

Sheelagh Reece DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side A

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BECTU History Project

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Interviewee: Sheelagh Rees

Interviewer: Norman Swallow

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

Tape 1 Side A.

The copyright of this recording is vested in The BECTU History Project. Sheelagh Rees, television director and producer. Interviewer Norman Swallow. Recorded on the thirtieth of June 1992, Side One.

Right, first Sheelagh when and where were you born?

I was born in Belfast in 1923.

Ah, ha.

Mm, mm.

And schooling?

Yes, Victoria College.

In Belfast?

In Belfast.

Ah, ha.

Which is noted for one thing only, that in my mind which is that a marvellous scholar called Helen Waddell went to Victoria College and she's known popularly as, as the author of *Peter Abelard* but she was an amazing Latin scholar and she went to my school.

Ah, ha.

And she's the only one I can quote.

[Laughter]

And then I did, I did my secretarial work there because they had a department. It amuses me now that the girls go to these schools and they're out in three months knowing everything and I did two years, [Laughter] you know, to do my shorthand typing and my bookkeeping and what they called business methods. I don't know what business methods were but I did them. And I did, I was very lucky there because I'd only ever been very average, you know, I don't think I was ever first in class, I was once second, I was usually about third or fourth but I got, I got firsts in both years of secretarial because I could do the shorthand you see. So that was very lucky when I, I came to work for the scripts chap which we'll come to later on.

And how long did you stay in Belfast then?

Mm, working in Belfast?

Yes.

Well, I had from, I went to work when I was sixteen.

Doing, doing what?

Shorthand/typing.

Ah, ha.

And I was in The Belfast Harbour Office in the war for four years, which was very interesting and, and through the bombing. And one day I had to walk to work because there was no transport, there had been a very bad raid and I walked to work. And it was, it was very nice, I worked for the Harbourmaster. And what did I do? I had, every morning a list, to make a list, type out a list of the ships that had arrived and departed the previous day, and of course, it was all secret, everything was secret. I can still to this day recite the list of things that when you're taking, because I also had to, when the clerks were busy answer, the window went up, you know, it was a glass window...

Yes.

Which shot up, all glass and polished and the masters of the ships would come and report in. And, but there was, there was a list like that that said name of ship, port of registry, gross tonnage, net tonnage, you know, all that and I still know that. And that was quite interesting but after four years I began to think, you know, there must be something else, I was getting bored after four years. And there was an advertisement in the paper, the famous *Belfast Telegraph*, of which John Cole used to be the editor.

Yes.

And asking for people and I wrote and I had an interview at Broadcasting House.

Where, in, in Belfast?

In Belfast.

Right.

And I think it was Mrs Haverfield, Mrs Haverfield either interviewed me but or was closely connected on the London side to the appointments. And she was a very elegant lady and I had this interview and I did the typing and I did the shorthand and I have the letter which says that they can offer me the job provided I can get a travel permit, and this was December 1944, and I was not to hand in my resignation until I had been to the Labour Exchange, no Job Centres in those days.

Yes.

To the Labour Exchange to get a travel permit. And I got the travel permit and I had a nice reference I must say from the Harbourmaster who was very kind and I left. And I left Belfast on a Saturday night boat to Liverpool and came down on the Sunday on the train, very slow in the war.

Yes.

I mean they stopped not just because of raids but for various reasons and they stopped, it took ages to get to London and then I went to the hostel where I'd been booked in and...

Which one was, which one was that one?

Well, it was very grand, it was Grosvenor Square. I think it was 50 Grosvenor Square and the, the flat, this was interesting, the flat belonged to Lady Dorothy Paget, who was a well known racehorse trainer. Do you remember the name?

Yes, that's right, mm.

And it had a marble bathroom.

[Laughter]

Mind you we were in bunk beds, which was a bit of a letdown because my letter from the BBC said it would be dormitory type accommodation sharing, they didn't say you would be in a bunk bed, you know.

[05:06]

[Laughter]

But anyway I'd been in bunk beds before because in the war I, I was part-time in the AFS, the Auxiliary Fire Service, on duty, there was never a raid when I was on duty. Anyway I knew about bunk beds and there I was. And this flat was, must have been superb, you know, when it was actually... I think at that time she was alive but living elsewhere.

Wasn't Yvonne Littlewood there at that time?

Yvonne Littlewood was there and I met Yvonne Littlewood there. And I don't think she was in the same room of bunk beds as I was [Laughter] but I do remember...

Yes. I think she told us about bunk bed. No, she didn't tell us.

Didn't she?

No.

Oh bunk beds, yes.

[Laughter]

But the other thing if it's not im..., improper. This marble bathroom had a bidet and none of us provincials had ever seen one before.

[Laughter]

And there was great speculation about what it was for, usually for one's feet one thought. However, I don't think anybody used it. [Laughter] And it, it must have been lovely, a lovely flat. And then I went and got in to various accommodations. But certainly the hostel, there were a lot of people there whom I think only Yvonne Littlewood is, is the only one I've really kept up with or known since.

And who were you working for from there?

Well, I went, my first job, and I wondered if, if, if it was simply because there was a gap there or whether they really did follow what I said. I in my interview they said did, would I like to work in the Overseas Service? And I said well, my father had lived abroad a lot and in India and it sounded very interesting, which was all you could say in those days especially at the age of twenty.

Yes.

Because we never travelled.

No.

You only travelled if you were in the services as you know. And so I went in to The London Transcription Service at Maida Vale. Set in this convent, do you remember it?

Mm, mm.

And it's now demolished. Some, oh, some years ago it was demolished.

Yes.

Sheelagh Reece DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side A

And that was terribly interesting. Because it was converted in to offices by I think having just desks put in. We had these, these wonderful ecclesiastically shaped windows, and they were cells really with wooden floors with knots in the boards, you know, and, and terribly cold in 1945. Oh we were cold and we got even colder because we had to go for coffee, lunch and tea in to Maida Vale Studios where the big orchestra studio was.

Mm, Elgin Avenue isn't it?

Yes.

Wasn't it?

Elgin Avenue. But we were actually our, our base was St Hilda's Convent.

Yes.

And there was some very, very interesting people there at the time. Now V. C. Clinton-Baddeley who wrote and, mm God the name's gone out of my head. The famous, oh, contemporary woman writer, Penelope... It will come to me, it will come to me later on was there.

Mm, Lively?

No, not Lively. No, she's younger.

Gilliatt?

No.

Oh well, and also Michael Horden was there?

I've written, no.

Yes.

He took part.

Ah, sorry.

When we get to programmes, yes. I worked for Malcolm Baker-Smith.

Oh great.

And Malcolm Baker-Smith had been a designer with Barry Learoyd before the war and he joined the Navy. He'd been invalided out of the Navy and he'd come back to BBC as they called a producer then doing programmes for overseas. And we recorded them quite often at Broadcasting House as I remember and then they were cut on to disc at Maida Vale, actually cut. And sometimes in some BBC premises I catch that peculiar smell of, of a disc cutting room. That's a very strange pungent smell isn't it?

Sheelagh Reece DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side A

And I can remember it still. And so we did little programmes there and we never heard them after the playback because they were shunted off abroad. And then I worked for various other people. Malcolm Baker-Smith had an offer to go and produce, I mean the actor side of it not the musical side of it of something at the Opera House, which he took.

Had he?

I hope the name comes back to me.

[Laughter]

And I was invited to the first night and of course, that was a thrill. I mean to go to the first night at Covent Garden, this was when it had opened. Now before that it had been used as a dance hall. You know, they took the, all the seats out of the auditorium and I actually with some of the girls of the girls club I later I lived in we used to go, I used to go to Covent Garden and dance. It was a kind of like The Hammersmith Palais.

Oh yes.

Okay a bit grander, you know. And though it was always dark when we went, it was the blackout, you came out of the station and you went sort of left, right, left and the first time I went to the Opera House in the daylight I couldn't find my way because it was light. *[Laughter]*

[10:12]

[Laughter]

Anyway that was a lot of fun and it was very thrilling to go to this, and everybody of course, in those days in proper evening dress and long frocks and things.

Yes, yes.

And I'd got a long frock. And then he left and I worked for Philip Bate.

Yes.

And Andrew Miller-Jones as a fill in, you know.

Were you still at Maida Vale?

Oh I'm sorry, no, I jumped.

No, you've jumped to Ally Pally have you?

I'm sorry, I've jumped.

Yes.

Malcolm Baker-Smith, yes and...

Well, he was, sorry a...

A producer.

A designer before the war?

Before the war and he, he wanted to come back as a producer, which he did.

Television?

Television producer. And so in I think March 1946 we went up to Alexandra Palace and we had an office and we started getting together programmes. And it was, it was very exciting and I mean there was no training. May I have a drink?

Yes.

There were no training school. I mean apart from the initial three weeks, which was devoted really to showing you how to type an official BBC memo from subject to. And then the producer's initials would be in capitals with a stroke and then yours would be in lower case.

Okay, yes. [Laughter]

Because you were very lower case.

Still the same isn't it?

Well, I think the girls have gone a bit uppity now, they're called PAs or something. However... [Laughter]

No, you still get letters the same way.

Do you?

Mm.

Yes. So anyway there we were. And I was at times alarmed, excited, frightened, because I didn't know, I didn't know what I was doing, I was doing what I thought was right, you know.

What kind of programmes did he produce?

Drama.

Malcolm Baker-Smith, drama?

Plays, yes.

Plays, yes.

I remember one, he was, he wanted to do *Cold Comfort Farm*, which I think was rather an undertaking in those days.

Yes, yes, it was, yes.

Anyway, I sort of, halfway through rehearsals he said 'Has the green slip come back from copyright'? And I said 'Not yet Bill', and they hadn't told us and I being very new didn't know that you should keep ringing up when it's copyright and say 'we haven't had it, why haven't we had it'? And I was waiting for it to come through, and, as luck would have it, what's her name who wrote *Cold Comfort Farm* didn't want to have it televised so he was left with a cast of, a cast you see. And we changed horses midstream and got a French's edition of, you know, a play that had three men, three women and two, two something else you see.

[Laughter]

And rehearsed that and did it.

It seems a bit strange that you should get that far without discovering the author doesn't want you to do it does it?

Well, it does seem strange.

Yes.

I mean....

After all the book was in copyright.

When I say, when I say that nowadays the people in, doing that job that I was doing have less responsibility. There were so many back up, there are so many back ups now.

Yes, yes.

At every stage there's a back up. There's a script editor, there's a director, there's a producer.

Yes.

You know, and that stops all these. But when there's only two of you and one of you's never done it before, you know. Anyway it has happened since, it happened about ten years ago and something actually, but then in, in those, in these days of recording you see they just simply took it out of the schedule.

Yes.

But you couldn't do that in live days.

No, no, no, no.

I think fortunately it wasn't billed, it hadn't got as far as the billing thank God because that was another hazard. So there was an awful lot of responsibility up there with the girl who was called the producer's secretary. And I remember a very unhappy episode, not to me thank God, there was a nice girl called Mary Bassett, she worked for Robert Barr and in those days the plans were very small of course.

Yes.

Not these great, there was no photocopying, and the way the plan was copied from the designer to go to the scene master, the property master, the lighting engineer was that the girl, I, would do carbon copies.

Yes.

You know, you'd actually go all round the thing with a pencil, no Biro's just yet, Biro's were almost in, and you would actually do carbon copies on to blank plans. And poor Mary, who was actually engaged to be married at the time and probably had much better things to think about, she had got one of her carbons, one of her blanks the wrong way round.

[Laughter]

And by sheer utter misfortune that was the one that went to the scene master.

[Laughter] Yes.

And it was teatime and I happened to be in the canteen and Mary looked very red-eyed and I thought something awful's happened, why, why, you know, was young, engaged, happy girl all this dear? And they'd set it up back to front because her plan was back to front because she'd put the carbon in the wrong way.

[15:06]

Was this the same day as transmission, no?

Oh yes.

What, the same day?

Oh yes. It was when you do, you set a thing in the morning for the afternoon.

Yes.

And quickly strike that and put up the evening.

Yes.

You see, and they were putting up the evening. And everybody rushed about and switched it round from front to back and re-lit it and off it went on the air you see.

During the actual transmission you, as the production secretary or whatever...?

Mm.

You were sitting in the gallery?

I was in the gallery, yes.

All the time?

And...

And in front of you was the script?

In front of me is the script.

Et cetera?

And I also, there was a thing called camera cards that I'd never heard about and I had to be, had to be told about camera cards and...

Right. Can you explain about camera cards?

