Joy Batchelor (animator) 12/5/1914 - 14/5/1991

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BIOGRAPHY: Born in Watford, Joy Batchelor worked as a freelance graphic artist and designer on various newspapers and magazines before meeting John Halas through a press advertisement for an animator. They married and together they formed Halas and Batchelor Cartoon Films, making a variety of short animation films both for commercial advertising (particularly campaigns for J. Walter Thompson) and for the Ministry of Information throughout the Second World War. In the post war period Halas and Batchelor made a variety of films, including a feature length version of Animal Farm (1954). They also became involved in ASIFA (Assoication Internationale Du Film d'Animation). SUMMARY: In this interview, Batchelor talks to Kay Mander about her career, commenting other animators and their influence on her, from the early period up to the 1980s, and on the difficulties of running a small business and training animators. She discusses various techniques and aesthetics of animation, and touches on her interactions with the documentary movement and with the ACTT.

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Interviewers: Jim Shields

Interviewee: Kay Mander

Kay Mander: Joy, could we start with when and where you were born?

Joy Batchelor: I was born in Watford, and at the time it was a little market town, and now nobody would know it, including me. It's horrible, perfectly foul.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: When was that, when actually?

Joy Batchelor: Well, I was born in 1914 so I'm a very elderly lady! I went to school there, I got scholarships and scholarships, and I got one to the art school...

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Which art school was that?

Joy Batchelor: Watford. And when I was what, I suppose 18 or 19, I'd taken my various what they call now Dip AD, which then was the Board of Education Art and Design course...

Kay Mander: And what were you planning to do with your art talent at that time?

Joy Batchelor: Anything but teach. [laughs] Which is what my parents dearly wanted me to do, but I'm afraid I stuck my heels in, and went to London to look for a job, and do you know nobody wanted me. There I was, brilliant, talented, young - you know - and nobody would give me a job! [laughs]

Kay Mander: What sort of job did you go and look for? Advertising, or...

Joy Batchelor: No, anything to do with art. I had my folio of rather indifferent drawings, and I just walked up and down, I walked up and down Fleet Street, that's the one I remember most because there I got some work from magazines, and even from the Daily Mirror. Terribly nice man there called Donald Zec.

Kay Mander: He's still around, isn't he?

Joy Batchelor: Is he? How marvellous

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Or is it the name that stays?

Joy Batchelor: I don't know. And another very nice woman who was Ronnie Searle's wife at some point, I've forgotten her name, but she gave me work too, so in a very meagre way one existed.

Kay Mander: Were you living in London, or still living in Watford?

Joy Batchelor: No, we'd moved to Northwood by that time, but it still meant I came up every day on the 7.32 train, because of the cheapness of the fare. Workman's, yes. I've forgotten the price, I think it was 7 and 6 a week. Anyway, eventually I got myself a job, and it happened to be an Australian called Dennis Connolly - no-one's heard anything about. And he was trying to make a cartoon.

Kay Mander: What year would this have been, approximately?

Joy Batchelor: '34.

Kay Mander: And he was trying to make a cartoon?

Joy Batchelor: He made two actually, terribly bad.

Kay Mander: What was his name again?

Joy Batchelor: Dennis Connolly. I think there was an Australian animator who'd made good in Hollywood, and I've forgotten his name

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Not Len Lye?

Joy Batchelor: No, no, not dear Len. I'm going to talk about Len in a minute, because he's one of my heroes. Anyway this chap gave me work for three years, and I learnt the beginnings of animation.

Kay Mander: What were you working on, cels?

Joy Batchelor: Oh yes. In fact we animated directly onto cels. No paper drawing, straight onto cel in ink. It was disgusting!

Kay Mander: No in-betweening?

Joy Batchelor: Well no, it's very easy to in-between with cels.

Kay Mander: What sort of camera did they use in those days?

Joy Batchelor: I think it was a Sinclair. I'll tell you who operated that, was Adrian Jeakins - do you remember Jeaks?

Kay Mander: Yes, yes

Joy Batchelor: He was the cameraman, he was gorgeous. And in fact the only one of that bunch who did anything afterwards, apart from me.

Kay Mander: Were these films for cinema?

Joy Batchelor: Yes they were, but they only had a short life and a gay one. He had very good connections, this bloke, and our film - which was about two little horrible bears, koala bears - lasted three days at the Empire, and it was hooted off!

Kay Mander: Oh dear!

Joy Batchelor: This is very candid, I tell you. [laughs]

Kay Mander: So did that get you interested, was the sort of thing you would like to go on doing?

Joy Batchelor: Oh, I found the animation part of it very exciting, and I never thought I would. I always thought it would be dreary beyond belief. But I got hooked. And then I had a series of other jobs, designing and silk screen printing, and this and that. But when John advertised for an animator, I thought, "Ah, this is your lucky day." And I didn't mean just for me, I meant for John, because I knew there were only about 30 people in the entire country who knew anything about it!

Kay Mander: How did you hear about the advertisement? How did John come to advertise?

Joy Batchelor: Oh, he just believes in it... In the paper. He's a very very, oh I don't know, what is he? He's always expecting the best, you know? And it didn't occur to him that he would get no answers. He just went and advertised.

Kay Mander: In the paper you read regularly, or in the trade paper?

Joy Batchelor: In the Standard. Small ads. And that really was remarkable, because at that time, Anson Dyer - do you remember him? - he was just, you know, going off out. He'd had his little day. And in fact at that time that studio was doing trace paint for a French firm. And there was also Hoppin and Gross, who made Joie de Vivre and Foxhunt.

Kay Mander: Yes, I met them when they were making that.

Joy Batchelor: So did I, I went for a job and I got turned down.

Kay Mander: I was working down there, at Worton Hall studios, when they were shooting that.

Joy Batchelor: Was it Worton Hall? It was Beaconsfield, I thought, because they were working for Rank.

