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BECTU History Project
Interview no: 384
Interviewee: Ann Meo
Interviewer:
Duration: 01:32:24

[00:00:00]
Recording of Ann Meo, approximately twenty-fifth of May, 1996 in France, talking about her days in television.

When I was in sound, in radio, I did a tremendous lot of editing and mucking about with tape and everything went round, either to left or to right on things that turned like wheels, and then as time went on…

Reel-to-reel.

No, but I mean the controls you used, you turned them in what was in fact a natural movement because everybody had screwed a bottle top on or done something like that, and then by degrees when television began to come in they started having things like this. And I just do not believe that you can get as sensitive a movement, whatever you're doing, going up and down a sloping board like that as you can when you open the old-fashioned pot, which you could do very, very delicately. And I used to say to these young chaps in television, 'I don't know how you can do it with those awful things you have to push up and down', and they used to look at me open-mouthed and say, 'Why, what used you to do?' And they literally didn't know, you know, that in the old days when you wanted things to be louder you turned it up to the right and when you wanted it softer you turned them down to the left.

That's the sort of stuff we want to hear about.

And then the other thing that astonished me was the first job I did for the BBC was to edit the entire recording of the Test Match at the Oval – well you're a cricket expert – what was the very famous Test Match in about the '46/47, something like that? With Hutton and…

Could it have been '53?

No, it was earlier than that. It was Hutton and Compton I think. Anyway, they had done this revolutionary thing for the BBC, they had recorded the whole match on steel tape, which was on reels about two feet across, huge things. And the only way you could edit it was with an acetylene welder. [laughter] And I was shut up for weeks at Maida Vale editing this enormous five – what was it – five days of cricket on these terrible reels and they used to fall off the reels occasionally and you'd get miles and miles in a terrible… clanking tin tape and I suppose ought not to say it, but there was a terrible man who was the technician, I won't say his name, but he would have been had up for sexual harassment, as they say now. I didn't care, but oh, he was a nuisance. And I had these two huge machines and every time I wanted a bit I used to say to him, 'Stop it there, now play it back, now cut it there and join it up'. And he used to get a thing like a pair of pliers, chop it in half and put it on the welding thing, *zzz*, *zzz*, and join it together. [laughter] And all those things are now sitting on terrible old vinyl recordings somewhere in the archives and I hope I made the right decisions, but I don't think I missed any of the real high points. But a more extravagant way of trying to create an archive, I can't imagine.

So what sort of speed would those tapes go through, these great metal things?

Very slowly. I don't remember what they were classed at, but they must have been something less than thirty… they went round slower than thirty-three and a third.

Mm. Imagine they were fifteen or something.

Those huge discs that were made for, what was it called? The Transcription Service, you know, the things that were sent abroad. But it was all very unhandy.

How did you get into television in the first place?

By accident, like everything else. I went to see Mrs Carrington, I think even by marriage no relation to Dora Carrington, but she was the appointments officer of the University of London and I happened to discover that they had bought a house in Gordon Square which

used to belong to Adrian Stephen and I was down there and I thought, oh good gracious, they must be, those offices must be in the bedroom where I used to stay when I went to stay with Judith. And just for a joke when I discovered Mrs Carrington was in one of them, I went in to see her and I said to her, 'Your office is in my bedroom' and she said, 'What do you mean?' and we had a bit of a chat. And I said, 'And in any case, I need a job'. And she said, 'Oh do you? Yes' she said, 'of course the trouble with you is you'd be an ideal employee but you don't look well on paper'.