Well, because the cameraman can't hold the script and work his camera, [Laughter] change, well they didn't change lens of course.

No, no.

But I mean he couldn't, what did he do? His tracker tracked and he focused.

Yes, yes, yes.

And so that he, he, he hadn't got hands and so on, and so the script was broken down in to shots, which it was.

Yes.

And the shots were translated in an abbreviated way on to cards, which were clipped on to the side of the camera and he simply looked, he looked at his card.

Yes.

And, and he heard.

Yes, right.

Sheelagh Reece DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side A

You know, shot four two next and so on. But of course, there weren't the number of shots.

No.

There couldn't be the number of shots, there were lots of tracks in and out.

And the problems of camera movement was....

Oh yes.

Tell us something about that?

Noisy, noisy, difficult. People would fall over the cables. The cables would get caught up and, and sometimes round the actors' feet. And once an actor told me, in fact an actor who became a director, Gareth Davies, he said he was acting in something like *Compact* some years later and his foot, he felt his foot being raised as he was sitting there talking at a desk, ah, ha, ha in to the camera and his, his leg was lifted up and the cable was taken from underneath and his leg was quietly put down again.

[Laughter]

But I, I also remember that because I worked on, on a Tolstoyevski, I think it was, and Kenneth Griffith was the lead and the same thing happened. That was much later, that was 1953, it was still happening in '53. So I mean it happened all the time. And then things just broke down.

Yes.

And you will remember the transmission card that would go up.

Yes, yes.

You know, and, and a little picture would be put on the screen.

Right.

But the thing that always made me nervous was the introductory music when the picture of the tower came up and the mast.

And Alexandra Palace, yes.

And that music turned my stomach over. I, I was so nervous. And even at home, I didn't have a television set but later on when I heard that music my stomach would still turn over, my God we were nervous.

Where were you living yourself at this time?

I was in Bayswater.

Ah, ha.

I was living in a...

And you got to Alexandra Palace like all of us on the, on the bus, on the bus from BH, the morning, the morning coach?

Yes, I did. I got, I got the tube from Lancaster Gate. But just to tell you one thing, interesting thing about where I lived while I remember it, that it was called The Helena Club and the writer Muriel Spark...

Oh yes.

Was there when I was there, I remember her and she based her book *Girls of Slender Means* on The Helena Club.

Yes.

But fortunately we didn't have the awful fire that they had in the book, but there we were.

And you, we, I was talking of money you actually what you meant but you mention in your notes about the bus?

Yes.

Every morning from Broadcasting House at eight, eight fifty-five or...?

Every morning from Broadcasting House five to nine.

Yes.

And Sidney Budd would get on, do you remember Sidney Budd?

Yes, yes, yes.

And that awfully nice girl who married Peter Dimmock, Peter Dimmock's first wife, what was her name?

Oh yes.

Dark haired girl, very attractive, very lively.

Yes, yes.

Very intelligent sort of girl.

Yes, yes.

Sheelagh Reece DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side A

There we all were and off we got whatever the weather. And it was cold, shall I go on to the winter of 46/47?

Yes, as you wish.

Because we're still in 46/47.

Yes, we are, please do. It was a nasty winter wasn't it?

Oh it was cold. There's a photograph in here of, of, you know, we're all muffled up.

Yes.

And so we would, we, we tried to get over to the canteen for a bit longer than we really should, in fact sometimes we went straight to the canteen from the coach and then nip back to the office. But then there was always the walk, you know, coats and hats on until I was...

Where, where was your office then? Were you in, were you in the theatre?

It was round, no, it was, well, at one point it was behind the theatre.

The dressing rooms?

In the dressing rooms.

[20:00]

Yes.

Where there was no outlook it was just a well. And then we moved to something that had been modernised and done up. What was it called, that block? It contained the, on the ground floor it contained the telephone, the telephone exchange.

I don't know really, I should be able to remember but no I don't remember that. Well I, I didn't, I didn't go till 1950 which is four years ahead.

And, and I tell you who was in there, there was D H Munro.

Yes.

First on the left.

Yes.

Then there was Eric Fawcett and Freddie Donovan further down. And then there George Moore O'Farrell, Michael Barry, me. We're on the first floor.

Good Lord, that's unusual.

Well, it's between the...

Yes, yes, yes.

Between the tower and the theatre.

Yes, yes.

And there were, there were, there were loads of things but there were no coffee machines in those days.

No.

I mean there would be now.

You had to go to the canteen?

You had to actually put your coat on, and we didn't bring thermoses for some reason. Well, probably because we couldn't get coffee, you see everything was rationed, you, you couldn't carry food about with you.

No, that's right.

You couldn't, and I mean you couldn't even I think milk was rationed. And then if you hadn't enough money to buy a second coffee well you didn't have one.

What were you, what were you earning then?

Well, this is the very exciting. I was on, earning a hundred and eighty seven pounds a year.

And when you were on...?.

When I started.

Ah, ha.

And...

That's, that's in Maida Vale ?

At Maida Vale.

Yes.

It was two pounds eighteen and ten pence a week plus fourteen shillings cost of living, and I lived in London on that. And after, and I remember at Maida Vale arriving, because I had my bus fares to pay it wasn't near enough to walk, arriving with the tuppence halfpenny for my morning coffee and nothing else, I had no more money.

No.

And then we got paid on Fridays you see in, in real money.

Yes, yes.

And I wasn't paid by cheque until 1955 when I became a, what was called a PA in those days, floor manager. I was paid in cash all the time.

You were on the...

I didn't even have a cheque book.

You were on the staff, BBC staff?

I was on the staff. I was established in '47 I think. I've still got my original contract.

Ah, ha.

Which warns me about all sorts of things that I mustn't do.

[Laughter]

[Laughter] You, yours was probably the same.

Yes.

You know, you mustn't, you, anything that you make, record, invent or draw or paint belongs to the BBC.

Belongs to the BBC, yes, that's right, yes.

And you mustn't divulge anything. And, oh, that reminds me that in my letter telling me not to give up my Belfast job until I got my travel permit that I was not to divulge my, the name and address of the hostel.

Oh.

Well, except, except to my parents.

Yes, yes.

You know...

Yes.

Because I suppose the Germans may have thought it was a secret hideout, you know, and bomb it. So where did we get to? We got to, oh, the terrible winter, that terrible winter, it was so cold.

It was 1946/7?

Forty six/seven.

Yes, yes.

And at the beginning of '47, you know, television went off the air for six weeks.

Yes, mm.

Because we were saving electricity. And we went up to the Palace every day religiously and did very little, drank coffee in the canteen if we could afford it, [Laughter] I could afford it a bit better than I think because I was getting, my salary was going up once a year by five shillings a week so you see in four years I'd get another pound.

[Laughter] Yes, so you....

And when I, just to go ahead a little while I remember it, when I got the PA job I was getting paid, I was getting eight pounds a week as a top secretary, A2W or something terribly grand, I mean if you wanted to get more than that you had to go in to the admin. And I went from there to twelve pounds a week, which was the bottom of the studio manager PA scale but it was a dizzy rise of four pounds a week. Never had anything like it proportionally, never. [Pause]

Anyway we're still at Alexandra Palace and you're still with Baker, Malcolm Baker-Smith are you?

Malcolm Baker-Smith? Well, after his, the opera thing, then he left and I went about between different people. Philip Bate with his music and his moustache and his French horn, and he was a great one for reading *Exchange and Mart*, which I'd never seen before, there were always copies of *Exchange and Mart* - musical instruments you see.

Ah.

And, mm I think I have jumped and you will have to delete that. However, in between was there not John Glyn-Jones.

Yes, yes, John, yes.

There was?

[25:00]

1947, 47?

So if we can just say...

1947 or thereabouts, yes.

Yes, yes. John Glyn-Jones followed Malcolm Baker-Smith as being my officer in charge.

Yes.

Alan will remember him.

Yes.

What a character, wild he was, he would do all sorts of things. He once threw a tin of pins on the floor, and I like a fool picked them up because in those days we did. You know I picked them all up because I didn't want to leave them for the cleaner.

Right, yes.

In those days we'd all cleaners.

Yes.

I must, I must mention the cleaners and the door knobs, and we had brass door knobs, do you remember? And they were cleaned every week and sometimes the good ladies, and they were very good.

Yes.

They forgot, they put on the Brasso and they forgot to take it off.

[Laughter]

So you'd open the door with your clean morning hands [Laughter] so the brass would come off/ And we had, had these wonderful cleaners up there and they polished the door handles. And do you remember that once a week a little man would come round with a clean hand towel and he would change the hand towels and every person had their own hand towel, and I'm sorry to tell you I've still got mine and it says 'BBC' on it, it's, it's embroidered.

Yes. [Laughter]

In the corner and I've got a souvenir. That the cleaning was very good. When you think now it's, you know, barely done at all sometimes. And so John Glyn-Jones was such a character, and if things were getting difficult in the gallery and it was live he would, he would sink under the desk.

[Laughter]

He would sink under the desk and say 'Oh God' and sink under the desk leaving me and the vision mixer to go on. And when things got a little better he'd pop up again,

Sheelagh Reece DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side A

you know. [Laughter] We had the problem of doing two studio shows live at the Palace where the producer had to go between the studios via the balcony.

Yes.

And when we were about to change studios the S Tele, the Senior Television Engineer, who later became a TOM, Technical Operations Manager. Then he became a...

Don't know, I wouldn't know. [Laughter]

Yes, he became Technical Operations Manager.

Yes.

Anyway, anyway...

TOM, yes.

Yes.

A TOM?

A TOM, and he would queue in the next studio and we'd dash, or that is the producer would dash along rain, hail or shine it didn't matter the weather, out on the balcony in the open air where I would have a script, my script and the stopwatch ticking and my notebook and pencils and a handbag trotting along behind you see and then we'd do the same to come back again. And it wasn't easy but it was a lot of..

And of course, a live show?

And of course, it was live.

A live show?

And everybody, people were not as, I think people were more polite then but they were also a bit more frivolous because I remember once it was summertime and it was the hot summer of 1947, and because we had so few clothes I can remember what I was wearing and I was wearing a blue, very pretty blue cotton long skirt, because it was the new look, with a belt that tied at the back. And one of the lighting engineers, I never knew he'd done it, he tied my belt to the chair so when I got up I was tied to the seat.

[Laughter]

They don't do that now, you know.

No.

But that's probably because the girls wear trousers you see and you can't do it. And this was quite frivolous in a way and it, it was very nice.

John Glyn-Jones was an actor really wasn't he?

Yes, he was.

Yes.

And he went back to acting.

Did he, yes.

He then went to live in North Africa, I think it was in Algeria.

Oh, yes.

He hadn't been at all well.

Yes.

When he first left he went, he bought a windmill in, in East Anglia and he lived in this windmill and then he was quite ill. I saw him at The Television Centre about 1977 in the bar, he was taking part in something but he in fact then went to live in Algeria.

Oh. Can you name some of the dramas you actually worked on?

Well, yes.

Titles, authors?

Well, that show that was...

The cast and so on?

Yes, well I can and I can remember that the one we did that had to fill in for *Cold Comfort Farm* was called *The House With The Green Shutters*.

Oh.

And we did in fact go all the way to Denham to film *A House With Green Shutters* and it was queried, because somebody said 'Why did you have to go so far'? Well, it had to be in the country and it was the nearest country. And Pam Barnard was an actress then, you remember Pam Barnard? She died after she'd retired, she had a motor accident it was very sad. But she, she played the leading girl. And we then did a lovely two hander, a Shaw two hander. We did, oh I can't, I can't, I haven't got any, I didn't keep my scripts you see.

[30:12]

Never mind. It was Bernard Shaw?

Mm, one he wrote himself., Malcolm wrote himself called *The Traveller Returns*.

Oh.

Which was a sort of ghost thing. Then the Michael Horden one I made a note of, he'd been in the same ship as Michael Horden in the war.

Ah, ha.

And I remember reading a memoir he had that they were at some Christmas they listened to the nine, the carol service, you know, together on board ship. So he did a naval documentary, drama documentary and had Michael in to narrate it, which was when I first met Michael Horden. And then Michael took part in something at Alexandra Palace for him. I remember a very, a funny little story. Michael's wife was coming, do you remember in those days there was a viewing room with about six seats?

Yes, okay.

And actors were allowed to, you know, there were a minimum of six but you could have your nearest and dearest and his wife was coming up. And she was very pregnant at the time and she arrived at the desk and the girl on the desk looked at the ticket and said 'Are there two of you?' [Laughter]

[Laughter]

Which Michael thought was a great joke, [Laughter] 'Are there two of you'?