Kay Mander: No, they were working for Alex Korda when they were doing the hunting film...

Joy Batchelor: Anyway, they only made two films, and they had everyone they wanted. So the next one who turned up was John, and I had learned to animate, after a fashion, with my Australian chap. I'm very grateful to him to this day. And then, well in between that of course I did a lot of freelance work for various companies and advertising people. Not only the Mirror and Titbits and Woman's Weekly and things like that, but also for Shell. And at Shell I met Jack Beddington, who helped to keep us from starving.

Kay Mander: And that was doing graphic for their advertising, for their posters and things?

Joy Batchelor: Yes, mm, mm

Kay Mander: I see

Joy Batchelor: Oh they did all sorts of things. But when he moved on to the Ministry of Information as Films Officer, of course it was very good for us.

Kay Mander: So you saw this advertisement of John's, wanting animators, so you went along...

Joy Batchelor: Yes, and got the job.

Kay Mander: And how many animators were there at the time? How many people were there working with John?

Joy Batchelor: Four people. And a cameraman.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Who was that?

Joy Batchelor: The cameraman? Ah, he wasn't really a cameraman at all, he was a live action cameraman. I think his name was Webb. I never heard of him again, he really wasn't a film cameraman, he... knew enough to sling together a rostrum.

Kay Mander: You had a rostrum camera presumably, of a kind?

Joy Batchelor: Of a kind, of a kind, yes.

Kay Mander: Did you ever come in touch with Frank Rodker and his camera at the Shell film unit?

Joy Batchelor: No, no. I came in touch with Paul Rotha but I didn't see my way to doing pin figures....

Kay Mander: Isotypes!

Joy Batchelor: Yes.

Kay Mander: We were all being very rude about those yesterday.

Joy Batchelor: Really? I thought they were awful.

Kay Mander: So did we. Well, for film, they were fine for other things but they were no good for film at all. So what did you work on when you first went to John's?

Joy Batchelor: A film called Music Man, which was based on the life of Liszt. It was a terrible [indecipherable]. The design was quite good, colour was nice. I think John and I both knew the same amount about animation as one another, but we didn't want to admit it! But later on, when I had to leave animation and work in studio and directing and production, I took up script writing because you can't have children and hop into the studio each day, and that's when I really began to write scripts.

Kay Mander: What year would it have been when you first joined up with John?

Joy Batchelor: Oh, '36 I think, '36 or '37.

Kay Mander: So when did you actually set up Halas and Batchelor?

Joy Batchelor: Not until 1940. He decided it would be a good idea to go back to Hungary where he knew the people. So we did that for a year, and we shot back because it was just before the war started. Oh dear, what a drama. With no money, on trains with wooden seats.

Kay Mander: I know, I've been on them. From Budapest to Vienna. [laughs]

Joy Batchelor: Not nice.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Was that '38, '39 then?

Joy Batchelor: It would be '39, yes.

Kay Mander: It must have been very uncomfortable, apart from all the worry of it. If you've got relations there, John had got relations.

Joy Batchelor: Anyway, back we came and back we stayed.

Kay Mander: So when the war started, you were still working on what sort of films?

Joy Batchelor: Well, when we could get films. We first made advertising films for J Walter Thompson, and that was - I enjoyed that. And there again we were lucky, because they wanted, they'd run out of newsprint. They weren't allowed to advertise in the papers or magazines or anything. So, being clever people, they thought, "Aha, film hasn't been rationed yet!" So we made three or four films for them. We made films for Kelloggs - must have made films for other people for them. I remember the Kelloggs ones.

Kay Mander: This was still the traditional cel animation that you were using?

Joy Batchelor: Oh yes, yes. I'm a cel animation baby. Except we started on paper first. It was getting quite sophisticated. But I've never managed to climb onto computers.

Kay Mander: I was going to work up to that later on. But as you say, you were still working in the traditional style.

Joy Batchelor: And then it was largely thanks to Jack Beddington that we got to working for the COI.

Kay Mander: The MOI it would have been... that would have been about what, 1940-ish?

Joy Batchelor: '41, I think. And the first film we made was through John Taylor, because they didn't quite trust us to produce anything.

Kay Mander: John mentioned Dustbins [Dustbin Parade]. Was that the first one?

Joy Batchelor: No, I think the first one was Dig for Victory. But Dustbins yes, we made, and I can't remember... Yes, that was still with John Taylor because I remember the voices on that. One of their directors, Max Anson, did the voice for something or other.

Kay Mander: And Train Trouble, would that have been...?

Joy Batchelor: Oh that was before...

Kay Mander: I've got a list here, an index of Halas and Batchelor productions... Would Train Trouble have been...?

Joy Batchelor: That was before we started helping the war effort, as they so kindly put it.

Kay Mander: Who would that have been made for?

Joy Batchelor: J Walter Thompson. Train Trouble was for Kelloggs, Carnival in the Clothes Cupboard was made for Lux, also for J Walter Thompson. Now. All the others, up to Magic Canvas, were for the Ministry of Information. The Shoemaker and the Hatter was made for the Marshall Plan Films Unit in Paris.

Kay Mander: Ah well, that was 1949 or something - seven or eight -

Joy Batchelor: After the Americans came in

Kay Mander: When Lothar Wolf and Stuart Schulberg were there, was that right?

Joy Batchelor: That's right, mm

Kay Mander: So all through that war period - you'd now set up a company, had you?

Joy Batchelor: Yes, that was in '40, '41, I think

Kay Mander: And you employed quite a lot of people?

Joy Batchelor: Not at that time, no. There were no more than 15 to 20. We didn't employ a lot of people until we made Animal Farm.

Kay Mander: Ah ha

Joy Batchelor: Animal Farm it went up to 70.