[04:57]

And I said, 'No, I know I don't. Anyway, never mind, I'm going to go off to do…' whatever I was going to do, and five minutes after I left the office she had a call from the Encyclopaedia Britannica who were looking for somebody who might be able to write quiz questions, because the television industry had been told after the Carl [Charles] Van Doren scandal that no longer should quiz questions be written in the house, they must be done by a respectable exterior body, and they'd asked the Encyclopaedia Britannica to do it, who of course had grabbed at it and said yes and hadn't got anybody to do it, or at least they had, but, you know, nobody who had the right qualifications. And so I went down to see the Encyclopaedia Britannica and found this amazing sort of amateurish cock-up going on [laughter] and there was a very, very shrewd managing director, who said, 'Yes, I think you're just the person we want' and within about twenty-four hours I was installed in an office and told to write quiz questions. [laughter] Oh! There was a frightfully nice boy called Francis Celoria doing it and he'd been the archaeology editor – why they chose him, God knows – he'd been the archaeology editor of the Encyclopaedia Britannica and he'd just been fired into this seat, you do the quiz questions. And he was a terribly nice, terribly intelligent boy but he had no more idea of what he was doing than fly to the moon, and he was fearfully nervous, he was always clutching his fly buttons. [laughter] Anyway, poor boy, I hadn't been in the office more than about three weeks when this managing director called me into his office and said, 'Listen, I'm going to give you Francis Celoria's job, but he's a very nice boy and I'm going to move him sideways and I don't want to hurt his feelings and we must do it so that he's got a move up', etc, etc. So we went through this farce and Francis was sent to tell me, 'I've got a wonderful new job, they're talking me off this television quiz business', etc, etc. So I said, 'Oh, how marvellous, that is good news', you know. And actually everything worked out alright because then Francis left the Encyclopaedia Britannica and went back to archaeology and finished up, I think, what do they call it, you know, the boss boy at the London, you know,

the Museum of London in the Barbican, where he probably still is, I should think. No, not quite, I should think he must have retired. But anyhow, so there I was in this large horrible office in Victoria.

What year was this, Ann?

Oh God. It must have been about 1958 because the first thing I did, or sort of noticeable thing, was – wait a minute – no, yes it must have been about then because there was the thing called *The 64,000 Question*, which was 64,000 halfpennies or something, which was pinched from the American show on which there'd been all the trouble. And that show folded and Hughie Green, who'd been doing *Double Your Money* as a sound show for Radio Luxembourg I think, got to do it as a television thing for Rediffusion…

This is Associated Rediffusion?

Yes. In the old Air Ministry building in Kingsway. And that was '58 which was, was it the start of commercial television, roughly speaking in '58?

Commercial television actually started in '55 I think.

Did it?

Yeah.

Well, what was it… colour?

No, it was black and white. Colour came in about 1960.

It was very early in that thing and there was the Hughie Green show, which then was *Double Your Money*, and at the same time there was that chap who did the one called *Take Your Pick* – what was his name? Where you…

Michael…

Michael Miles, that's right. Where you could win either £1,000 or a kipper, you never knew what was in the box. [laughter] It was quite amusing, but gosh, he was a potato-faced idiot. And Hughie Green was pretty dreadful because of course he didn't want to have questions imposed on him by the Encyclopaedia Britannica and when I turned up in place of Francis Celoria he nearly had a fit, because of course Francis Celoria was so petrified, because he never said anything but, 'Oh yes, Mr Green. I'll do my best Mr Green'. And then couldn't do it and I turned up, and I mean he didn't know what I was going to do, but you can imagine, if you know anything about Hughie Green, to be confronted with somebody like me as I was at that age, he thought who is this, why have they sent this bloody upper class intellectual git! [laughter] And it was the most amazing warfare for about six weeks, and he was always finding fault.
[10:11]
And I remember once, I had to write a set of questions on the Bible and at the beginning of the question sheet there always had to be a silly question which was a pun, with which the contestant supposedly won a pound. And Green was supposed to write them or they were supposed to be sent in by the public, and they were never there, so in the end I took to writing them and in the end I got rather good at it and they admitted, you know, that it was all alright. Anyhow, this was in the rather early days. I made a joke at the beginning of the Bible questions which was quite simply, 'Were Job's comforters made of wool?', ha ha, you've won a pound and the show is started. Well of course Green, because he was looking for trouble with me, 'How dare you make a joke about the Bible?' And I said, 'Well goodness, we always have a joke at the beginning and it's perfectly harmless'. Oh no, no, no, and he complained and oh… [sighs].