Yes.

Michael Horden, very good, a very nice man. So we, we got up to John Glyn-Jones, we got to John Glyn-Jones. He left, I don't know why it is that the people I worked for left or, or actually two of them actually took their own lives, in the end Michael took his own - Malcolm took his own life.

Did he?

But long after he'd left. Lawrence Gilliam, who was his indirect boss, because we really worked to Rothwell House, to Features and Drama.

Rothwell House?

When we did Transcription Service we were just another...

Sorry, this is before, before television?

This was the very, yes, we'd have to put that back in the tape.

Yes, yes.

We came under Features and Drama and Lawrence, famous Lawrence Gilliam.

Yes.

So we had Lawrence went down to see him but I think he had too many problems and he went, which was sad. So and then that's right.

Right.

John Glyn-Jones left in [Pause] 1949. And in Nineteen... I was, I was off a lot because I had appendicitis and things in 1949 and I was away, I had two spells of sick leave. I mean one spell about six weeks when they didn't know what was wrong with me and then they did find what and then I was away again. So 1949 was sort of a sick leave year a bit. And when I came back I went, there was the great move to Marylebone Road, we moved out.

Yes.

Of those offices.

I was there myself, I remember.

In Marylebone Road.

Opposite Madame Tussauds?

Yes. Which is now a concrete block and it was a lovely building, a lovely building and I was sent to work for Wolf Rilla.

Yes.

Whom you will know well Alan?

Yes.

I adored working for Wolf, Wolf. Well now, we were the Script Department.

Yes.

He was called **the** Script Editor, he was the first Script Editor they had.

Oh this was a new role for you, I mean when you were...

Well, it was...

When you're in, sorry Malcolm Baker-Smith that was, that was sort of Drama?

I, all that, yes, that was production secretary.

Yes.

Drama.

That's right.

It was still Drama.

Yes.

Still drama.

But you're scripts, not production now? You're now scripts not production?

Yes, I'm now scripts.

And you did...

Nineteen...

Forty-eight?

End of '49 to '50.

Ah, ha.

Yes. I was, I was based at The Palace in '49 but I was away so much you see.

Yes.

So anyway 1950 was a kind of watershed. And John Glyn-Jones had gone so I hadn't got a job and Wolf Rilla hadn't got a secretary because she, poor lady whom I'd never met in Marylebone Road, she had a, some kind of breakdown and was away. Anyway I came in and I actually enjoyed it very much although it wasn't production because Wolf was very good to work for. He was a very lively man and he knew what he wanted and he was very fluent, you know. So we had a little card index with little blue index cards with, with writers' names on.

Does this mean did you choose the writers or they...?

They wrote in. Well, we, we, we, he chose some of them.

Or a bit of both, a bit of both, yes.

A bit of both.

Yes.

But all the plays that were sent in were sent in, but some of them were dreadful and, and so heavy and I mean physically, you know.

[Laughter]

And there was a lot of work. There was a lot of work because I was the only one to do it you see, so I had to index everything that came in and everything that went out.

[35:12]

Yes.

And I had to do all the letters about the scripts as well, and Wolf was very fluent and he wrote different letters, *[Laughter]* and they were very interesting, you know, and I learnt some new words, I learnt the word genre.

[Laughter]

Which I got down in shorthand and then I, I had to look up you see because I wasn't, it was a word that one had heard but one had never to type it before, you certainly didn't type it in the Harbour Office in Belfast.

[Laughter]

We didn't actually type it at Alexandra Palace much, you know. And meilleur, and sort of these, all these interesting bits happened. I liked it very much and there was a lot of work, I used to go in on Saturdays.

How long were you there?

I was there from '50 to '51, and in either the end of 1950 or the beginning of '51 we moved out of Marylebone Road down to Lime Grove and we expanded in to two rooms in one of the houses.

Yes, yes.

And the clerical staff, that was me and my, I was given an assistant, Bridget Booth, a very nice, pretty, clever girl, and we moved down. Now at some point in 1950 Wolf was directing and I don't clearly remember the actual, his exchange of jobs, whether he did, did the direction while he was still Script Editor or not but he did direct and then he decided to go off and be a director.

Mm, mm.

And it all came about roundabout the time we moved. So I, I would say I had roughly a year at Marylebone Road and doing this quite heavy job and fairly responsible and being nice to writers and so on and so forth. And so we moved down to two rooms in the houses. And Bridget was a great help, she later, after about a year she went off to, oh, it must have been later than that, she went off to commercial television as a vision

Sheelagh Reece DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side A

mixer. In the houses what do I remember? I remember Ken Tynan coming to see who was there...

Yes.

Because we had two more Script Editors as I remember after that. Ken Tynan came in and wanted to take a pint of milk that belonged to me, this is how I remember him.

[Laughter]

The only time we met, he came to see the Script Editor, who I think must have been Wolf at the time, and in those days and I still lived in the girls' club but I would sometimes take provisions in and I'd bought a pint of milk at lunch time in Shepherd's Bush and put it to be cool on the shelf, on the window ledge. And he walked past it and said 'Is this anybody's'? I said 'It's mine', and Mr Tynan couldn't have it.

[Laughter] No.

[Laughter] So during that time, during, excuse me, during that time I did two weeks for Michael Barry when he was head of drama because his secretary was on holiday, which was very nice.

And was he at Lime Grove?

He was at Lime Grove as head of drama, he was upstairs. And that's when I first met Joanna Spicer because she came down to talk about schedules. I'd never met her before, she was awfully nice and she sat in his office with a notebook, you know, and they'd talk about plays and laugh about the titles and wonder what it would be like and would it fit in, this was very nice.

And how long was it you mean and that kind of thing, how long?

How long?

The play, sorry?

How long was a play?

That's one of the questions.

Well, they were still doing ninety minuters.

Yes.

They...

Sorry, I mean that's one of the things you discussed obviously with Joanna, the length with Joanna?

With Joanna.

The length of the play because of the schedule I mean.

The kind, no, oh sorry, I really meant the kind of play and what it would take. I suppose time did, time must have come in to it.

Well, to fit in to the schedules you may mean.?

Well, yes. Oh, she was really thinking of, I remember talking about types of plays. You know, she would say 'This play sounds as if it takes a lot of sets' and if it needs a lot of room and so on and so forth. Because nobody had at that point broken down a play, a play had never been broken down or edited, you know. And then they'd have to try and get twenty-six sets in to a studio that could hold eight. So this is, this is where this wonderful work of Joanna started.

She was terrific.

She was, she was. And then we had Val Gielgud who worked mainly from Broadcasting House but came down twice a week.

[40:18]

He still had his connections with radio?

Oh yes, yes.

That was his main job?

Yes, yes. I don't know what Michael was doing at this point, had he gone to directing?

Michael Barry?

Yes. Where had Michael Barry gone?

Well, he was, when did he become head of drama?

But well, he was the head of drama then wasn't he when, the time you're talking about?

He...

Yes, he must have been.

Yes.

Did, didn't he go to the regions as a...?

Sheelagh Reece DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side A

He went to, excuse me, he went to Dublin eventually. There might have been something in the middle but he went to Teilifís Éireann certainly for a long time, he was there for years and years.

In, certainly between 1950 and '52 he, he was television drama at...

Lime Grove?

At Lime Grove but certainly Val Gielgud did his twice a week as, you know, Michael wasn't there. Val had either taken it over or I cannot remember, I cannot remember, but Val did come down twice a week. And he had the same secretary Michael Barry had had I do remember. So we were there, I was there in '50. Now in '51 I was there and we had, Wolf had gone, we had a lady who came in. She had been in the Navy too during the war and I forget her name but she did the job for about a year, Hazel Wilkinson.

Yes, that's right.

Hazel Wilkinson.

Yes, yes.

And then they had Basil Bartlett. Now by that time I'd gone back to Production but Bridget was there and Bridget worked for Basil Bartlett.

Were the productions, or am I jumping the gun a bit at Lime Grove, were the Lime Grove studios working? They weren't working in 1950 were they?

They were working certainly in '52.

Oh yes, yes, yes.

Because in '52 I was...

I have '52 in my mind about that?

Yes, it is '52.

Yes, '52 definitely they were working because I went back in to Production you see. The reason I was with the Scripts Department was that whereas nowadays you would be redundant the same day that your boss died or went away then they just found a hole and put you in it, which was nice, because in later years it had been very, very useful to do that work, to get to know all those writers.

Yes, yes, yes.

You see and it was a great, great asset. So then '51 I remember as being a nice year, I don't quite know why but it was. And '52 I was definitely back in Production and I was working with Alan Bromley I can remember. And I remember it being very hot in the, in the studio in 1952 in Lime Grove.

But at least the studios were a little easier? I mean camera movements and so on and so forth?

Yes. We had got to...

A little better, a little better?

We got to, we got to three lenses in, when we came to Lime Grove didn't we? Three lenses or four? What twelve, twenty-four, thirty-five?

Four?

Twelve degrees, twelve, fourteen degrees. No, twelve degrees.

No.

Twenty-four degrees.

Yes.

And thirty-eight degrees.

Thirty-eight, yes.

So you had narrow, mid shot and, and wide.

Yes.

And you could hear them when, change lens if they were near the mike.

Oh yes.

You must remember that?

Yes.

Quickly.

You could hear the click because they went round in a circle.

Yes.

'Click', 'click', 'click'.

Yes.

You could hear sometimes they changed lens, but it did save a lot of tracking.

Yes, I'm going to change sides, hold on.

[End of Tape 1 Side A 44:03]

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

Tape 1 Side B.

Sheelagh Rees, Side Two.

1952, I went back in to Production and I think I was still on grade BW. I'd risen from CW to B2W, To BW.

Which means how much money were you getting?

I suppose I was getting about five pounds a week maybe.

On B, on BW?

Maybe. I haven't got the slip for that, but at five bob a year in...

Yes.

In four years.

Yes, yes.

You know I would roughly be on that. I worked with Alan Bromley.

Yes.

Which was enjoyable and my office was in the Sanger's block.

Oh yes.

Now at Lime Grove there was a block, whoever Mr Sanger was I do not know. The canteen was in there and behind the canteen there were offices and I was in Sanger's canny [ph 01:00] office. And round about this time I got an even better job at A2W which was guest producer's secretary, and there were three of us. Myself, Sylvia Rich

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

and I think Helen Littledale I think, certainly Sylvia. And we were on these dizzy heights and I was allowed to claim a briefcase, which made a change from carrying a basket full of scripts to rehearsal.

[Laughter]

Because we were rehearsing in the early days at... This is important too, we'll have to sort of back track on that. Rehearsal rooms behind Marylebone High Street, BBC Publications, Beaumont Mews.

That's right, yes.

And there were four rehearsal rooms there, and Joe Hughes, the rehearsal attendant, a lovely man and of course, there was the journey from Alexandra Palace to Beaumont Mews. You know, one would trot up and down, it wasn't quite like going from Acton to Shepherd's Bush. And they were, they were quite good studios and on the whole we had room in there but we had to overlap the sets a lot. And it was then during the Beaumont Mews days that I sometimes stood in for the what is now called the AFM, the stage manager who had to go off and do something or was allowed the day off for something, you know.

So you're based at Lime Grove?

Well, I, we, we rehearsed there.

Right.

When we were at Alexandra Palace.

Oh, so you've gone back a bit, yes.

Yes, I'm sorry. That was rehearsal rooms for Alexandra Palace, for Beaumont Mews, Marylebone High Street, and I cannot remember when we stopped using them, and we started going to boys' clubs round about 1951 or two.

Sound great?

And Beaumont Mews was lovely. Because Marylebone High Street, you know, if you had the money, you know, you could buy a bag of apples to take home, that sort of thing. *[Laughter]* It was very nice. So 1952 I know I was with Alan Bromley.

Can you remember what you did...?

A comedy.

Yes.

I can only remember...

A play or two, yes.

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

Being a comedy. I cannot remember play names, I wish I had kept my scripts. But in one move I made, you know, when I was moving house or moving flats I had to get rid of a lot of stuff and I did, I also got rid of sadly all my theatre programmes back to 1945, which I wish I had now.

Yes.

1952, then I worked for Lionel Harris. This is all guest producers now you see, all big stuff. Lionel Harris, and I did a lot with him and we did musicals. We did *The Comedy of Errors* to music, which had come up from Bristol, he had connections with Bristol Old Vic. And one of them was a Julian Slade, and I can't remember if it was *Comedy of Errors*, the music was marvellous, such jolly music. And, [Pause] the one about, *A Comedy Of Errors*, that's the one about the twins isn't it, yes?