Kay Mander: That was after 1950, Animal Farm. So who were you dealing with, did you have a lot to do with Helen de Moulpied, for example, at the Ministry of Information?

Joy Batchelor: Well, to begin with, until Dennis....

Kay Mander: Well Dennis didn't come until after the war, until '49.

Joy Batchelor: Oh he did, he was slightly before the war, because he was invalided out, he had his leg chopped off at Cassino.

Kay Mander: Yes, and he came to Rod at Basic, and said, "Where shall I go for a job?" We're talking as though it were yesterday. But he was definitely after the war.

Joy Batchelor: Was he, well I know he took Helen de Moulpied's job. It was a bit of a giggle at the time. He and Philip Mackie, who went through the same campaign, but didn't lose a leg.

Kay Mander: How did you find all that period? Did it give you a lot of opportunities that you might not have had if things had gone on as they were before the war? Did it give a push to the animated film?

Joy Batchelor: Well, it was the nearest things we'd ever had to continuous work. Because before, you made a production, you got enough money to make a production, and at the end of it, finish. You then cooled your heels, wondered how it would go - and usually it didn't - and then thought, "Well, must get some more money from someone to make another film." But that was a steady, steady, steady flow of films to make. And although they were paid disgracefully badly, as you would know, at least it fed people and kept them together.

Kay Mander: Do you differentiate between cartoons and animated film? Is it two distinct sections of your mind, or do you approach them all in the same way?

Joy Batchelor: Well no, animation is just the newer term for cartoon.

Kay Mander: Well I was thinking of diagrams, actually.

Joy Batchelor: Oh, I just call them diagrams. Sorry.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: The technique's surely the same, isn't it?

Joy Batchelor: Yes, the technique of cartoon animation is virtually the same. Animation you have rather more scope for design and colour, rather less for animation as such. Because if the animation's good enough you don't need to bother about the design. The trend that happened after 1960 - leaping forward - when we had ASIFA, all that, the designers really took over. Not animators, who were also sometimes film-makers. Like John Hubley. But you had designers, primarily designers, who also knew about animation. But they usually got someone else to animate for them. And on the continent there are an awful lot more people like that. The best Italian one is Luzzati. He was, is a wonderful designer. He worked with an animator man called Gianini, but they thought of the films together, so they were both film-makers.

Kay Mander: As things progressed, presumably you weren't doing all your own animation right down to the shooting, were you?

Joy Batchelor: I wasn't doing all my own keys, for god's sake, and certainly not all the in-betweens. Except when something drastic happened, and then you had to. So it's very useful to know how to do it. Well it's like in any well-managed household, you portion out the duties to various people, and it's when they fold up you find you're back to the kitchen floor. [laughs]

Kay Mander: And did the continuity of work help you to get better equipment, equipment more to your own taste or design?

Joy Batchelor: Oh yes.

Kay Mander: How did you go about that?

Joy Batchelor: Well, finding out what other people had got, finding where we could find it for ourselves, then scraping up the money to buy it. I used to tease John, and say well every time I think I might want a mink coat, which god knows I didn't, we buy another camera! It was rather like that.

Kay Mander: Originally, one was using ordinary cine cameras for animation, put onto rostrums, and one picture one turn motors, and so forth. But then subsequently I believe there were specially designed cameras, were there not? Who designed those?

Joy Batchelor: Well, Newman and Sinclair.

Kay Mander: Did they? Erm, George Hill?

Joy Batchelor: He was a name that you've just brought by me.

Kay Mander: Yes, dear George. In a little shed at the back of John Barnes, what was.

Joy Batchelor: Camden Town, I thought, but I think yes you're right. And then we got a wonderful American machine.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Yes, the Debrie.

Joy Batchelor: Yes, we started off with a wooden Debrie, that was our first camera, in a museum now I think.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Was it an Osprey?

Joy Batchelor: No Osprey was the big one.

Kay Mander: Osprey was English, wasn't it?

Joy Batchelor: No, no, Osprey was American. And then we got - well we started toying with three dimension when we worked for the Lux films. And it was Technicolor who made us the most embryonic [laughs] effort, just a pane of glass over the bedrock. But the Osprey was

famous. Now what John has got, the Osprey with computerised this that and the other, which is terrifically good, because you know how easy it is to make a slight mistake.

Kay Mander: And you just forget to tick something off...

Joy Batchelor: Yes, and your double exposure, which god knows is pretty daunting, goes all over the place!

Kay Mander: That's all now electronically controlled, is it? I haven't been in an animation studio for a very long time.

Joy Batchelor: It's all computerised like mad.

Kay Mander: Has it turned it into a sort of factory industry much more than being as personal as it used to be?

Joy Batchelor: I don't think so, it's a help.

Kay Mander: It's a technical aid.

Joy Batchelor: Yes, that's what it is.

Kay Mander: You had some very good animators at Halas and Batchelor.

Joy Batchelor: Yes we did. We had a lot of very good animators, and we lost them all.

Kay Mander: Bob Privett?

Joy Batchelor: Bob Privett was one of the early ones. The best we ever had, Harold Whitaker. And he still works for us sometimes, but mainly he's articled to - if that's the right word - people who were trained up, even by me, and are now called the Animation People, and they've taken up where we left off. But Harold goes on and on, he's wonderful. And I don't know of any English animator who's better. I know some American ones who are, um, like Bob Cannon who was a great - and Frank Thomas , who was one of the Disney ones, did a lot of Pinnochio.

Kay Mander: During the period when you started Halas and Batchelor until all this expansion into electronics and everything, what other animation companies were there that you remember? I know Anson Dyer moved out of town.

Joy Batchelor: Yes, well, I'm going to have to look up. There was Anson Dyer, there was Hoppin and Gross. There was clever Dennis Connolly. There was Len Lye who was....

Kay Mander: A one-off.

