I go back to shortly after the way at Alexandra Palace I don't think anyone could have had a more demanding baptism into

television. It was a play by Denis Johnson⁶⁵, it was a play about Swift, it wasn't *Yahoo* but Denis Johnson was absorbed with Swift. I played the housekeeper of his lady lover Stella I played the role and narrated the film. In those days if you needed to get in close up you had to get into this enormous hood on the camera. I was in my late thirties, but had to play the character as an eighty year old. I start the film in close up, telling the viewer what it was like in Laracor where Stella stayed and Swift used to visit her and I had to say, ah in those days in Laracor and take my glasses off and walk on the set thirty years younger, then go up to sixty and then back to eighty. What was extraordinary then was that you could never cut; it was like a live play, the cables on the floor were enormous, every time you moved which was nearly always running you had to get over these cables. Now when you had a change of costume and had to get to the next set, the dresser had to run with you and then you had to be ready to go in the new costume. It was a kind of manic excitement working in films then, working with adrenaline you got through it then you had to do it again, that was Sunday the following Thursday with none of the excitement or tension and that was frightening.

Unidentified Voice: Was it the second performance you didn't like as much as the first?

Jean Anderson: Yes, it was worse because it was worse than your second night in the theatre, you thought it was done, but after three days. If it was a very big production you had to use another studio so not only would you have to run over the cables but you'd have to find another studio and then carry on. In a way I wouldn't have missed it, it was an extraordinary baptism into a new game

Margaret Thomson: And did the writers and producers manage to simplify the action so you could be out of camera to change?

Jean Anderson: The directors had a more interesting time as there weren't as many cameras on the set. In fact there was one famous director, an Irish director called Fred Johnson who was known as the one camera technique and he would arrange groups as if it was in the theatre and he would arrange the moves of the appropriate artist into close up at the right moment. See you couldn't change lenses then

Unidentified Voice: You could change lenses then but you couldn't zoom

Jean Anderson: You couldn't zoom, I see

Margaret Thomson: Could you change lens without stopping the action

Unidentified Voice: no you have to stop the action

Jean Anderson: Then of course after that closed, it was Lime Grove which thought at the time, how one worked there I don't know, I did a chat show there and it doesn't seem to have altered. I had some very happy times. The one that I always feel touched when they remember me from it is *The Railway Children*, the mother in the film and that was incredibly popular and I think that was because the parents enjoyed it as much as the children and they all cried together and still people come up to me and say were you the mother in the railway children and I can't believe it

Margaret Thomson: it was very tender, such sensitivity about the period

Jean Anderson: Now the first time I did it was live, then I did it again six years later and something called telecine had come in so there was slightly better mixture between filming and studio. Of course my children had grown up, and they had to get three different children and nobody believed it could be a successful but it was extraordinary power of that story and something incredibly sad about that mother. We used to get extraordinary letters about it, I remember one from Christopher Fry saying he had to alter his lifelong family arrangements for Christmas because everyone refused to go because they hadn't a television where they were going and they had to find out what happened to father, who was in prison, no that was lovely. And then I did a tremendous amount of classic serials, that was a very happy time, I either had tiara parts or rather special housekeepers I wavered between the two

John Legard: Late 1950s, 60s, and by then it was recorded?

Jean Anderson: Yes, then I made a lovely serial of *Lorna Doone* and I was Mrs Ridd, Bill Travers was John Ridd and was excellent. It was a wonderful cast and it was in black and white. It was done again eight or ten years ago and it seemed awfully modern and we had a lovely time down there in the West Country and that took about a month to make. And then I think I'm coming to a series that lasted seven years and that was *The Brothers*

John Legard: Was that shot in black and white or colour?

Jean Anderson: Oh colour, well into colour. *Lorna Doone* was in black and white, which is why they've made two new things.

John Anderson: After *The Forsythe Saga*, because that was in black and white and they'd wished they'd done it in colour.

Jean Anderson: Yes, after then, I'm awfully bad with dates, you'll have realised. When I was sent the script of *The Brothers*. I don't think we had any ideas it was going to involve us for seven years and really it was the first British soap. The idea was that Gerry Glaister⁶⁶, who wrote and produced, and the two writers, Eric Pace and Norman Crisp⁶⁷, they were very good scripts. The first episode, was so dramatic, it started with us all at the funeral of father then the will reading and a lot shocks and I found out that the father had been living with the secretary and had a baby, all this happened and that he left the business to the three sons and none of them wanted to be involved. I was the matriarch; I was on for seven years, with gaps in between.

John Legard: How many did you do in a series?

Jean Anderson We did seven series of 13 episodes, the first was ten and the last was 15.

That was such a success it sold abroad and we were asked to go to Sweden, Holland,

Jerusalem and we were feted. I remember in Jerusalem they had to get the army there were

⁶⁶ John "Gerard" Glaister (1915-2005) was a British television producer and director. His work includes *Colditz* (1972), *Kessler* (1981) and *Howard's Way* (1985)

⁶⁷ Norman Crisp (1923-2005) was an English television writer who worked on programmes including *Dixon of Dock Green* (1955), *Dr Finlay's Casebook* (1962) and *Secret Army* (1977)

so many people. We asked to go to the Wailing Wall and were asked to be discreet and we couldn't have been doing it better. We were walking up to the wall, I was with Jennifer Wilson and suddenly this old crone came up to me and started shouting "ema, ema, ema," at me and everyone turned round, we were absolutely mobbed. That means mother, I have an extraordinary photo of us trying to get back onto the book. I remember in Holland, they brought these books that were meant to follow the script of the show, a lovely square in Rotterdam, there was about five of us signing these books, they'd expected 500 people, but there was 3000 there. They had to get the police to get the children out of the square. Some of them were in tears, it had this extraordinary hold. Still, more people talk about *The Brothers* than anything I've done since.

Unidentified Voice: It's funny you should mention that because we've got a neighbour who is very keen on television and my wife happened to mention that we were interviewing you and she said "Jean Anderson!" immediately

Jean Anderson: Why it stays with people is because the scripts were good

John Legard: And when did they come out, it was a Sunday?

Jean Anderson: Yes it was a Sunday; I remember being in Mull a vicar saying he had to rattle through the service so they could get back for 7!

John Legard wouldn't be surprised if they didn't revive it?

Jean Anderson: Well yes, but transit is so dated nowadays.