Yes.

To music.

Yes.

And very exciting and no terrible disasters on, on transmissions I remember because it did, it was better at Lime Grove. I mean it was, you know, the plugs didn't fall out so easily and there seemed to be generally it just was, it was smoother.

But they were still live were they, yes?

Must have been.

Yes, even telerecording, oh wait a minute.

Yes, '52, three?

Telerecording was beginning to come in I think.

I'm sure it was, yes.

Mm, mm, we could check up on that certainly.

Yes.

Then in 1953 one that I enjoyed very much, I worked with John Fernald, who was head of one of the big drama schools.

[05:03]

Mm, in London, yes.

Yes.

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

In London, with, as I mentioned before, Kenneth Griffith in this play where he had to have the cable removed in 1953 even from around his foot. And we rehearsed that one at The Inns of Court. They had a, a room at the Inns of Court and we went there to rehearse it. You clever men can remind me the play that's got Raskolnikov in it. We'll look it up.

The Russian play you mean, yes?

The Russian play.

Chekov probably?

No, it wasn't Chekov.

No, Dostoyevsky I'm sure?

Was it. Anyway Kenneth Griffith played Raskolnikov and I did enjoy that and John was great to work with. Fifty-three, who else did I work with in '53? Oh I worked with Lionel in '53 as well as '52, I did quite a lot with Lionel Harris. John Fernald I remember and we then move in to '54. That is when the dreaded serials started and the hard work began, because in plays earlier, you know, we used to have so long to do a play, a long time in the office, you know. I mean I needed it because I had, there were no script typists so we typed the scripts, you know, the first scripts.

Yes.

And we did all the alterations and we did everything. And can I just digress back in to scripts?

Yes, yes.

Please do, yes.

There was no photocopying until the '50s and the first photocopying was for the Design Department when they photocopied plans, but we had none. And when we were at Alexandra Palace in this building between the tower and the theatre, at the end of the corridor on our floor, on the first floor, there was a Roneo machine and we did our own Roneo-ing.

Yes.

And a messy business it was and the ink.

Yes.

And the, and the heat, in 1947 the heat with the ink and the heat and everything else it was dreadful. Anyway we, we did all that. So that in fact the office time was used up by tasks that are now done by other people, you know, script typists.

Yes.

Themselves came in to being and so on. So that, that all went on. Fifty-two Lionel Harris, '53 Lionel, '54 serials. And by this time we had moved from our offices. I had, one office I had was called the horse boxes in the Scenery Block, it was the ground floor, do you remember the horse boxes?

Yes, yes.

Because they were partitioned.

Yes.

They didn't go up to the ceiling and, you know, it was pretty noisy down there and it was hot.

Okay.

And it was away from, you know, it was away from facilities. There were no coffee bars or coffee machines or anything like that it was away from everything. We moved from the horse boxes in to our proper offices, which were still the Design Department but it hadn't yet become the Design Department, we hadn't moved in to the big circle.

What, at the centre?

At the centre.

No.

Until sometime in 1954. Other people I think moved in in '53.

Yes.

But I was still in the horse box in '53.

Yes, I think, I think I moved in the Talks Department in '53, in to the office, the office area.

Were you, were you in horse box? No.

No.

You were in a real office?

Mm, I think it was '53, I could be wrong.

In the Design Department building now?

Yes.

Yes. And did you move in to the...?

Mm.

Don't remember? Anyway I, I moved out of a horse box in to a real office with windows and tele..., two telephones and proper furniture and people, you know, people next door and proper doors and no brass handles. And I did my first serial, and Norman Rutherford was at that time assistant head of drama and he allocated, you know, the things and he said 'Serial'. I said 'Norman, six episodes'? He said 'Yes, it's going to happen, you've got to do it'. I said 'Alright', you see. And that year the work that I got through, I mean it was so much because it was not only the increased work of a serial but without assistance, without photocopying.

Yes.

Without any help.

Yes. What was the ser, what was the serial do you remember?

It was called *The Dancing Bear*.

Ah, ha.

And it was directed by, by that time we had producers and directors. Dennis Vance was the producer and David MacDonald who'd come, come from films...

[10:00]

Was the director?

Yes.

Was the director.

Yes.

And that was a combination to be seen.

Who was the author, do you remember? It was specially written wasn't it?

Yes.

Yes, of course, it was.

It was written by John Miles.

Ah, ha.

And, and a young lad who did some news reporting as well. And we rehearsed in town, we rehearsed in town. It was, it was a lot of hard work, it was a lot of hard work, because, as I say, there was, there was only one of me and a floor manager

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

came in as you know in the last week, but that didn't help. I mean, you know, we did filming, we did filming. I mean there was no, it was the director and me. Up to now it had only been bits of filming.

Yes, indeed.

It was the director and me.

David MacDonald and you?

Yes. Well, now he of course, was a film director and he did some big things. Do you remember him?

He was my CO.

Was he?

Was he? In the...

Yes, I was filming it.

Yes.

Yes.

But he did, he did feature films didn't he?

Oh yes, yes, yes.

Yes, he did. Anyway I'm afraid he'd started on the drink by then, by the time he came to us.

He never stopped. [Laughter]

He had...

He was a dear man.

And he continued?

Yes.

He was a dear man.

Yes, he was.

He was a dear man but he needed an awful lot of looking after.

Yes, he...

Oh dear. And I mean there was, nowadays there's a production, well they call them a production manager and there's a stage manager in the office from the beginning. And these wretched, I can nearly use a rude word, prop lists, six pages, they could run in to six pages of props of twelve copies each.

Gosh.

And they, they were forms in batches of six. So I'd have to, I'd do carbons. The first set of six and then go on to the next set of six and the next set of six, I mean you were there till all hours.

Yes.

And they'd ring up and say, you know, 'Tell the buyer that we've cancelled the dining room table'. You know that sort of thing.

And that was your job?

Well, early on it was but that, the stage manager would, would do what she could. But you see before the studio manager came in, he only came in to look at it, he didn't come in to work in that last week, he didn't really work, he just found out where his cues were, you know, when it was polite. But the poor girl, it was usually a girl, who was the stage manager still on contract.

Yes.

Gosh.

She had so much to do because she hadn't got, she hadn't got a production manager beside her, and she had to do the teas and the coffees and the prompting and the script corrections, get the script corrections to me on the telephone without leaving the actors. You know, it was all that. There was, there was too much work to do, and it, it was quite a while before it became fairly shared out. One, one good thing was when they put AFMs on the staff, they called them AFMs, and that was a very good, that was a great help because it took away all this typing.

Because this means assistant floor manager?

Yes. It took away all this typing. You know, when you were trying to book actors and answer the phone and God knows what and do film schedules, because in the early days of filming you went out with your producer, as he was called, and the cameraman and the assistant and probably no sound. And you just went from place to place, you know, and it was a surprise to me when I learnt you had to ask the police sometimes. And when we started on *The Dancing Bear* I, I did a schedule you see and we were in Kensington Gardens for which I'd had to get the permission you see. And it was that nice, a cameraman with grey hair, big man, who's got a son very like him who had ginger hair, father and son?

Gemmell, no?

Gemmell? Could have been.

Mm.

Anyway it was the father who came out on this and I'd said, you know, we leave Lime Grove at eight o'clock and we get to Kensington Gardens at, at a quarter past or something. And we, we got to half past ten it's, we're still on schedule. [Laughter] And so I, I had no idea about continuity, I'd never been taught it in my life, you know. You know, I had to just guess what it was so that wasn't very easy. And it was David knew what he was doing.

Yes.

He knew what he was doing. And I mean he knew what I wasn't doing so it worked, but if it hadn't been for David God help me it wouldn't have worked. Then we went through all the summer with these six episodes live, live and, and Dennis in the background, and that took, took practically all of '54, at the end of which I was a, not a nervous wreck, I enjoyed it but I mean I paid for it later because I was so tired.

[15:12]

Yes.

So tired. And that was the end of his, his contract you see, and I don't think I saw him after that, perhaps twice for a drink which was the only way you ever saw him. And then I was very sorry to hear that, then he moved down market again to, I heard a sort of tiny flat on the Edgware Road and then he actually took his own life as Malcolm had done, and drink was involved in both and stress and stress and, and things going wrong. It was very sad indeed. So then we moved on to 1955, which was what you call an anchor mark, you wanted an anchor year didn't you? That was, that was when I did my big move and I jumped from being a secretary to being managerial. And they advertised the jobs because so many people were leaving. The, you know, it was the year of the big shake up.

Yes, yes, yes.

And they advertised this job and I think in a weak moment I said to somebody 'Oh I could do that', and then they reminded me and they said 'You must put in for it', so I did.

What was the actual job you put in for?

Production Assistant, Drama.

PA?

Mm, mm. I'd never been on the floor except to hand out camera cards. [Laughter] Never and...

Twelve pounds a week you say?

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

Yes, I got, I got twelve pounds a week gross I mean, you know. I jumped from I think eight pounds to twelve pounds. Anyway there was a board, Harold Clayton was on it and Michael Barry.

Oh yes.

And Michael Barry had been in the Navy and he looked at my what we now call a CV, you know.

Yes.

And said 'You worked in the Harbour Office, and how do you, how do you, did you manage working with men'? And I was, I mean I just didn't think I would get the job so I said whatever I liked, you know.

[Laughter]

And besides they'd never had a woman, they weren't going to. I said 'Well, I was always fond of sailors', I said, knowing Michael was in the Navy.

Yes.

And anyway I got the job and my knees shook, I didn't know what I was going to do. Do you remember Miss Leonard?

Yes, yes.

She was my personnel officer.

Yes.

And she wrote me a nice memo and Michael wrote me a nice memo. And then of course, all the nitty-gritty started and I did three months floor managing training following people about. [Pause] And it's not easy being the first woman to do a man's job.

Talk about the training course? Can you remember much about it at all?

Floor managing training?

Yes.

Well, no, it was just being attached to people.

Oh I see.

There were no lectures and things.

Ah, ha.

It wasn't like a director's course.

I see.

I did that later.

Ah, ha. Ah, ha.

Lewis Gol..., you know...

Yes.

Put on a pair of headphones. And there weren't, there were no walkie-talkies or anything. In fact at no stage in my floor life was I ever able to speak to the control room ever, I could only be spoken to. But in those days you, you had a plug in cable.

That's right.

You plugged in to the boom, you probably remember we did, and unplugged and ran and plugged in somewhere else and if you ran too far too fast you, the plug came out or your headphones fell off.

Yes.

And it was live television, I can't tell you what it was like. It was exciting I'll say that for it. And so I trailed various people and I did *Children's Hours* with Naomi Capon.

Oh yes.

I did one with Naomi. And I did the news, and it was on that that I had my worst moment, my most frightening moment [Laughter] of my thirty-eight years. I was doing *The Nine O'clock News* alone at Alexandra Palace on my own and they changed the running order halfway through, which I'm sure they still do, and I lost my place.

[Laughter]

And I was in charge of the News. And I lost my place on *The Nine O'clock News*. And I stood in the middle of the floor and I, I thought please God, let it be alright, though I was laughing so much myself. And fortunately it was because the, they had, you know, various people to do various things and the red light came on and it was an experienced newsreader who, who soon went to commercial after that, not because of it I hope, and the red light came on and he spoke and we went through, I picked up my place. But I was, it was a dreadful thing to do, dreadful. And I went and apologised afterwards I said 'I'm really sorry'.

And you're now back at Alexandra Palace?

Well, yes, we had to be for a moment.

Yes, I understand that.

Because, [Laughter] this, we were talking about plugging...

[20:00]

Yes.

In headphones, and we plugged in to the boom. And the, the really old-fashioned ones were the better for sound. I mean you could always hear on those.

Yes.

When they got in the ones with boxes you got in to a dead spot in the studio and you couldn't hear at all, but you could hear with the old-fashioned ones though they were very painful to run with.

Yes.

Because they'd catch your hair and put, tweak your hair out or fall off if you bent down and they were dangerous in that respect. But it was exciting and it was, once I'd got the hang of it I'd say it was one of the best jobs I've ever done, enjoyed the most for the teamwork. Because there's a kind of teamwork on the floor that doesn't exist upstairs because upstairs it's very individual.

Yes.

You know, you do your job and you listen and you, you know, and you're watching pictures. Downstairs you're physically going to run in to people and you've got to not get in to shot.

Yes.