Joy Batchelor: A one-off. Wonderful man. The most talented, creative free spirit. He never seemed to get his act together commercially. He no sooner got a client than he offended him in

some dreadful way! But he did a very nice little sculpture at the Academy of American Art, a sort of fountain thing, and he gave up making films. He preceded McLaren.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Yes, the Canadian.

Kay Mander: And also, he got sidetracked onto those extraordinary films - Basic English - did you ever come across those? During the war, they were quite extraordinary, with people saying, "I am here, you are there." And he got obsessed with them.

Joy Batchelor: I saw one which really struck me, which was Kill or Be Killed.

Kay Mander: That wasn't one of these, this was...

Joy Batchelor: It wasn't one of that series, but it was live action. I thought it was a very good film.

Kay Mander: And as you said, Norman McLaren came up. He was extraordinary.

Joy Batchelor: He was extraordinary, and he worked very deliberately, he built from one film onto another, onto another. There was a progression in his work. But then, I think it was John Grierson who took him off to...

Kay Mander: Canada.

Joy Batchelor: Mm. Because when I first met him he was working here. Always very quiet, always frightfully industrious.

Kay Mander: Sound is very important in....

Joy Batchelor: Well yes, we've been very lucky with our composers. And also I think very fortunate in establishing quite early on that you work the picture together with the sound, so that you plan and time the music track at the same time as the picture. Most live action sound is done afterwards and stuck on. With us it weren't like that, that's why I was a bit annoyed when good old ACTT said that film editors in animation aren't paid the right rate. Well, that's because nobody seemed to know that they didn't do the same work as live action. They certainly didn't, because we used to plan and time our picture track - no matter, you know, three feet, twelve feet, fifteen feet - we had six cutting frames either end.

Kay Mander: You mean that the editors were merely joining things together?

Joy Batchelor: Yes. They had six frames either end leeway, you know, for sort of little nasty things that happen, and that was it. What happens now, I don't know. I'm terribly out of touch Kay!

Kay Mander: When did you stop actively making films? I mean I know you've never given it up really, but....

Joy Batchelor: Well, all this with my hands happened in 1972. That's a long time ago.

Kay Mander: It is quite a long time ago, yes. You'd got colour long before that, er, stereophonic sound - anything like that were you playing with? You hadn't got electronically controlled cameras or anything like that?

Joy Batchelor: Oh, yes.

Kay Mander: What, in 1972?

Joy Batchelor: Of course.

Kay Mander: Ah. So what difference did that make to the way you worked?

Joy Batchelor: It made the difference that I couldn't draw my story board. That's what it made the difference of! And so I used to patiently construct the storyline, and - well - my story boards looked like a mad monkey walking about, and then I found a very good designer, a Hungarian who became my hands, as he put it. And I made a couple of films like that.

Kay Mander: Which ones were those?

Joy Batchelor: Well, one for the French called Contact, a film about an electricity company. I did one for the Milk Board, erm...

Kay Mander: You were involved with the French with Asterix one time?

Joy Batchelor: No

Kay Mander: Ah, well I've got some misinformation.

Joy Batchelor: Well, they were Belgian really.

Kay Mander: Belgian, I beg your pardon. Were you connected with them? I understood that you did two Asterix.

Joy Batchelor: Well John may have done, but I didn't. I had no idea.

Kay Mander: Oh I see. It is very confusing because the articles tend to be sort of all-embracing, and not specifically...

Joy Batchelor: No, our people in Paris - I worked in Paris for two years with my no hands, and before that I worked in, or commuted rather, in Holland on a film for the Dutch government. Had a very good designer, don't ask me his name, I've forgotten it.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: When you say you commuted, you actually did the actual work there, in Holland?

Joy Batchelor: No, I went over there for briefings and for showing the action sketches and the various developments, and talking to the people and finding out what had to be done. And looking. It was the same thing really as - well, if you're making live action, you go and look at what has to be photographed. I went and looked at what they wanted to be shown. It was nice.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: When you say you worked two years in Paris, you actually worked there?

Joy Batchelor: No, no

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: I see, it was done in England but you were backwards and forwards, I see.

Joy Batchelor: I was a commuter. The way I was in America.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Oh

Kay Mander: What did you do in America?

Joy Batchelor: Well I started off with Animal Farm

Kay Mander: But that was made here - that was for Louis de Rochemont.

Joy Batchelor: That's right, yes. But there was a lot of to-ing and fro-ing on that. And after that, what did I do, I made a film - they were commercial films - one was for Seagrams whisky. And we had George Hin [?] doing the designs, but I did all the location sussing out and the various versions of the script and so on there. There was another, I can't remember it.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Was the Seagrams one, was that a mix of live and animation?

Joy Batchelor: Well, this was a slot of animation, about nine minutes, in the middle of a long film, long live action film.

Kay Mander: Can I come back to Animal Farm? How did Animal Farm originate? Did the idea come from you and or John, or from Louis de Rochemont?

Joy Batchelor: It came from Louis, but it started off with the film I've told you about already, The Shoemaker and the Hatter, which was for the Marshall Plan films division. And that went down very well in America, and I've forgotten the name of the man - how maddening of me....

Kay Mander: Lothar Wolf

Joy Batchelor: No no no, not Lothar. He was a politician, Harrison something. He recommended that the film be made by us because he liked Shoemaker and the Hatter, and so we got it.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Was it an American politician?

Joy Batchelor: Mm, mm, Harrison somebody.

Kay Mander: So your fame had gone quite wide by then, already.

Joy Batchelor: Well, the films had.

Kay Mander: So during all this time, there was the union. You've mentioned ACT not understanding about editors.

Joy Batchelor: No they don't, to this day.

Kay Mander: Did you, you joined ACTT - or ACT, rather?