Were these early programmes, were they pre-recorded or would you go out live?

They were filmed.

They were filmed?

They were done on film, yes.

Done on actual live [incomp – 11:20]?

Oh God, it was perfectly dreadful, yes, because you can imagine the problems it presented doing rapid editing and everything.

Mm. And so you probably, yes, they probably came out two or three days later, something like that.

Oh yeah…

Did you build up a…

No, we did them weekly and I can't remember what we did, we recorded them on a Thursday, and I can't remember what day they went out on, but it was always a fight to get it done, you know, without cuts and without stopping because of the problems of editing and getting it going. We used to do it all out at Wembley and it was a nightmare because it was an awful journey and I can't remember which… one year we had a frightful fog and I had to walk, the tube went wrong or something and I had to walk about four miles in the fog in order to get to the studio in time with the questions for the show, and that was one of the rare occasions on which they did say good God, well you know, she's to be trusted, not many people would have walked four miles in this pitch dark fog just in order to be there at the right time. But…

Was it an original British invention, Double Your Money*, or was that…*

I think, Hughie, I think thought it up himself.

Did he really?

Because after all you see, he'd had all that trouble with Carroll Levis doing his… so he'd been doing sort of shows for ages and he'd been in the business since he was sixteen.

Opportunity Knocks*, was that…*

Op Knocks too, yes. But he didn't start that until a bit later, I don't think.

Later was it?

Yes, yes.

I see.

Because, no, the real trouble with all that stuff out at Wembley was that we were still in the clutches of the awful union problems and it was unbelievable because of course theoretically I should have been a union member.

To Equity?

Well, of something.

Or ACT?

Anybody, to get on to the site. And I can't remember how I got away with it, but for ages and ages I wasn't. And…

Because it wasn't as if there weren't other sort of parlour games and…

No, but there was nobody else who could write the questions. At least do it properly, yes, really. But we used to have terrible problems out at Wembley because we had an actual stage in the studio, it wasn't very high but it was about six foot high, and Green used to play right down to the front, you know, right into the footlights if there had been any, and we had a woman who was a bit infirm and Hughie shouted to somebody to bring on a chair for her and the first trouble was, who was to bring the chair on, because it ought to have been a prop man, but that seems to have… somebody backstage must have sorted that out because the chair was put into position and it was put in too near the edge of the stage, and just as the woman was going to sit down on it I realised that she was going to fall right in, so I shot forward and pushed the chair back and her.. and there was a fearful, I mean it didn't actually come to down tools, but instantly one of the troublemaking union people said, 'You're not supposed to do that, you're not to touch that chair'. And once or

twice I had to climb from my seat right across the stage on my hands and knees to be out of shot in order to get round to the soundproof box at the end of the show and…

Was that the Treasure Trail?

Yes. And when I was doing it one day there was a huge great snake of cable in the way which I had to move to get over to get there, to get there and even in the middle of the show…

[15:02]
This was actually being televised, yes.

Well, it was being…

Were you on camera?

I would have been, had I been round there, but in order to avoid climbing over this thing these blasted, one of these blasted union maniacs said, 'What's she doing moving that cable?' And I seem to remember we did actually come to a stop for that, until you know, everybody said, ah don't be so ridiculous, you know, let her get on. And they forever, the electricians were forever threatening to pull the plugs on this because of this and because of that, it was a nightmare. And I was always worried because I thought one of these days one of them's going to tumble to the fact that I'm not actually a member of any of the acceptable unions, because at that time I was a member of the Screenwriters' Club which was not then acceptable to them, you know, as a union ticket. But it changed very quickly.

So that was the beginning of the first series then, you were really there right from the start weren't you?