And, and you've got to do sign language to cameramen and to the boom and to sort of indicate that what we're going to do next and you've got to learn to run without making a noise, you know, soft shoes. And you've got to get from one end of the studio to the other without knocking anybody down or being seen or being heard and not knocking the props off the table, you know. It's, it was very jolly but it could be frightening, it could be terrifying. But I mean you, you had, you got an attitude and, and the important thing was to make sure the actors were happy and not be frightened. Because I mean I remember an actor telling me once that he had a floor manager that was so nervous his hand shook. [Laughter] You couldn't do that, you really...

No.

You know, so I used to, I used to cultivate a smile and I'd go round, I'd be round the set and I'd have my hand up and I'd smile. And some actors, actors would tell me that they'd rush up, oh they would rush up and go like that, you know, sweep, sweep a hand across their face to start.

Yes.

It's no way to treat a man.

[Laughter]

So, you know, however much you dashed you were there in good time and not panting and smiling. And it paid off because I've been told, you know, several times that it was the way to do it.

That was your first big drama production then in '55?

Mm, my first big drama was with Ian Atkin producing.

Yes.

And John Jacobs directing his first.

Ah, ha.

And I PA-ing, as it was called then, it's now a production manager.

Right.

My first big drama and David Wilmot doing his first. David is freelance now but he does a lot of continuity and always has done on radio, you would hear his, his on Radio Four.

Oh, yes.

And David came from Windsor Rep.

He was your assistant AFM?

He came in as a stage manager, he was my AFM.

AFM?

AFM, and Ian of course, was, was very strict with us all.

Yes.

And one of his great things was to have which, which John Jacobs had to do you see because he was doing it under Ian Atkin was to have the, all the floor positions of the cameras marked on the floor. And there were really too many marks. And John Jacobs had, and I had a private joke and we met many years later at somebody's retirement party and he said to me 'Do you remember 3Z11'? And I said 'I do, I shall never forget', Camera Three Position Z.

[Laughter]

From A to Z Eleven. And I had to get them on the floor before lunch. I had to get them on the floor.

And this again was still live, still a live show?

It was live and it was also in the days when they were very thrilled with back projection.

Oh yes.

You remember it was a great thing.

Yes, Alf Davis, yes.

And I had, Ian Atkin was, was very scientific, mathematical scientific so we had lots of back projection and we had all these camera positions. And he had several scenes on back projection to which he said to me on the first day 'Well, of course, you and your, the scene crew you will rehearse these scene changes', you see, you know, in the coffee, tea break or something. Well, I knew the boys wouldn't do it but I pretended we had and, but it worked. And we had one scene on back projection which was a meeting, a meeting with chairs and every actor and actress had to bring in their own chair noiselessly and sit on it and having done the scene get up and carry its chair off.

[Laughter]

Without making a noise. I don't know how we did it. Anyway we did it in Studio D, it was John Robinson was the lead.

Oh dear.

And I've made a note of the lady.

Yes, 'A Dream of Treason'?

Yes, and what was it that...

'A Dream of', but you haven't named the author?

[Pause] No, I haven't named the author who I will remember but the actress was...

Jill Bennett?

Jill Bennett. She was the juvenile lead.

[25:00]

But, [Pause] the actor...

John Robinson.

John Robinson.

John Robinson, did he dry on you because he was fatal for drying up.

Not that I remember on that.

Was he?

Terribly tense he'd get.

Yes. No, as far as I remember we, we got through, we got through it. And Ian, Ian wrote to me afterwards and said it was a lot for a first. It was, but I mean being Ian you see [Laughter] you had to do it, you didn't, you weren't sloppy.

[Laughter]

I was trying to remember the author. He was a politician and, as well as writing plays. He died some years ago but after that show he gave a little party in the House of Commons for the knobs like Ian and John and the actors and I was invited, which was very nice and I bought a suit for that. And mind you I could actually at this stage go out and buy a suit. And ladies wore hats for the House of Commons, only 1955 remember.

Yes.

We haven't got very far.

[Laughter]

And I had a little hat and I had a nice suit and that was all very jolly. And then I went to work for [Pause] a theatre producer and I hope his name will come back.

Still the same job?

Still the same job. Very quickly after that. I mean I really should have had about a month off but, you know, it was the following week. He was tall and he was lame and he was theatre, [Pause] and I hope his name will come to me. And we did a T S Eliot. We did a T S Eliot and this was Nineteen...

Fifty?

Fifty-five. So we could easily look it up, if I can I'll find out how to do that. In fact if you could remind me afterwards I can go somewhere and look up all these because there must be a chronological list and I could give you the, the fill ins of the producers. And that's 194..., 1955.

Fifty-five, yes.

Was a heatwave year.

Yes.

Gosh.

And I was living in a tiny little top floor bedsitter, you know, without a fridge, still only 1955, I'd no fridge. And you bought milk every day and threw it away, that sort of thing and it was...

You could buy half pints then.

You could buy, and you could buy them from a machine.

[Laughter]

Too, '55 did the T S Eliot. Then a nice man called, a Scotsman came down, Scotsman from the theatre, young came down and we did a Scots play, a very strange piece that was.

Ah, ha.

And he was a very nice man, I must look him up. Now '55, '55, Barbara Burnham, I worked with Barbara Burnham. [Pause] Fifty-five...

And you ran a production secretaries course in November '55?

I did. Miss Leonard asked me to do that for a week. I quite enjoyed that, in fact I enjoyed it very much.

Where was that?

And I'd never done it before.

Was that at Lime Grove?

It was the first one to tell ordinary secretaries how to be television secretaries.
[Laughter]

Where was it?

It was in the Television Centre in, in a meeting room that they had by that time. And I'd never done it before so I took the stopwatch home with me over a weekend, you know, I wrote out all my notes and then I, I timed myself on each lecture to see how long I could talk. I felt can I make, I found I could talk and they seemed to enjoy it. And yes, I did that. And then in '56 Adrian Waller with, [Pause] with that. It was called *Nathaniel Titlark* and produced by Adrian Waller and the title role was played

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

by Bernard Miles, and as I remember it it was the famous Eileen Diss's first production.

Ah, great. Very nice.

And I went in the studio and I thought what a pretty set because she'd done it all in colour. You know, we didn't actually use a colour much before that.

Yes.

Because it was black and white.

No. It would all have been in grey?

So that as the day, as, as the shades were right.

Yes.

And you didn't have bright white, and you didn't have dead black it didn't really matter. But she, she came in all fresh and new, and a very pretty girl.

Yes.

I remember, still is.

Absolutely.

[30:00]

Still is and she did this pretty set. I remember Roy Oxley, do you remember Roy Oxley?

Yes, yes.

He was on a bordering age to remember, he said to me 'She's very pretty, I hope to God she can draw'.

[Laughter]

But she could draw alright. And I'll, I'll let you have that copy if I can have it back. That's 1956 by the way and the date is on it. It's from *The Sphere*, April the fourteenth 1956 describing how they did a television play. Bernard Miles was not an easy man.

No.

And Adrian Waller was not an easy man. The next thing I did with him, with Adrian Waller was with, with Donald Woolford [ph 30:48] who was not an easy man, so I'll tell you a few stories about that. Anyway, [Laughter] we did *Nathaniel Titlark* and Bernard Miles didn't believe in read throughs and didn't want one and he mumbled

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

his way all the way through it and wouldn't, wouldn't do it properly. Now there were six of those as I remember.

Yes.

And we used to in those days all do the cameras and script together, you know.

Yes.

We would, in fact I mean production assistants now probably do the same.

Where were you rehearsing then at that time?

A club, boys' club somewhere probably.

Yes, near Shepherd's Bush?

Probably Sunbridge [ph 31:30]?

I don't remember, I don't remember.

No.

No.

When we get to Donald Wolfit that was Holloway.

Oh.

And that was a very long way to go.

Yes.

Holloway. Anyway that I only remember as being long hours and late and difficult because the, the lead and the producer were both difficult. A very nice man but you see there you are and there we were. So 1956, if I was with Adrian then I would have, it must still be 1956 and did the Donald Wolfit at Holloway. It could have been a year later but it was...

Yes.

It was a, it was mid '50s. And Bernard Miles, it was a play from the theatre called *The Strong are Lonely*, Bernard Miles and his cast, when we used to bring up plays and do them in the, in the studio. Well, there and we'd, we were in the second or third week of rehearsal. Norman Rutherford, at this time I think was Acting Head of Drama, you know, he did about a year.

Yes.

It was before Sydney. When did Sydney come?

Sydney Newman?

Sixty-three.

Sydney Newman you mean?

Yes. He came in, in, in '63 didn't he? Yes. Well, it was, it was before that so perhaps we're in to the '60s. [Pause] Perhaps we're in to the '60s. What is the date on this, Titlark thing? That's '56.

Fifty-six.

However if I may just jump just for this play. Donald Wolfitt was the lead and we're in about, we're in the rehearsal room and he has a great walk up from the front of the stage as it were up to the top where he turns. And he said to me, because he couldn't see a camera as he walked up the stage he said 'Is the camera on me'? And I waited for Adrian because I mean I could see there wasn't a camera...

Yes.

You know, if the camera was taking his back view? And Adrian Waller said 'For the purpose of this shot the back of his head is as good as the front', and he heard it because I think Adrian had got his finger on the key.

[Laughter] Oh heck.

And the great man, because you see what, what he should have said, he said 'I'm just going to come on your turn and get a close up', you see but he didn't, he didn't. And the great man put the script down very carefully on the table and turned and said 'I am afraid I cannot go on'. And there we were at the Holloway Road about four o'clock and I'd broke them for tea, what else could you do? So we broke for tea and Norman came up, I seem to remember. Now how he came up and how he got there in the time, [Laughter] from Shepherd's Bush to Holloway Road God knows.

Norman Rutherford?

Yes, and it was all smoothed over anyway.

Good.

And, but, you know, it was tricky and there was a deadly hush, you know, and all that sort of...

[35:00]

But it was alright on the night as they say?

It was alright on the night, it was alright on the night. Anyway '56, [Pause] '56..

Well, '56/'57?

Fifty-six/fifty-seven, coming up to the Stuart Burge days, lovely man. I did quite a lot with Stuart.

We haven't come to 'Z Cars' yet have we?

No, I haven't come to *Z Cars*. Stuart Burge, *The Dark Is Light Enough* with Edith Evans we did which was very nice. I was working with, with the people they called 'the greats' is, always is unless it's somebody, say, like Woolford [ph 35:30] or Miles but when you get to the, the stage of Edith Evans, I mean you can be yourself and do what you like and people are nice to you. And she said 'Do you know my dear', she said 'I got out of my taxi this morning and the driver called me "Edith"'.

[Laughter]

We all went 'ooh'.

She was nice to work with,

Oh yes.

And we're still at Lime Grove the actual production?

No.

Have we moved to Television Centre?

We had moved to Television Centre...

Ah.

For now, now *Nathaniel Titlark* was in Lime Grove.

Yes.

Mm, [Pause] Bernard Miles was in Lime Grove. *A Dream of Treason* was in Lime Grove, '56/'57. We were definitely in The Centre in '58. Now where were we in '57? We were in The Centre in '57 don't you think?

I think probably, yes.

I think we were. Possibly '56 but I don't remember, [Pause] '56. Chloe Gibson I worked for in '56 and Barbara Burnham again. Fifty-seven Andrew Osborne I worked for in '57 and that was always great fun.

Gil Calder or was he later? ?

Gil Calder in...

Not much later surely?

Not much later. A drama documentary about alcohol, Philip Latham played the lead.

Yes, well, yes, he talked about it.

You remember, remember that?

The one written by Duncan...

That could have been '57.

Was that written by Duncan Ross, written by Duncan Ross?

No, I don't think so.

Colin Morris?

Oh yes, probably because he did a lot.

Yes, with Gil, yes.

Colin Morris, Gil. Fifty-seven and I know we were then doing a play about Cyprus.

Yes.

Yes, he mentioned that.

'Incident At Echo Six'.

'Incident' was it?

Yes.

Was it?

Yes.

Yes. And Troy Kennedy Martin?

Yes.

Yes.

He wrote it.

Troy Kennedy Martin, yes. Coming up you see to become *Z Cars*. Drama documentaries. Elwyn Jones was at this time doing documentaries, in charge of them.

And he began 'Z Cars'?

He came...

He moved to 'Z Cars' didn't he Elwyn?

Well, he became head of series. He came in 1955 as organiser.

Yes.

And then became, ran the documentaries and then when, he became head of series.

Yes.