Joy Batchelor: Yes, and in fact I had done some work for them before. I did a - with Bob Privett - I did a definition of film animation terms for them. A glossary. I should think that's pretty out of date by now!

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Is it? I wouldn't have thought so really.

Joy Batchelor: Well, it was right up to the minute then, but that's - I can't remember when it was.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: It probably needs updating, but I don't think it would be out of date.

Joy Batchelor: Mm. Well it will have no computerised junkets. [coughs]

Kay Mander: So, you joined ACTT?

Joy Batchelor: It seemed the easiest thing to do, quite frankly.

Kay Mander: Was there an animation section or anything like that, at the time?

Joy Batchelor: Nope. No, no. In fact I think we were the first animated company, to you know, to enter the fold.

Kay Mander: So you never - did you have very much to do with ACT, apart from just going to the meetings occasionally?

Joy Batchelor: No, we had occasional upsets when we didn't see eye to eye. But by and large it was all very relaxed. [laughs] Well you know....

Kay Mander: [laughing] I've got a list of questions here, I'm not sure that I want to ask them! [inaudible intervention from AL] No, I know, I'm just playing it by ear. Erm, do you think ACTT has played a useful role in the shaping of the industry?

Joy Batchelor: Well, it's a bit curate's-eggy. [all laugh] I really think it is.

Kay Mander: Did it make a big difference to the animation companies?

Joy Batchelor: No. Not really.

Kay Mander: Because you were all good employers, I suppose?

Joy Batchelor: Hm?

Kay Mander: You were all good employers.

Joy Batchelor: Well, whatever we were, we were jolly well taught that. No - who's the president now?

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Tudor Gates

Joy Batchelor: No, before that.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Bruce Henderson

Joy Batchelor: No, it must be before that, then.

Kay Mander: After Puffin?

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: It would be Robert Bolt, would it? Not Robert Bolt.

Kay Mander: Anthony Asquith?

Joy Batchelor: No, it must be someone rather lower down.

Kay Mander: Alan Sapper

Joy Batchelor: That's it.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Oh he's General Secretary.

Joy Batchelor: Well, I thought he was a big, big disgrace. I thought he was so busy beavering away that he couldn't see the wood for the trees. But, um, that's just my opinion - and I stick to it.

Kay Mander: Fair enough, we're all entitled to our opinions. You then got involved with live action. Did you enjoy doing that?

Joy Batchelor: Not really. We didn't get involved all that much, I think we made one film, and that was a trick film.

Kay Mander: Which one was that?

Joy Batchelor: It was something called The Monster of Highgate Ponds.

Kay Mander: Oh yes. Was that for the Children's Film Foundation?

Joy Batchelor: Mm, mm.

Kay Mander: And that was, what, animation and real people?

Joy Batchelor: It was model and real people.

Kay Mander: Did you do a lot of models?

Joy Batchelor: Not too much, because we neither of us really liked it.

Kay Mander: Because they're not so flexible as drawings? Why was...

Joy Batchelor: I don't think we felt quite so at home with them. There's some very interesting work being done now, because the technique has certainly evolved. There's nice work being done in Hungary, and in Hollywood I think too. So you've got all this sort of squidgy stuff. [laughs] It's very malleable.

Kay Mander: What did you think of Peter Rabbit? [sic] Who Framed Peter Rabbit? [Who Framed Roger Rabbit?]

Joy Batchelor: I've only seen, um,

Kay Mander: You've seen pieces of it.

Joy Batchelor: Pieces of it. I think it's technically brilliant, but then he always was. A good director, good producer.

Kay Mander: Yes. When you say you weren't able to draw, use your hands any more, could you not do anything on computers?

Joy Batchelor: Well if I knew about computers I suppose I could!

Kay Mander: You never wanted to?

Joy Batchelor: I never got around to it. I'm thinking now, I've got no further in thinking than a word processor. And I'm not all that keen on that.

Kay Mander: But computers nowadays - am I wrong? - surely you can draw anything you want, can't you, on them.

Joy Batchelor: Well, within reason.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: There are limitations, aren't there. Yes, yes.

Joy Batchelor: The only computerised films I've liked are the very early ones, very primitive ones. Um, which really were no more than working out stresses and forces. I thought those were brilliant.

Kay Mander: Who made those?

Joy Batchelor: They were American ones, and they were just black and white, they were measuring the velocity of water going through a dam, and you know, earnest things like that. But visually they were quite beautiful. And Peter Rabbit [sic] [Who Framed Roger Rabbit?]I think, you know with a flick of a wrist you can have a shimmery red colour all over somebody, I don't know, I find it rather boring on the whole. The animation with Dick Williams, of course, is always brilliant. But I thought some of the tricks, the tricks you know of colour, and adding and adding and adding, I won't say it's nauseating but you get to know it after a bit.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Predictable?

Joy Batchelor: Yes. Oh very predictable.

Kay Mander: Do you remember Night on the Bare Mountain, the one with the pins?

Joy Batchelor: Oh that, they were a wonderful couple. [Alexander Alexeieff and Claire Parker]

Kay Mander: Do you think that anything done nowadays is as imaginative as some of the things that were being done in the old black and white animation?

Joy Batchelor: Well, there was a young animator at the Canadian Film Board, French, and he did a marvellous film based on the pinball, and miles, miles better than anything Alexeieff ever did. It was walking through a mirror into a landscape. I was filled with admiration.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: A moment ago you said you weren't particularly fond of doing live action. You know, I know this is a personal thing. Why was that - is it lack of control of what you really wanted?

Joy Batchelor: Well that's part of it. The other thing is [I] don't know really anything about it, to be quite honest. But the main reason is, I think there's so much of it. It's so dense, and you tend to lose the ideas, or at least I do, because I tend to have a simple mind [laughs] and I like to keep

track of the ideas. And when I see all the beautiful scenery, and all the emotion and all the lighting and all the this and that, I think oh yes, what are we getting into now? And I don't like not knowing. I think it's really that simple. Sometimes, of course, it can look incredibly beautiful, or something we could never match in animation. But it does tend to lack the clarity you get with animation.