Yes, but I can't remember now how long I stayed with it. I didn't stay with it for terribly long because the BBC asked me to go back and as I was getting rather fed up with…

Back to what?

To the BBC.

To the BBC to do…?

They wanted me to go back and take over from the woman who'd been running the actual use of the archives. Archive librarian, because before I'd been responsible for putting the stuff into the archives, for editing and selecting it, and the woman – what was her name? She was Anna Insten's [ph] sister. She left and they asked me to go back and I thought, well, it's not much money but it's a secure job and perhaps it's better than being at the mercy of all these lunatics in television.

Just to go back a bit, how long had you been at the BBC before the Hughie Green and all that and going into television? Had you been there for some years?

About ten years I suppose. Seven, ten years. It's hopeless asking me about chronology because I have no sense at all of the passage of time, but it was well… anyway, I mean I went into the BBC in '57 – '47 – and I was working for Hughie in '58 and I'm sure I'd started working for him in '58, or rather for the Encyclopaedia. And then what did I do?

And then of course as far as the BBC, those years in between, you were working with the archive and all that sort of thing, sound?

Yes, until I went back into television. How did I go back into television? I can't remember.

Oh this is, you're talking about now '57/58 after you left Hughie Green?

Well, I went back into the BBC where I didn't stay very long. I think I stayed in the…

Well, it doesn't matter.

No, it doesn't matter. I'm just trying to think how the devil I got from going back to the BBC into getting back into television, and then when I did get back into television of course, it was because Hughie had thought up this substitute for *Double Your Money*,

which was exactly the same except that it was called *The Sky's the Limit* and you were given travel instead of money for the prize.

Oh right, yes.

But I can't tell you, in the early days I wrote, well I didn't write all of them, but with two little assistants, I wrote a hundred questions a week for Australian television, questions for *Take Your Pick,* all the questions for *Double Your Money,* a constant stream of questions for places, you know, for the provincial companies, all sorts of shows of which I've forgotten the names.

What was the Australian television link? How did…

Oh, well because it was a chap whose name I've forgotten who was a shark fisherman who had a terribly popular programme of sort of general knowledge questions, quiz in Australia. And I think he just asked the Encyclopaedia Britannica if they could supply him with a hundred questions a week as a purely financial, you know, and they thought that it was all quite easy and asked me to do it, not having the slightest idea, you know, how long it takes or how many staff you need to do such a thing properly.

That sounds like quite an interesting sideline, but I suppose, did you see the results of the programmes?

[19:34]
Bob Dyer, that was his name, Bob Dyer. No, I never saw one. Then there was a chap who I think might still be about, a Canadian who started doing quizzes and quiz programmes, a man with a double-barrelled name, and he was, for some reason either asked or… no, that's right. He had that imposed on him like the other people did, he got a job to do something for Rediffusion and he'd always written his own questions, and then he was told he couldn't and that he'd got to accept them. And then he said he wouldn't do tha,t so in the end we said, well alright, you write the questions and the Encyclopaedia Britannica will vet them to make sure you haven't made mistakes, and that enraged him. And the very first set of questions he sent in had a frightful mistake in them and I drew attention to it and said you mustn't let that go out, it's downright wrong, and he didn't accept it.

Hadn't got any reference books in the office of course or anything, but on the telephone when he was told you mustn't use number forty-five on page three, or whatever it was, and it was a question he had mixed up *Sketches by Boz*, by Dickens with Phiz who did the illustrations. And he said, 'Who did the illustrations?' No, yes he said 'Who did the illustrations?' and said 'Boz'. And he would not have it, but he said, 'It's called *Sketches by Boz*'. Anyway, that caused a tremendous shemozzle, but it all settled down in the end. But I mean my life in television, as far as I can remember, seems to have consisted of one long string of immense arguments with people who wouldn't accept this, and writing letters to listeners who wouldn't accept that the answers were…

I can imagine the listeners getting…

Oh, but I mean Hughie wouldn't have this and wouldn't have that, and he was always saying to me, something absolutely obvious that everybody knew but he didn't happen to know, he would say, 'Oh no, that's far too *eriodite*'. 'Eriodite' you see. 'Far too *eriodite*'. And of course he was always trying to rig, not rig the questions, but he was always trying to rig the show by allowing somebody to see the questions or telling them that there would be a question about, the Archbishop of Canterbury or something, and I was there to stop it.