He became head of series until Nineteen..., the end of '64. He went the same time as Milne. No, not Milne, mm, Baverstock, the same time. He went whenever that was he went the same time as Baverstock. So '57/58 Stuart Burge and Edith Evans, and Stuart Burge, *The Voice Of The Turtle*.

Alvin Rakoff, or are we too early?

Now Alvin Rakoff at about that time, [Pause] a single hander with Alan, [Pause] not Alan MacNaughton, Alan, the other Alan, that will come to me. A wonderful single hander about a man who's having a, a drunken weekend, a very, very good play that Al produced. Fifty-eight, no, '58 I went on the directors' course which was at Marylebone Road.

Fifty-nine you say here?

No, I was wrong.

Oh, '58.

Fifty-eight was the directors' course. And I followed that with a short series at some point '58 or '59 in Birmingham.

As a director?

As a director, yes. And then in '59 I did a thing for Elwyn which was called *The Case Before You*. And David Wilmot who'd been...

Yes.

My AFM, he also did, we did it between us in 1959. So that, that was very, very exciting year. I also what was very exciting was doing a big thing with Gil called *Who Me?*

[40:12]

Yes, *'Who Me'*, yes.

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

Which for years became a training exercise film for the police. And I mean up to, I can remember up to 1976 they used to watch it and there was some funny clause of ours that it couldn't be sent to them it had to be taken, and I, I had to take it once and I took it up to Preston where there's a training school, you know, to be in charge of it. And so there I was and it was the only time in my life when about two hundred policemen have stood up for me, because they were standing up for their commanding officers.

[Laughter]

And they, and we came in and on to the platform and they all stood up, I thought my God. And I thought I hope they don't ask me questions, which they did and I tried to answer as best I could, although that was nice. So we took it, we took it, and it was so well thought of. It would look old-fashioned now but my goodness it was good and it was great to work on, it was great to work on. And of course, I was on the floor for that you see, I was on the floor for all of Gil's. We, we got on very well. Fifty-nine. Then '60 I remember I did a schools documentary and I did something about Robert Ross, a drama documentary on Robert Ross who discovered the cause of malaria by injecting himself. It took place in India and Television Centre.

You mean you went on location?

No, no.

[Laughter] Hard luck.

I mean India, India, yes.

What, what, was your job now, same?

Directing.

You're now a director?

I directed... Well, no we never became directors unless we left.

Oh yes.

I was going to keep this bit till later on.

Sorry, yes, please.

But I'll explain now. You, if you were, say, a PA as we were called.

Yes.

Production manager, and you were given all these opportunities you then had to decide whether you were going to stay as a PA or whether you were going to leave and be, because they, even then they were not putting directors on the staff. You see

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

what I mean? So if you wanted to direct and felt brave enough, felt you'd had enough experience you then had to cut adrift.

Yes.

And, and hope to be employed you see. But this, this crunch didn't come till later on but I am doing it up and down at the moment. And certainly in, in 1960 because I think I did both those things in 1960, 1960. I enjoyed that very much, loved working

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 1 Side B

with actors, loved working with actors. Because in retirement when people say 'Do you miss it'? I said 'I only miss the actors'.

[Laughter]

And I miss rehearsals because I loved rehearsals. I once said I wish we could always rehearse and never do it. *[Laughter]*

[Laughter]

Sixty-one, *[Pause]* '61? I cannot remember much about '61 really except that I, I had home problems because my father had had a stroke so I was to-ing and fro-ing from Belfast.

Sure.

Between '61 and '63 I was to-ing and fro-ing quite a lot but I still did some direction. And in '62 that was a big *Maigret* year, and I remember it well because we were abroad so much, I was either flying to Belfast or I was flying to Paris. *[Laughter]* And we, I did *Maigret* from March of '62 till October. One with Andrew directing, one with Terry Williams and one with John Elliot directing. Oh, and I did, I did a couple of John Elliot's documentaries which I did in round about 1958 I worked with John Elliot. He did one about an orchestra travelling about, you know.

Yes.

An orchestra on tour, and I enjoyed that very much because John knew what he wanted.

Yes.

You know, and it was very good. So '62 was *Maigret* and nothing else and, and was, was very enjoyable. 1963, oh 1962 to '63 was the second bad winter.

Yes.

The previous one having been at Alexandra Palace. And I remember I, I did a show as PA floor manager, Television Centre which had one set and it was very cold and I got a bad cold and it turned in to bronchitis and I for the first time in my life I was quite ill so I was away. *[Laughter]* That's what I remember in this terrible weather and I had this enormous, by this time this enormous bedsitter that was thirty-six feet long.

[Laughter]

And had three French windows. Thirty-six feet long and twenty-two feet wide and one gas fire and an Aladdin stove...

[End of Tape 1 Side B 46:06]

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

Tape 2 Side A.

Side Three.

Winter '62/3 is it?

Winter '62/3. The worst winter since 1946/47 when the ice didn't melt, do you remember?

Yes.

It didn't snow again much but the ice did not melt and the roads were very, very difficult. And a lady who lived in the same place as I did had a large dog and she could hardly take it out for a walk because it took her and they slid together all over the road. Anyway I was in bed with bronchitis in this room of thirty-six feet long with a gas fire and an Aladdin stove and a little kitchen with a glass roof, and the workmen next door dropped a ladder which broke my glass roof and also the waste pipe of the flat of the man above, so that when he pulled the plug out of his sink the water poured in to my flat.

Oh.

And there was I with my bronchitis and my Aladdin stove. Anyway I recovered from all these troubles and went back to work [Laughter] and was working I think with Al again.

Al Rakoff?

Rakoff, yes.

Yes. Which was very enjoyable. Al knew exactly what he wanted and he was very nice about it, you know, and you felt you knew where you were with Al. Sixty-three...

Three?

Three, [Pause] Sixty... What happened in the summer of '63 I cannot remember. My father died in, in March of '63 and then I cannot remember what I was working on. But they were doing *Moonstrike*. Do you remember *Moonstrike*? Produced by Gerry Glaister, and I was offered a *Moonstrike*, which was by that time Gerry had gone on to something else and it was David Goddard was producer and I did one for David Goddard.

As a director?

A director, yes. And I remember very clearly one night's filming which was a night of really terrible trepidation that on the recce I followed, on, on the recce, it should have been a bad omen to me for the filming, [Laughter] I didn't realise, it probably was a bad omen we came across two lorries which had collided and the driver of one of them was sitting weakly by the road, and I can't remember what we did but we were a bit, we were proper people and we did something about it. I then came on a lorry which had knocked down a little boy who was lying in the middle of the road, and that was very unpleasant. And on the night of the filming Tubby, dear Tubby Englander was the cameraman, which was very nice. And we had a lovely moonlight night and we were on the canal near Harefield where we always used to go when it was meant to be Free French and the canal you see we went there.

The catering wagon was late, the coach had some sort of accident or just delay. We did the filming, a nei..., we weren't making a lot of noise because when it's under cover at night the Free French you didn't make a noise you see it wasn't noisy filming but he came out on to the canal and said 'Who's in charge here'? I think it was the lights, and I said 'I am' and there was a to-do and everything else. So we had, we got all that fixed up and we carried on. And there was a thunderstorm but we weren't rained off, but when I got home at three in the morning I found a note from the housekeeper of the flats where I lived saying 'Dot and I have done what we could', Dot was her friend, a dear old lady downstairs. And I opened the door and they had been mending the, my ceiling which was about to come down, they were giving me a new ceiling in this thirty-six foot long room you see. And they had put, the fools had put the rubbish out on the balcony at the front, which had actually brought down part of the balcony, and they had brushed the rest out of my back door which was on the first floor on to a flat roof and all the water in the thunderstorm had come in and it had flooded the end of the room.

Oh dear.

And it had also broken part of the balcony, and this is what I came back to after night filming, so I, I'll never forget that night. And the filming looked quite nice after all that I must say.

And a good, a good programme?

In *The Moonstrike*, they don't remember *Moonstrike*. Well...

I can remember the title.

Yes, and no. It was sort of alright, you know. I don't think mine was by any means the best but it was enjoyable. And then 1961... No, we're 1963 aren't we?

Yes, yes.

[05:00]

1964, [Pause] I know what I did at the end of it and I cannot remember what I did at the beginning of it.

Never mind, what was the end of it?

The end of it I did a Kipling because we were doing Kipling and I was given a Kipling which was nice.

Still as director?

As a director, yes. But I hadn't done anything between Kipling and as far as I remember. We did a series that was initiated by Elwyn which was called *Storyboard*, which were some very quick stories. And I mean they're quick, quick in operation, quick in execution and we did them very fast.

They're what, sort of thirty minutes?

No, they were longer.

Were they?

I think they're fifty minutes and they were very fast and they were a lot of work, *Storyboard* that was.

Yes.

And also in that I remember, I know I don't remember what I was doing because I was moving, buying a house for the first time in my life and all that, you know, a first time buyer has a lot of problems and things. And, but I do remember Kipling. And then '65 France again. We were doing a *Sherlock Holmes* and I was PA-ing this and it had a...

And who was the producer on, producer and/or director?

The producer was, the director was Sean Sutton.

Ah, ha.

And the producer might have been David Goddard might it? Sean Sutton. And this particular one had a scene taking place in Switzerland, and we had a bit of money because we were conscious of money by this time and I said to Brian Batchelor who was the organiser, you know, could we do this, if I could find something in the north of France could we do it? So I was allowed to go on a recce to the north of France to be Switzerland, found it. Simon Langton was my AFM, who became a director as you know and a film director, and we went and we did our filming in the north of France. And it was, it was a delightful episode, everybody was, was, you know, it just worked, it just worked. We went early in the year before tourists and we went, you know, quite close to the coast and I did what we'd done on *Maigret*, we flew from Lydd to Le Touquet, which you can't now.

No.

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 2 Side A

Because I, I rang up to see, I thought it would be quite nice to go to Le Touquet and they don't run that service, but we did that on *Maigret*, we flew to Le Touquet and flew the cars and it was very quick.

Yes.

And found locations and it was no bother and the French were charming and the food was good, and there they were, there we were. So that was *Sherlock Holmes* and that took me through the spring of 1965 was when I moved in to my house so I remember that. Then I worked with Terry Williams who was directing on [Pause] it wasn't a country, a country policeman but it was a series that involved a country policeman and it was a well known, the story teller.

Yes.

You know, the author was, was well known for the series, I'll have to look that up. Could you, could you...?

Do you want to stop?

No, yes. Well, I've moved in to my house.

Yes.

I'm with Terry Williams. I then remember well we were starting *Softly, Softly*. Now I've remembered what I did in '63 I did *Z Cars*, that's right. In 1963 after the summer, September for three months I did *Z Cars*.

Enjoy it?

Oh very much. I liked the floor work on *Z Cars* very much. Sixty-three, Sixty-four. Now yes '65 I worked on the first *Softly* with Sean Sutton as director. Cathy Mellor as his production lady and we went to Bristol and set up the first episode. And I was on *Softly* for quite a lot of that year, '65.

And you liked it, you enjoyed that?

Yes, I enjoyed the police things and I enjoyed working with the police. I still do because I'm in, I'm a Neighbourhood Watch area co-ordinator. Sixty-five, Sixty-six I did a play for some reason. I think I said to the organiser 'Could I do a play'? And they said 'Well, alright if you insist', with Gareth Davies and the lead David Langton I remember. Sixty-six, that was. Now '66 I did three *Finlay's*.

[10:18]

Ah, ha.

Did you?

In Scotland.

Of course.

And filming in Scotland for all three. Joan Craft directed one, Terry Williams directed one and Ian MacNaughton directed one. And at this time my office was in The Langham, for some reason they needed us to move out and we had splendid big offices up in town. Royston Morley was producing and I worked with these three directors and we did three weeks filming, a week for each director.

Yes.

Wonderful weather, August, August in Scotland, hardly a drop of rain. Long evenings, lot of...

The transmissions were from the Television Centre presumably?

Oh yes.

Not from Scotland?

No, no, it was...

From London?

It was London.

Yes.

It was London.

Yes.

And we had these three weeks of filming and wonderful weather, and my first visit to Scotland.

Oh.

And so that would have taken me through, right through the autumn, right through the autumn. We were rehearsing at that time in the Brompton Road, a hall by Brompton Oratory, presumably their church hall.

I should think so probably.

And there was a Scotsman who played the bagpipes there. I suppose that was rather fitting as it was *Finlay's Casebook* but he had to be asked to stop when we were rehearsing and of course, it was my job you see as the PA.