Kay Mander: In other words, with your animation you can pinpoint the exact thing that you want to get across to the viewer.

Joy Batchelor: Mm, mm, if you're any good.

Kay Mander: During the, after you came in contact with Jack Beddington and subsequently MOI, you must have got involved with a lot of people who were very active at the time, for instance you obviously met Grierson. Did you get affected by people like Grierson, Arthur Elton, John Taylor, all those people in the documentary movement?

Joy Batchelor: John Taylor very much

Kay Mander: Because you worked with him?

Joy Batchelor: Yes. Arthur Elton, no I didn't, didn't particularly agree with anything he stood for. [laughs] Grierson was very funny. We met at some silly old film festival he'd got, and he outed a film of mine, he said this is not festival material. So I thought, "Well, I'm not having that from this little Scotsman!" [laughs] So I tackled him. We had a most enormous row and were the best of friends ever after.

Kay Mander: The perfect way to get on with John Grierson!

Joy Batchelor: Yes.

Kay Mander: What film was it that he didn't think was festival material?

Joy Batchelor: Oh god, I can't remember.

Kay Mander: But you didn't actively work with, closely to, any of them. During all that period of sponsored films...

Joy Batchelor: No, I didn't. But he did make one big, big gesture, did John. He said, "In animation you have been doing what we have been doing in documentary." I thought that was pretty good.

Kay Mander: Very good indeed, yes. That really does say a lot. Who else of that period do you remember as being somebody that you liked talking to, that you liked seeing the films of, or liked showing your films to?

Joy Batchelor: I really adored Len, didn't know McLaren so well. I liked Len partly because he was so amusing, and also he was a very good dancer. God, he was a good dancer! [laughs] He used to project, just loops and loops of film that really wasn't anything. Just interesting and with a strong beat, to a strong beat soundtrack. And we would dance away like anything.

Kay Mander: Did you ever come into contact with Stuart Legg?

Joy Batchelor: Yes. In erm ...

Kay Mander: Working with him or just socially?

Joy Batchelor: In Paris during the Marshall Plan era. Would that be correct?

Kay Mander: Oh. Well what would Stuart have been doing at that time I wonder? Dalrymple and Humphrey Jennings were involved, definitely.

Joy Batchelor: I didn't know Dalrymple. Wish I had.

Kay Mander: You knew Humphrey?

Joy Batchelor: Mm. But I think that was in, would that be in America, could it have been? Or am I thinking of someone else?

Kay Mander: Yes, you might have come across Stuart in America. You never actually worked with him, he never had - sort of associated with any of the films you were making.

Joy Batchelor: No, he came in almost as someone who was looking at what had been done, and advising or you know, giving an opinion, not even advising.

Kay Mander: Well that was, yes, what Stuart did. He was sort of - not a film doctor, but he was supposed to have a, be very good at making snap assessments of films.

Joy Batchelor: He was rather a film buff, wasn't he?

Kay Mander: If you had a chance to do it all over again, would you still have followed the same career?

Joy Batchelor: Mm, oh yes, I think so.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: In your, kind of in your very early days, when you were starting in the business, did you get much encouragement from people?

Joy Batchelor: No. Well, there was, times were hard. And as I think I told you at the beginning, nobody wanted a young upstart person coming in to tell them that's not the way you animate. Which of course I did!

Kay Mander: I did the same thing in documentary!

Joy Batchelor: Did you? [laughs] "People don't walk like that!" "Very well, do it yourself," they'd say. I spent a terrible couple of days working out how you do walk. [laughs]

Kay Mander: You met John, and then you subsequently got married. How long between the time you met and the time you got married? Had you already started the company before?

Joy Batchelor: We started the company before, yes. It took about three years for us to decide, "Well, might as well."

Kay Mander: Were your methods of working similar?

Joy Batchelor: Pretty similar, except we had this divergence on script. Because John is really more keen on how the thing looks, and the production values, and erm... I kept on saying, "What does it matter if nobody knows what you're trying to say?"

Kay Mander: And you didn't want to be a teacher? [laughs]

Joy Batchelor: No, I didn't want to be a teacher! I taught a lot of people, actually.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: I think that's slightly different. That's if you're passing on experience, I think that's a different thing.

Joy Batchelor: Well no, when, you remember all those things you had to go to, and look at films, and decide whether they were any good and whether they should be included in... They were the pre-planning of the jury selection committees. I did my share of those.

Kay Mander: That would be for what, for the BFA, British Film Academy days? Or BAFTA?

Joy Batchelor: BAFTA. And abroad too. I was on the Venice Film Festival, and one in Portugal, one in Spain. There was a general consensus, and I think it was a pretty wise one, if you don't know what the people want to say after five minutes running time, they don't know their job.

Kay Mander: That applies to 99 per cent of modern films!

Joy Batchelor: [laughs] Well, I still think it's basic. That's why I'm awfully sick of a lot of films I see nowadays, which to my mind aren't films at all. They are product.

Kay Mander: Yes.

Joy Batchelor: Which is a rude word.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: When you're doing that kind of jury selection, did you find that you were ever kind of at odds with each other, or was it...?

Joy Batchelor: Well, sometimes. Not very often, but sometimes.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Did nationality come into it at all, do you think? Or national pride?

Joy Batchelor: Well, it had a way of rearing its ugly head. But not too badly. I tell you who were very naughty, the Poles were dreadful.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: In what way was that, then?

Joy Batchelor: Well, they barracked and they lobbied. Yes.

Kay Mander: The Czechoslovaks had a very good set up at the end of the war, didn't they. They did animated films.