Well I suppose the thing is, that's illegal really isn't it?

Oh absolutely, I mean the whole reason for having the Encyclopaedia Britannica in the operation was to take damn good care they didn't cheat.

That's right, yeah. And certainly when you got to the questions the point is they were all qualifying for the Treasure Trail were you? Or no, The Sky's the Limit *was different wasn't it?*

The Sky's the Limit, you got into the box, I can't remember. Oh, I know what, you had the right, at the end of the first page of questions, you had the right, having won sixty-four pounds or something, you had the right to ask the unprized test question, and if you got the test question right, you could choose to go in the box or not. It was very ingeniously, very cleverly worked out because at every step there was this feeling, shall I keep it or shall I

have another try and perhaps lose the lot. And tension, was absolutely in the auditorium when they were in the soundproof box, was absolutely electrifying.

How much say did Hughie Green have in the actual producing? Did you have a director…?

Yeah. He was always having rows with one director after another and they were always being chucked out and coming back, and some of them were better than others. It was a constant warfare, but that's because of his temperament, you know, not because there was anything wrong with the directors or producers.

But he had the final say I suppose because he was such a popular figure wasn't he?

Well, apart from being a popular figure with an enormous following, the truth of the matter was that in his own field he was an astonishing professional. I mean quick witted, my godfathers, you know, if anything went wrong that other people hadn't noticed, he would not only notice it, but he would take evasive action in a most ingenious way.

You mean like a technical problem or…?

No, no, no, with the show, in the way the show was going. He would suddenly remember, you know, that he'd asked this person a question which had a bearing on something that was happening and he would immediately push something in to make people forget that she'd said that she read the Bible all day every day or something, because he'd seen that there was a question about the Bible two questions further on in the set, or something like that. He was awfully, awfully good in that way. And also he was quite good at coping with the things where, I mean one of the reasons why I kept appearing on the show was because it began to be a gag between us that if he could find an excuse he would turn to me and say, 'Come up here, I can't understand this question', you know.

Quite a good idea, that.

Or somebody would start to argue with him about a question and he would say, 'It's nothing to do with me, I don't write the questions, she's down there, get her up here, she can argue about it'. And it became… we got it quite well worked out.

So you had a little repartee from time to time?

Yes. I mean there were certain things I knew he couldn't pronounce and certain grammatical constructions that he didn't like and I used to put them in deliberately, and you see he was a professional and he could see that it was quite funny and he didn't mind. But when I tried to do the same thing with Bob Holness he used to create murder, because I knew he didn't like saying 'prestidigitation' and so about once every series I used to get in a question which incorporated the word 'prestidigitation' so that he could, you know, fall over it. But whereas… what?

[adjusting microphone?]

[25:23]
Whereas Hughie would have thought this was frightfully funny and would have played up to it, Holness didn't like it at all.

What sort of viewings can you remember, they must have had fantastic viewing figures for those…

I can't remember, but…

It must have been several million or something.

Oh yes, it was absolutely colossal. I think the absolute record we ever had was sixteen million. Could it have been?

It could have been, yes.

It was absolutely extraordinary. But it was of course partly Hughie, but it was partly the format, because it was such a tension builder. You had people, you see you had – what

did you have – you had five, if they lasted, there were five weeks of this constant building of tension and…

Yeah, whatever, yeah.