To stop him, yes.

And he was Pipe Major MacDonald I think or MacGregor, I say you know...

A pipe major

And this is Nine...

You weren't directing, you were PA?

I was PA-ing on this.

You're not directing?

No, I wasn't directing on this. I don't think I did any more after Kipling because at that point...

Directing you mean?

Directing. Because at that point I would have had to decide...

Yes.

And I'd just bought a house and I thought...

You played safe?

Well, I played safe, which I think was quite a good idea as far as I was concerned because some of the names I know, you know, you don't see them so often.

No.

And I haven't, it's not really, you know, I like to know what, what I was doing and when I was doing it. [Laughter] So '66 that was *Finlay*. Sixty-seven, Sixty-eight I think John Elliot again. Have I made a note, no?

No.

No, '67/68. I remember not much of that until '69 which I remember '69 to '72 very well indeed. [Laughter] Because I worked on the first co-production that The BBC undertook for television.

Oh.

Alan Bromley started it off called *Paul Temple* and it was how many episodes?

Co-production with whom?

With Munich, a firm...

Drideutcherwilplunk [ph 13:36]?

No, no. With...

Oh Reiner...? .

With a firm in Munich.

Oh Reiner Moritz?

No, it wasn't Reiner Motitz. The man who, who ran it as far as we were concerned was Niels Neilson [ph 13:42] who was very good indeed, a very good and clever man. Anyway Alan Bromley started it and went on with it to about November, October/November, when they decided to bring in Derek Sherwin and Peter Bryant from Serials who were working together because it, they seemed to feel that it hadn't got the correct tone or something. Anyway Derek and Peter came and they changed the format and the opening and we went on until 1971. And it, it was very, very interesting because it, it was arranged that there should be for the foreign episodes a well known actor or star from the country it was going to be sold in., there was, you know, it was going to be sold all round.

Yes.

But each of those countries would, would have its star, and the filming was to be, you know, in that country. So this was something that hadn't been done before, not on that scale. I mean *Maigret* wasn't like that at all.

No.

Because we just worked through the BBC Paris office.

Yes.

[15:00]

And for advice, and we had never gone in to these realms and it was a great experiment. And I was what was, I was still called a PA but we hadn't yet got to be Production Unit Managers but that was really the job I was doing, but I had to PA as well at the beginning. I had to go and go filming on, on a couple of them and it was an eye opener because you see they didn't think much of the way we worked and they were quite right.

Really?

I mean by their standards, by their standards we were inefficient. Oh yes, you know, and...

So you learned something?

And I mean somebody made a mistake in their continuity, you know, which would not have happened if, if it had been a proper film, because they were expecting feature film expertise and they hadn't got it.

They were a film company?

Oh yes, yes.

Not television I mean?

No, they were film. And they expected, they expected feature film performance but they didn't get it, they just didn't get it because we weren't trained to do it.

No.

Anyway they, they did find always an excellent location manager for each country because they knew them who at least got the locations and did the, all that. Because in the first two, I did the first two and it was, it was very difficult for me. I mean I just had to go to Holland and Belgium and, and flounder about to find what they wanted and I had no contacts, you know, nothing.

No.

So it all became very successful and in their mind it was very nice and it all improved I think in their standards, and we made I think fifty-two of them. We made them every ten days on the old ten day strike pattern, and that was quite hard work, you know, it really was. And we did batches of filming and we went to Holland, Belgium, France, Italy.

With a BBC crew or local crew?

Oh the BBC crew, Tubby Englander was doing a lot of it.

Oh he, Tubby you were saying was the cameraman. Who was the film editor do you remember?

Yes, Chris, Chris was a very nice boy, Chris trained by Sheila Tomlinson, Chris...

Yes.

Very good he was, very good and very nice. [Laughter] He didn't get upset about having too much to cut, you know, or, you know, he was, he was marvellous, had very good assistant too. And that went on through from 1969/70 through '70 in to '71. So in fact it was from about June 1969 to about June 1971 that we did it. We must have had a holiday for the actors.

Yes.

But we were working all the rest of that time.

You mentioned Michael Elliott, have you come to him yet?

I've passed him.

Oh you haven't mentioned him?

Well I...

You mention him in your notes but....

I haven't, I, yes. Michael Elliott about 1958.

Ah.

And Joan Craft was my AFM. It could have been a bit earlier, it could have been a bit earlier than '58 but not later than '58. He produced an adaptation of a D H Lawrence, he directed an adaptation of a D H Lawrence and we rehearsed in the Holloway Road again.

[Laughter]

I remember Joan Craft was my assistant.

Yes.

She later became a director and a producer.

Yes. You say, sorry?

And she's still with us.

You say in 1972, which is the next year I think, made a PUM, well a P.U.M?

Oh yes, yes, we were...

In '72?

We were sort of recognised by then for the job I'd been doing for some time which was Production Unit Manager, which was organising and doing the money.

Does that mean you weren't necessarily in the studio or on a film location or...?

Well, I was wherever...

Or you might be?

I felt I was needed. I was always in the studio and frequently on location.

Unit Manager anyway?

Yes.

PUM?

A PUM.

Yes.

Production Unit Manager 1972. 1972, now that, on that year they suddenly sort of ran out of programmes.

Oh.

And I had a gap in 1972 of about two months and I was asked where I'd like, I was given a choice so I went up to the Location Office run by Jenny Betts and I worked up there. And I had an interesting job, interesting, not always terribly pleasant, going round people, mainly factories who'd complained, you know, that they hadn't been paid or that we'd left our rubbish, you know, and I, I got a suit for that.

[20:00]

[Laughter]

And it was quite a nice, what Jill Pott called my admin suit.

Oh.

And I remember going to Walls ice-cream, oh dear. And, and various people who'd written in and they were very, very rarely Drama people.

Oh.

Who'd done it.

But it didn't matter, I mean you weren't just for Drama people?

Oh no, we were for everybody, the Location Office was for everybody.

For the whole of..., oh I see.

It was...

Anybody on location for whatever reason?

Yes, anybody, yes, they went through that office you see. And they, they'd forget to pay and they'd forget to say thank you and they'd leave their rubbish and you know...

[Laughter]

They'd do all the naughty things. So that, I did that for two months and '72/73, '73...

Back on drama?

Oh yes. Oh I was only up two months in the Location Office.

You're still a Unit Manager?

At some point, at some point I wrote a handbook. At some point I wrote a handbook and it was before Nineteen...

You say 1967 writing a PA guide?

Yes.

Is that it?

I did.

Sixty-seven?

Yes, yes, it was. Sorry I left it out. 1967 Andrew Osborne asked me to write, yes, asked me to write a handbook for Pas, who are now called Production Managers.

Yes.

And I had some days off for this and I sat at home and typed it on my portable. And I took it in to Andrew in, in what was then foolscap and he looked at it, he said 'Darling far too heavy', he said.

Yes.

When he'd read it he said 'Far too heavy', the file because it was this sheaf you see. So I took it home and what I did I divided all my foolscap sheets...

In half, yes.

In half and retyped it in to a tiny little book shape and he said 'Oh lovely darling, much better'.

[Laughter]

But it was the same?

And it was the same thing.

Good.

And there's a lesson there, you know, presentation is all, and if it looks heavy they don't want it. And I made it little and neat and he read it and said 'Very good, very good', and I got some money for that.

Yes. Where is it?

Now I don't know. Norman's got, got my books. *[Laughter]*

You say you got sixty pounds less tax.

Did I?

A bonus.

Of sixty?

Sixty pounds you say.

Did I?

Well, you've written it.

Oh, well, then I have because I kept all those.

Yes.

I kept all those because I thought it was interesting the amounts, how the amounts of money went up and the, perhaps I could, I could look at that later and record it. Sixty, yes, yes...

Sorry. Well, yes, we have mentioned it there's no need to say it again.

Yes, but there were some more.

Well, when...

Yes, we can read those. [Laughter]

Now '72/73, [Pause] '72, '70...

The next thing you've written down is grace leave in '75.

Yes. I went to Rhodesia while it was still Rhodesia and it was very good. I have no notes on, on productions in '72/73.

No, no, no.

[Pause] I went on the management course also in '75, July '75 I went on the management course at Uplands, which was very enjoyable indeed. And that was two weeks with a weekend at home in between. And on the weekend at home in between I was, I was writing. I'd been asked to do a short speech at the final and I was writing this short speech downstairs when there was the most terrible explosion upstairs like a bomb, and I went upstairs and part of the bedroom ceiling had fallen down and it was very inconvenient.

Oh dear.

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 2 Side A

Especially as I was going off in the morning early to, back to management college. However, we, you know, managed all that, mopped it up and left it till I came back sort of thing. And I, I gave the speech that I wrote under the explosion and that was very nice. And '75... Seventy-six I did quite a lot of *Sofllys* as, they are now called a Production Associate.

Yes, yes.

I'm now called a Production Associate.

From '75 onwards you say, yes?

Yes, I was, I was called....

Production Associate, you got a credit as that did you on the screen?

Yes, yes, I did.

Still Drama of course?

Yes, still the same department Drama Series.

Ah, ha.

Yes, and...

Who was, who was running it then, Sean? No.

No Sean was Plays. Andrew left in Seventy..., ah, '73/74 I know exactly what I was doing and it was wonderful and it was very hard work, and it was *The Fall of Eagles*.

[25:06]

Oh yes.

Stuart Burge directed it. And Andrew, Andrew was head of...

Series?

Series at the time. And *Fall of Eagles* was a kind of landmark because it, it, for anybody who's interested in history we were going back in history from 1848 to 1918 and there was a lot of reading to be done for all of us. And when you get to the 1890s, 1900s it's not within our living memory but certainly my parents' living memory it would have been and, and one is sort of joined on to it.

Yes.

You know, it, by the 1880s it means something and you're thinking oh my goodness, was that really happening, you know. And it took us through all the Russian bits and very enlightening about the relationship between the Kaiser and Queen Victoria,

because he liked his granny and he liked coming over but they, the rest of the family didn't like him much because he was so bumptious.

Who wrote those scripts or several...?

Well, John Elliott set them off.

Yes. He didn't write them all?

Trevor Griffiths wrote the one about the, the Lenin.

Oh yes, they were different authors.

Yes. We had different writers but John Elliott, it was John Elliott's overall...

Yes.

Editorship. Trevor Griffiths wrote the Communist, the Lenin and Trotsky ones and other writers wrote, wrote other episodes. And it was, it was great and the studio work was very heavy, it was very hard work. As I remember Pru FitzGerald had a job helping Stuart and I think she was called a co-ordinator. And yes, it was hard, hard work and it was worth every minute.

Good.

And it was, it was worth it, you know. It was like doing *Z Cars* on the floor or the first *Softly*. You know, it was, it was a different kind of hardness but it was, it was worth it. And then Andrew retired and in '74 Ronnie Marsh came across.

Oh yes.

And became head of series. And '74/75/76... Seventy-six I worked with Ray, an Australian director/producer.

Don't know him.

Yes.

Yes, you do.

Oh.

Ah, it will come to me. On a thing called *The Headmaster*, which was a very good short series of stories about a headmaster. Seventy-five... Seventy-six, in '77 I was given something that I thought might be quite nice, it was called Blake's Seven, and I thought oh good it's about seven people, so maybe it's only seven episodes, and it turned out to be three years hard labour.

Oh.

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 2 Side A

And it's a sort of science fiction. It, it was set out to be an adult *Dr Who* and in fact it, it, it gained a fan club.

Oh.

And it was amazing in America, and it was just the sort of thing that I would run a mile from because I didn't believe in it and I thought it was, you know. Anyway that was, that was very hard work and overspent in the first series.

Oh dear.

Because it had been budgeted on *Dr Who* but it was to be an adult *Dr Who* which always seemed to be more expensive if it was for grown ups. Anyway I was hauled over the coals for that. And we did better in the next two years, I, I'd composed different budget and made it better and I got it actually underspent at the end. And that took from 1977 to 1980 when I had a reprieve from this [Laughter] devil's island, and we were with Serials by then, we'd come down the road to, to Threshold and I was given *To Serve Them All My Days* which was the schools thing.

Yes.

Which was very successful and very enjoyable and produced by Ken Riddington. And Ken Riddington and I remembered that we had worked together in 1946, so we go back to 1946. Malcolm Baker-Smith had done a play called *Noé* about Noah by André Obey and we have an ark and we have animals and Ken Riddington was a very young actor and he played a wolf.

Oh.