Joy Batchelor: They did, and the USR[indecipherable] had even better. And the Poles, yes, because Jan Meynitzer [Janus Majewski] was, he started off a poster artist, did very good films. I don't think he does any now.

Kay Mander: Do the animators keep in touch on an international basis?

Joy Batchelor: Yes, that's been going on since 1960.

Kay Mander: Has it. Could you tell us about it?

Joy Batchelor: ASIFA, it's called. Association of something something Animation. And was formally launched in 1960. And animation only began really in Cannes. There was a grotty little cinema attached to the main one, where very few people went to see it, but that's where animation was housed. And some of us, and I was one of us, said you know, this is all wrong. We're not getting any coverage, any exposure. All the cameras and all the publicity is in the main thing, and they're photographing Gina Lollobrigida and even Pablo Picasso [laughs] but nobody's doing anything about animation. So it was decided, it took about two years to set it up, the first of those animation accredited festivals under the auspices of ASIFA was in Annecy, in France. In 1960. And then you couldn't stop it. Still, there's not one on London of course, to this day.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Why is that, do you think?

Joy Batchelor: The government won't put up the money.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Oh, I see.

Joy Batchelor: And I don't just mean this government. Never has. Not since 1960, and it's not just money. They think we should be happy with, you know, appearing at the London Film Festival. In fact, it's the situation that it was in Cannes, all those years ago. Anyway, we leapt out of Cannes to Annecy, and now they're all over the place. There's one in Montreal, in Switzerland, in Portugal, in Spain. And I'm sure there are a lot more, but I can't think of them.

Kay Mander: Would you say that, there was a period when animated films ceased to be of interest to the general public, in the way that they had been when Disney first started.

Joy Batchelor: Well, that way, yes.

Kay Mander: And then, all of a sudden in the last few years, they have grown in popularity.

Joy Batchelor: No, I think they just shifted. People didn't go to the cinema, and Disney wasn't making his one film a fortnight. And what really was got me hooked, was when they had Silly Symphonies, I thought they were wonderful. And we don't have those little news cinemas any more, do we?

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: No

Joy Batchelor: [coughs] You see quite a lot of animation on the box, and most of it's very poor quality.

Kay Mander: I was going to say, what do you think of the standard of animation that you see on the box?

Joy Batchelor: Terrible. Well, they're buying it for cheap. They are really wicked. They have all the stock that useless now in America, and which they get for peanuts, the Americans can give it away because it's made its profit in the States. But erm...

Kay Mander: But what about the home manufactured material?

Joy Batchelor: Well, they don't have a big home market.

Kay Mander: Technically, they're very bad, I would have thought.

Joy Batchelor: Where?

Kay Mander: Well, I can't name names, can I. But even things that you see on the adverts, on the commercials, which are made by English companies, do you not find that the actual animation technique is very very poor?

Joy Batchelor: No, not altogether.

Kay Mander: A lot of flicker.

Joy Batchelor: Oh, well that's one of the things - we have John Hubley to thank for that. Loosening up the medium.

Kay Mander: Could you explain?

Joy Batchelor: Well, John Hubley tried to get away from the egg shapes and the tight outlines of the Disney thing. So he did rather amorphous figures without outlines, and he was a gifted genius. So what he did looked fine, but what lesser people do looks a mess. Looks as if someone's spilt, you know, the jelly.

Kay Mander: The cel flicker, I always think, but it's not - it's meant to be there.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: In fact, it isn't a sequential drawing as it should be.

Joy Batchelor: Yes it is, but they haven't finalised it, they haven't gone through their stages of animation, clean-up, trace, paint, because they don't believe in tracing lines. So it does wobble about. But there's still some very good stuff about, and Dick Williams has done a great deal of very very fine animation for commercials. And Bob Godfrey hasn't done so much for commercials, he tends to do very simple but terrifically funny stuff for children's programmes. And he can't afford to get carried away by technique, because he has to depend on the prices they pay him, plus - oh what do they call it - residuals. Yes, well I mean you could go bankrupt waiting for the residual. [laughs]

Kay Mander: Lucky to get them! Can we talk about recruitment and training? When your company was doing a great deal of work, where did you get your new people from?

Joy Batchelor: Train 'em.

Kay Mander: Did you get them from art school, or?

Joy Batchelor: Well, we started that for Animal Farm, because we had to expand from 18 to 20 people to 70. That's as well as making the film. And that was the only way to do it. You got hold of anybody who had a good right hand, and put them in the charge of somebody who knew about animation. And it was fairly simple, you had a key animator who had an assistant, and they had between them two sub-assistants who cleaned up and learned as they went, well, little blocks of four. Worked. But after a bit, well after some years in fact, we were the only people training animators, and it wasn't a very rewarding one because as soon as they were any good, off they went. I will name no names, but there were some people who were no better than poachers.

Kay Mander: So there's no recognised entry into your field?

Joy Batchelor: Well now they teach animation in school.

Kay Mander: Where - the film schools?

Joy Batchelor: No, art schools.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Yes, at the Royal College they do.

Joy Batchelor: Royal College, yes. Bob Godfrey is there, and so is - oh dear - I ought to know his name, someone else, both teaching there. And they make their little films, and they get shown in the students' section of the parent ASIFA body, and some of them are very good indeed. So it's gone into conventional channels of teaching and training, which is as it should be. [pause] And even the film school, the International Film School, they used to have an animation department but it's fallen by the wayside. I taught there for a bit.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: They're suffering from financial drought, aren't they, at the moment.

Joy Batchelor: At the moment yes, oh dear. Well, I think they nearly always were. When I was teaching there we had a lot of Iranian and Nigerian pupils, whose governments were willing to pay for them to come and be taught. Then oh dear oh dear, the poor Shah was kicked up and those of the pupils who dared go home, went home. And the others went to America, I think. At any rate, the animation classes stopped like that. [coughs] Pity, because it is important to go on training people.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Yes, but I suppose the outlet, or the avenues for progressing from being trained to being a fully-fledged animator is a sticky one.