Until they got into the box for the thing. And they used to come out, you know, sort of shaking like leaves and if they'd won everybody was frightfully excited, and it was a very clever format. And he was quite right when they stopped *Double Your Money* to say, well, you know, that's the format, let's give it another name and start it again. And of course the thing about *Sky's the Limit* was that we had these sort of odd things we used to insert, like doing a whole series on the Bible or doing a whole lot with eighteen year old students where they were allowed to answer questions on their own subject, which meant that it was, you know, it pushed up the standard of everything, for a few weeks, which didn't lose the popular audience and of course fascinated the people who liked the more difficult questions.

Yeah, right. How long did you have in a series? You presumably on Double Your Money *and the other one, I don't know, you had like sort of twelve editions or fifteen or something?*

Oh, no.

Did you have a break and then you…

Miles of them. I don't… I'm trying to think. I don't think we ever… we had a sort of holiday period but I don't think it was very long.

So it just went on, literally…

It just went on and on and on.

And were they shown overseas? I suppose they…

I don't think they were, I don't think they ever got to that. But they were unbelievably popular. And it got to the stage where just on the strength of being hauled up on to the stage to sort something out with Hughie, you know, people would start singing the *Double Your Money* signature tune when I went into the pub. It was really rather awful. How anybody survives being a television star I don't know, because on the strength of those little performances people used to talk to me on the buses and people used to talk to me in shops. There's a woman – well, I say to this day, but years after I stopped doing it - I went into a shop in… what's it called? That street that goes up towards Highgate? Anyway, there was a big shop there which was a branch of the John Lewis Partnership and I went in there to buy something and one of the women from behind the counter on the next, as it were, I was in the shoes and she was in the perfume, she suddenly shot across and said, 'Oh, you're the lady with the questions on *Double Your Money*' or *Sky's the Limit*, and I thought, my God, it's five years at least since she's seen me. It must be simply terrible, unless you want that sort of thing, complete loss of privacy.

Yes, because in your case I mean it wasn't as if you were the star of the show or…

No, and I mean…

And if you were Hughie Green then obviously you get a bit worried if people don't notice you.

But once in six weeks perhaps, I used to be on for a few seconds, and that was enough.

What about correspondence? Did you have to deal with mail?

Yes, piles and piles and piles of letters, mostly from people who hadn't listened to the question, hadn't listened to the answer, had an axe to grind about Scientology or something, you know, but you had to write to all of them.

And you had to…

And occasionally you would get somebody who'd really got the bit between his teeth. I mean that was later, but in *Blockbusters* I remember having a correspondence that went on

for about six weeks, with the Royal Society of Chiropodists who would not have it that chiropody and pedicure meant exactly the same, except that one was Latin and the other was Greek. [laughter] Because they don't consider that chiropody is pedicure, because they think pedicure's like manicure and therefore is purely cosmetic and not at all… and that chiropody is… And it went on and on and on and on and on, and I kept writing back conciliatory letters explaining that it was just a matter of what the words meant and that using the word pedicure didn't mean that we were despising their activity or anything. And there were always people who knew better. There was one doctor who wrote a furious letter about some medical pronunciation, and I realised that it simply was that doctors had got into the habit of mispronouncing one of the words they always use and I couldn't persuade him. It was cervical, that's right. A cervical smear which he wanted pronounced cerv-eye-cal because they call neck things cerv-eye-cal. And he would not have it, you know. I think he probably did write to whoever was the head of Central Television or wherever it was complaining about this. And then there was the awful day when I made the mistake on the final question of a Treasure Hunt and I thought I would be for the chop. It wasn't actually my fault, it was…

[31:09]
This is Treasure Hunt, *this is much later? This is Anneka Rice.*

Yes, it was a mis… no, in *Sky's*... no, *Double Your Money*. There was a mistake on the final, the fifth part of the final question on the Treasure Trail and it was a mistake, it was a misprint in a reference book and it was the wrong year of some football, he was a boy doing football, it was the wrong year. And as soon as he looked confused and said, 'But it was 1931', I thought, I'm sure he's right. And Hughie had the sense to say to me, 'What has happened?' and I said, 'Well I think he's right and it's either a typing mistake or it's something, but anyway, I think he's right, we'll have to have him back next week'.