So we meet again [Laughter] in 1980. There is the wolf and there is the little girl, that used to be a little girl at Alexandra Palace, and I'm his Production Associate and we do this very enjoyable, very good, well received *To Serve Them All My Days* on OB.

[30:09]

Mm, yes, ah.

OB and studio. Not film and studio, OB and studio and... .

Where, far away?

No. We did it in sort of Dorset, Dorset. I did a, I had to recce schools. It took me, I did a week in Devon because it's, it was based on a school in Devon, which unfortunately wasn't really suitable because you couldn't really get the cameras in to it properly, you know, it was that sort of thing, which was sad and we, we did a school in Dorset. And that took me to 1981. Eighty-two I did *Jury* with Colin Tucker, which was thirteen episodes. One, you know one for each juror.

Yes.

And one over.

Oh yes, yes, yes.

And that was beset by strikes. So it should all, all have been over by 1983 but it wasn't because we were struck on. It was, I think it was something to do with sets or studios and it ran on and it ran in to the beginning of my last thing I did which was the Jane Austen and I overlapped them.

Ah. Which Jane Austen?

Jane Austen was, ah, it wasn't *Northanger Abbey*. Say some Jane Austen, and it wasn't *Pride and Prejudice*.

No.

It was, it was...

I'll look in this.

I wouldn't, oh what was it? There you are you see, there they all are. I'll have to look it up and fill it in.

Not Middlemarch, no.

No.

It's not Jane Austen .

No.

Sorry.

Not Jane, no, no. Not *Emma*, not, perhaps, no I'll better...

Anyway it's Jane Austen?

Yes.

Who was the director?

David Giles.

Ah, ha.

David Giles. Imagine you see not, mind you it is nearly ten years.

Mm, yes.

And that was your year of retirement?

That was the year of retirement and....

And you've noted here your salary?

Yes.

From a hundred and eighty-seven pounds a year and then thirty-five years later was it?

Yes, thirty-eight years later.

Thirty-eight years later, sorry thirteen thousand?

Mm.

So you've jumped from a hundred and eighty-seven to thirteen thousand?

Yes.

You talked, sorry....

Yes, do.

I'm, I'm rambling a bit because now you've sort of chronologically come to the end of your professional career.

Yes.

You've told us the worst moment, you haven't told us the best one?

What the best? Well, there wasn't a, I thought, tried to think of a best but there, well, they were much the same bests.

Ah.

Which is when you've done a good job and somebody thanks you or the show is right, or you, you get a picture on the screen that you've planned if you're directing and it comes up even better than you thought it would, you know. Working on the floor as a floor manager there were some best moments there in teamwork in, when it was live, when, you know, you just didn't know whether you were going to get there or not, you know, physically. There were several best moments all sort of on the same level.

You mention one here the Canadian?

Oh the Canadian man, yes. I was doing an Al Rakoff wasn't I?

Yes.

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 2 Side A

And it was an interesting show and not difficult but pleasant. And I didn't know that there was possibly a friend of Al's who's Canadian in the gallery from CBC, [Laughter] and he came downstairs and said 'I'd trade you for any one of my floor managers at CBC'.

[Laughter]

A best moment.

Which was very nice when you're exhausted.

Yes.

So but I, I've often thought what would I do. You know, you say, to people 'What would you do'? I've a friend who said 'I would love now to have run an art gallery', having been in education all her life, you know.

Yes.

I can't think of anything else I would have done.

I was going to ask you of course, I mean I...

What would you rather have done?

Nothing. Sorry, that's not to do with me... [Laughter]

Well, I didn't know you see.

Yes, no, no.

I didn't know what I wanted in those days.

No.

But I followed my instinct when I first joined, which was an instinct, I hadn't worked anything out.

Yes, right.

And I was going to another country after all.

Yes.

Yes.

I hadn't worked out any sort of plan and thought I'm going to be a theatre director or I'm going to speak on the radio, not at all, I had no idea.

It was, you are consistent of course, it wasn't only television I mean after you left transcription but it was drama all the time?

Yes. Well I, yes I did like drama.

Drama/documentary occasionally but, you know....

Yes, yes, I did really...

Dramatisations or drama?

[35:00]

Yes.

Always.

Yes. I didn't actually, I, well I wasn't qualified to go in to music at all, like Yvonne.

No.

But the other departments didn't call me and I was alright where I was and I knew people and I felt, possibly felt I could contribute.

I mean who, who, who if you like gave you the most encouragement, you know, throughout your, your period in The BBC?

Well, there was nobody throughout.

No.

Because they changed. Could I just mention these names?

Yes, of people you wrote you, mm, down there?

Yes.

I'll read them to you if you like, would you...?

Oh it's alright, I've whizzed through. These bonuses one pound ten I got in 1952 less tax of seven shillings. July 1954...

What was that for - the bonus - do you remember?

I think I worked for two people at once.

Ah, ha, yes. [Laughter]

Which was quite difficult.

Yes, sure.

[Laughter] 1954 I got twenty-five pounds.

What was that for?

And, well, that was coming up to Fifty..., coming up to 1955, it would have been my ten year bonus.

Ah, ha. Ah ha.

And then I got a special award in 1962 from Stuart Hood signing a letter.

Ah, ha.

And I wrote the PA guides and got some money and a letter from Huw Wheldon.

Yes, yes.

And then I got a MP3 with a letter from Huw Wheldon, and then I got my twenty-five year bonus of two hundred and eighty-one pounds less tax with a letter from Charles Curran who was the man's name I couldn't remember.

The Director General?

Charles Curran.

DG?

Yes. And then I had my grace leave and then I, I didn't get any more bonuses I just did the work.

But these....

But I got the money.

Yes. You, they didn't, didn't come and give it to you personally?

No.

No.

No, it came through the...

The internal mail?

Yes.

Some people actually got to see people like Huw Wheldon.

Yes.

But I think, you know, it was nice to have the letter.

Yes, yes.

I've got the letters.

The other consistent thing is you always worked for The BBC, you never worked for an ITV company.

No.

Were you ever tempted to, I mean so many people did during that time?

No, I wasn't tempted to.

Never thought of it?

Well, I considered it. I mean at one, when I was working for David MacDonald in 1954 he said 'Oh you should be a continuity girl and you'll go all over the world'. Well, I wondered about that you see. Because he was at, when he left us he was doing a job for the Danzigers.

Yes.

Do you remember the Danzigers?

Yes, yes.

And it was at Elstree I think and...

They had special studios, yes.

And I, I was invited, invited up for two separate days to watch and I, I thought well, I don't know, it's dark and it's cold and she never stops writing. What impressed me so much was that she timed the intervals between the takes as well as the takes.

Gosh.

For money you see.

Yes, yes.

The time, why they had stopped for good reasons or for bad.

Yes.

And I thought well, you know, I think it's The BBC. And I don't think at any point... You see I grew up in my early days through the first depression and I can remember

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 2 Side A

the difficulties and I think unconsciously it went in to my mind. And although I was too young to take it in I think I knew that there was something about having a job that was very important.

So you stuck to it?

Mm, I stuck to it. [Laughter]

Right, you did the right thing.

And it was worth it, I would say it was worth it at the end. I mean when I say at the end, at the end of this tape I would say it was worth it for me, and it was very interesting to be the first woman to do a job like that. And very character building, you know, it makes you tough, it makes you tough.

Yes, talking on that. Did, did you find, you know, being a woman did have a disadvantage or did it have advantages?

Well, it's very difficult to say. Only in the way, only in the way of life there's an advantage and disadvantage.

Yes, yes.

For instance if you're a motorist, which I am, it is distinctly a disadvantage to be a woman.

Yes.

Except perhaps if you're trying to get in to slow traffic, not fast traffic, and you lean out and smile and, and say 'Please', a man will let you go. But I mean it's more often on a motorway you'll be cut up by a van driver. It's the same thing but you, you learn, you, you feel your way.

Yes.

And you know how to deal with people.

Yes, yes.

You know. And I wasn't going on the floor to a scene crew and telling them how to do it.

No, no, no, no.

No. PAs were all women, women anyway weren't they?

I would say 'Would you'?

Yes.

'Can you'?

Yes. PAs were all, are women anyway, still are largely aren't they?

Well, they've become. [Coughs] I've got your hay fever. Are we off?

No, no, no.

No.

Oh we're not? Oh I was going to look at my notes.

No, that's alright, no.

I won't for a moment. Mm, mm, well, it was difficult when at the first year really because people didn't believe that you could do it, because they had been officer class coming out of the, out of the services.

[40:09]

Ah, ha.

And to control a studio you had to be.

Yes.

But I mean I could, I could get a studio as quiet as anybody else in the end, you could hear a pin drop.

Yes, I'm sure.

But I always say it all broke up when they started recording.

Yes.

Because people didn't bother. If, if you drop a ladder well we'll do it again. It was, it was really...

It will cost a bit more money. [Laughter]

You know it's, it was sad to me to see it go, it was really sad to me.

Yes, which, you know, which brings, brings us round to another point which I think is an interesting point you've made about, you know, bringing recordings in, you know, has meant it's slackened everything off and you've described what it was like in the early days.

Yes.

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 2 Side A

With, with the great cables and things there. Have you noticed any other kind of changes at all?

As I watch now?

Yes.

Well it's incredible to me the technique. And when I watch an old, I watched the old *Z Cars* last week and I thought what a funny bumbling old thing it was.

[Laughter]

[Laughter]

And not very good.

Mm.

I, I'm just amazed at the techniques. I'm, I regret the time they take to do everything because I'm quite sure they could do it quicker and more cheaply but it... I, I applaud the technique but not everything else. The content definitely no.

[Laughter]

No.

No better you think?

No.

Worse in fact?

Well...

Yes.

You don't get so many good plays.

Well...

It, you know, it brings us on to a different subject altogether buying in and so on.

Well, not over reacting it's where do you get all the, you know, where can you get material now from? You know there's so much squirted out.

Mm, you've just got to get people to write it.

And what can you say that's not been said before?

Yes.

I mean it's all been done before, as people so often say.

Yes.

Are there any new ideas left?

Mm, I expect they will, they will find some.

Yes.

[Laughter] I think so.

But to, to me it was, it was, it was a career that I don't know that I deserved but I enjoyed.

I'm sure you did deserve it?

But I was only a little what, shorthand/typist at a hundred and eighty-seven a year.

[Laughter]

You know, two pounds eighteen and ten pence wouldn't buy a good jar of coffee.

[Laughter]

It is amazing. I mean it is the difference in salaries not only for women but for everybody.

Oh yes.

Oh of course.

And how we were recognised by, you see we were never recognised by Broadcasting House, we were rather looked down on, you know.

Yes.

And we thought they were uppity and we were sort of that trash up at the wireless.

Yes.

And I think some of them still think that we are a bit, you know.

Could be. [Laughter]

I think, I think I would have enjoyed staying in radio, I'm sure I would. When I, when I listen to radio now and the technique they've got and what they do I think if, if there hadn't been television I would equally have enjoyed a job in radio, but as what I don't know. I mean I might have been able in the early days to get in to script editing and

Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 2 Side A

things, or maybe as probably studio manager, I think I would have been liked to have been studio manager in sound had there not been television. But I think having got in there I would have stayed.

Yes.

I think it, it was a great firm. I don't know if it is now. But they were very kind. I, I got food parcels from America through them when I was off sick one year.

Good.

Do you remember food parcels?

No.

You never got a food parcel?

No.

I never got a food parcel, I know what they were.

You, you weren't as ill as I was then. [Laughter]

Yes, I remember, and I remember them, yes. I don't think, I don't think I got one.

They were very good, they were very good employers.

Yes, oh yes, I agree with you.

And I mean when my father had a stroke and was ill I was, I was off for a month there and there was no quibble and people were nice about it and I came back. So they were very good. Anyway thank you very much.

Thank you.

Thank you very much.

For allowing me to speak .

And you.

Thank you.

Very enjoyable.

[End of Tape 2 Side A 44:30]

Page/Time	Query

**Sheelagh Rees DRAFT.
Tape 2 Side A**

Tape 1 Side B		
28 01:00		'canny'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – uncertain context.
44	30:48	Donald 'Woolford'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – TV Director or Producer.
45 31:30		'Sunbridge'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Location in Shepherds Bush area.
47	35:30	'Woolford'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – TV Director or Producer.
Tape 2 Side A		
57	13:36	'Drideutcherwilplunk? Spelling/Doubtful Word – TV Company in Munich [Suggested].
58	13:42	'Neils Neilson'? Spelling/Doubtful Word – Munich TV Employee in Paul Temple series.