Joy Batchelor: Well, I used to consider it took three years. Now, I believe the thinking is two. But I asked John this morning, and he's very good at figures, and you may have gathered I'm not. I said, "When we started in this thing there could have been 20 to 30 people at the very most." And he said, "Oh well now there are 1200."

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: There is work for them as they get trained?

Joy Batchelor: Mm. But not for everyone who wants to work, because....

Kay Mander: Presumably, anybody with artistic abilities is an individual, and therefore once they've got, reached a certain standard in animation, would they not want to branch out and create their own...?

Joy Batchelor: A surprising number of them don't have that. That's why somewhere I said there are people who are animators, people who are designers, people who are animators and designers and film-makers. The ones who have something specific to say are few and far between, because scripting is somehow, there's only one outstanding script writer, and that's Stan Hayward. And Bob Godfrey really depends on him no end for his films. He writes the scripts for practically all Bob's films. But he is, Stan is not a film-maker, and he is not an animator. It's very curious.

Kay Mander: Tell us exactly what you mean by script writer, in terms of animation. We assume you are asked to make a film on a certain subject.

Joy Batchelor: Well, you write your story, and plans your ads and scenes, in terms of what can be done in animated film. In other words, you gear it...

Kay Mander: Do you do a story board?

Joy Batchelor: Oh yes, sometimes a great many. That's why, you know, I feel so bereft.

Kay Mander: In other words, the script that you are talking about would be a story board.

Joy Batchelor: Well, it would start off as something like, you know, that piece of paper. And then it would get thumbnail sketches, and then it would get a lot, and then it would get broken down into scenes and sequences, and after that was finished and approved and finalised, you then went on scene by scene, all through a sequence, in action sketches where you would have a great many defining the action and the choreography.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Is writing a script for animation highly specialised or disciplined?

Joy Batchelor: Well, I don't know it's a discipline any more than writing a script is, but it certainly is highly specialised. I've been overlooking some scripts written in America for a feature-length film, and I was shocked. They have now reached their 13th script writer.

Kay Mander: A feature-length animation film?

Joy Batchelor: Mm, mm. "God in heaven," says I, "What are they playing at?"

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Is it because, if you like, the people they've chosen to write the scripts don't really know how to go about it? Is that is, or is it..?

Joy Batchelor: Well, the one I liked best of all the 13 was the 12th one, and that was a man who certainly knew how to write scripts, it was absolutely professional. He wasn't quite so good, in fact he wasn't good, in what to write for animation, though I think he could have been told. But instead of that, the 13th came in who didn't know about animation, but unfortunately not about scripts. And re-hashed, you know, numbers one to twelve. [laughs] It's no good saying, you can only give your wise, you know, advice and let the matter rest. And hope it doesn't disturb your nights.

Kay Mander: What's been the favourite film that you've worked on?

Joy Batchelor: Animal Farm

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: How long did that take from first pen on paper to final show print?

Joy Batchelor: It was over three years.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Three years.

Kay Mander: You actually created the characters for Animal Farm, didn't you? It was all your creation?

Joy Batchelor: We did an awful lot. The only other one I've spent as much time on was Ruddigore, which I did, I directed, produced - it wasn't the same class of story, and didn't have such good people on it either, which is why it took three years. I don't think you can beat having a good script... [inaudible]

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: You mean the Ruddigore script wasn't as good as the...

Joy Batchelor: Oh no, it was pathetic. One couldn't say so, because after all, Gilbert and Sullivan. In my researches I learnt that they knocked that out in three weeks! And I'm not surprised. [laughs] Well the music's nice, but it's a very silly, daft story.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Oh well yes, I mean they're all silly [laughs]

Joy Batchelor: Well, some are more silly than others. To misquote. Anyway it quite put me off opera.

Kay Mander: Is there anything that you would like to have made a film of that you never had the opportunity to? Any specific thing?

Joy Batchelor: Yes, I wanted to do a little series based on the Leys of Marie de France. And I went round hugging this jewel to myself for a couple of years. Somebody said that's a good title, sexy. [laughs]

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: No backers, then?

Joy Batchelor: No

Kay Mander: What a pity, it would have been very nice.

Joy Batchelor: It would have been nice. Wouldn't have been easy, but you don't choose them for easy.

Kay Mander: Well no, I think one chooses a challenge in a way, don't you?

Joy Batchelor: Well, simply because you rather dote on it. It's like a love affair, you know, I think ah, that's for me. But it was not to be. I'm trying to think. My son said,"Well that's more of a live action picture, Mum." The way children do. I said, "You might be right."

Kay Mander: How many children do you have, Joy?

Joy Batchelor: Two. The youngest one's a boy and my daughter is three years older.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Have they gone into the business?

Joy Batchelor: No. Well, Paul is writing. He's writing not for films, well only two films, both animated. And for comics and stuff. And our daughter's a graphic designer. Called them commercial artists in my day.

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: Yes. Any regrets that they didn't perhaps follow in?

Joy Batchelor: No, I think it's very good they didn't.

Kay Mander: Well, they might yet change, might they not?

Joy Batchelor: I don't know. But the fact is, if they want to they should be able to, but not if they don't want to.

Kay Mander: They've got the talent.

Joy Batchelor: Well, it's come out in different ways, and I think it would be very difficult for them with a couple of old parents around [laughs]. You sometimes see children who are absolutely browbeaten, not physically, but they have a terrible feeling they should do better. I don't think that's any way to carry on. Anyway, we didn't get the chance with them!

Unknown interviewer, possibly Alan Lawson: [laughs] Anyway, thank you very much.

Joy Batchelor: Not at all.