That was the way to do it, yes.

And Hughie said to me, 'You'll have to pay. You'll have to give him the £500 if you're wrong'. And so I said, 'Yes, alright, alright, he can have the £500'. And then the next week I explained to him what had happened and to the boy and I said, well the only thing to do is give him the £500 whatever happens, have him back and have another set of five

questions and if he gets that, he gets the top prize and the £500. So there was this wonderful thing and I had £500 in notes in my handbag when he won and Hughie called me up on stage and said, 'Come on, come and give him the 500 quid you owe him'. And so I…

So he won the second five and he got the 500?

He did win the second time and he got the £500. And I thought Hughie would be furious, but it was very funny because I thought the first thing I can do is to ring the editor of the Encyclopaedia Britannica and tell him what's happened before the press gets on to him, you know. And while I was doing it, a terribly nice boy called Arthur Johnson, who was helping out in John Hayman's office, came after me and said, 'Don't worry, don't worry, it's the most wonderful cliffhanger' and in point of fact, Hughie was absolutely delighted because he knew that as a result next week's figures would go skying up in order to get the result of this boy.

I wonder whether there are any tapes or the film has been kept, because so much stuff got chucked away didn't it?

I should think in commercial television I'm sure it doesn't still exist, because you see *Double Your Money* was done on film, which was a terrible bore…

It was quite an old film…

It was a bore to keep and store and edit and everything about it really was a bit of a difficult one.

It was actually shot on film was it?

Mm, mm.

As opposed to being filmed off a tube, yes. Very good. So you must have had quite a big crew on those programmes. Did you have three cameras?

Well, all I can remember as far… oh yes, we always had three cameras; we had a crane and two fixed ones, and one that was glued to… no, we must have had four because we had a crane, two; one on each side, and one that was fixed on Hughie, which was glued to Hughie all the time. But…

And of course it was all black and white in those days anyway wasn't it?

Er, was it? Yes, I suppose so. It became colour quite soon but I can't remember when.

That would probably have been Sky's the Limit*, because that was…*

Well, *Sky's the Limit* was definitely colour, yes, it had become colour by then.

That possibly would not have been film, it would have been…

No, that was tape. And the problem with that was of course that in the early days editing videotape was so impossible, because sound didn't match the picture, so you had to keep stopping, and of course the people who had to do it hadn't developed the manual skill to do it, you know, because some people could do – well, you should know – some people can physically do editing very quickly and they couldn't do it on videotape for ages because they didn't have the practice. But of course then it didn't take very long before it was all done by pushing buttons, it was electronic and it ceased to be a problem, you could chop things about and tiddle about with things.

[35:11]
So in other words, I mean it was only as a last resort that you would cut and go back and start again?

Oh yes, we…

It was virtually like doing it live.

Oh, we were always trying not to cut.

Because apart from anything else, it would slow things up so much.

But I think when you say about how many we had in the crew, I think we had seventeen people in the crew, because when we wanted to take it to Australia at the end of one series, which we did…

I remember you went to Australia.

…the union wouldn't have it. They said if you go you've got to take seventeen people and they've all got to travel first class and they've all got to stay… you know, the usual sort of… they've all got to stay in first class hotels and everything else. And Rediffusion wouldn't wear it, you know. No, no way. So a deal was done whereby Hughie would go to Australia, use Australian television company and crew and everything else, and all he took was, he took me, Monica Rose I think it was in those days, might have been Nancy Roberts. Anyway, you know, the two girls and me and the, I don't think we even took the director, I think there were only about four of us in the aeroplane. And when we got there it was terribly funny because…

Where did you shoot this, at Melbourne was it?

Adelaide, Adelaide. But when we arrived in Sydney airport, this chap I was telling you about, Geoff Stone, who had been a television, you know, a quiz presenter, and had gone and made a very important career in public relations and television in Australia, he knew I was coming and he had alerted the Austr*ah*lian press and to Hughie's rage, [laughter] when we arrived in Sydney, all these people primed by Geoff Stone rushed to interview me and said more or less, 'Hello' to Hughie. And three days later I was on Australian television on a terrible chat programme called *Beauty and the Beast* with a rather nice expatriate Englishman as an anchorman, being, you know, I had half an hour of prime time telly, telling them jokes and falling about on the floor looking for my bits of paper and talking about my Alvis. Because that was the other thing, that after all the rows we had with Hughie, the thing that finally reconciled him to me was that going out to Wembley in the Alvis, quite by accident I cut him up in his blue Rolls-Royce and I went round him in the Alvis and his girlfriend had been brought up in the motor business and she suddenly said, 'Hey, look at that, there's Annie in a marvellous Alvis Speed 20!' And

from that moment onwards his attitude towards me completely changed. He was a funny man. [laughter]

So presumably that was Sky's the Limit *we're talking about still isn't it? Yeah. And that was at…*

No, that was still out at Wembley. That was still *Double Your Money*.

That's still Double Your Money*?*

Yes.

Well, was that the one that you took to Australia?

Yes.

Yeah, right.

We took the final show, one series to Australia, and then of course we did the proving flight of the jumbo jet and did the show in the aeroplane.

Good God, did you really?

Yes! And we had Leonard Cheshire was going over with David Frost and we shared the aeroplane. There was Leonard Cheshire, David Frost, our little thing and nobody else, and we had the run of this enormous aeroplane with an upstairs bar, you went upstairs to the first class bar. And we did the show and we had an old lady doing questions on Shakespeare, I think it was, who came a terrible mucker on the last question and we had to fiddle about a bit to make sure that she had a reason for having a second bite at the cherry, because we absolutely had to have a win.

Oh, of course, yes.

Yes. Dear, dear, it was awful and we…

So that was, where did you fly to?

We flew to New York and well, because we were literally I think on the proving flight, and we stayed in a hotel chosen by David Frost right down Lexington somewhere in a very bad bit of New York, which was quite awful, and I thought why does David Frost – because he was already very well known – why on earth does he choose to use this hotel. But anyway, there we were and we had fixed to have this woman's daughter from Australia if she won. So it had all been laid on, but the daughter was to be flown to New York, you know, anyway, and there was this dreadful situation that the daughter was to come to the hotel and meet her mother, and she came to the hotel and sat in the foyer right next to her mother for about five, ten minutes before it suddenly dawned on me that she was the only person of about the right age waiting in the foyer and I went over and said to her, 'Are you by any chance, have you come from Australia to meet your mother?' and she said, 'Yes'. And I said, 'There she is'. [laughter] And well, I mean you can imagine, I think they hadn't seen each other for thirty years.

[40:37]
So she just didn't know who she was?

So she didn't know who she was. But anyway, that was very romantic. But…

So that was, well that presumably you took your crew all the way with you there and back?

No, we didn't, we just took ourselves. Rather like when we went to Australia. Oh, we couldn't… well I mean, I don't think, British Airways wouldn't have given us, wouldn't have allowed so many of us on the plane. We did, I remember, take the director and his wife, who was a make-up artist, who I didn't know, and I sat next to his wife and was talking and he was assing about, oh God, assing about at something, and not knowing that she was his wife I said, 'Oh dear, oh dear, a lot of amateur dramatics going on up there' [laughter], and she laughed and said, 'I'm his wife'. She was only there, I mean she'd never worked with us as a make-up artist before, it was a fiddle, you know, so that she could have the trip. But it was very unfortunate. And I took Monica Rose with me

because nobody ever paid any attention to anybody, that was the thing that worried me, you know, nobody, there was no cohesion at all. And so I took Monica Rose under my wing and touted her round New York a bit and took her lunch with some friends of mine who happened to be staying in the Drake Hotel, which is pretty impressive, particularly for somebody like poor little Monica. And when we arrived they were already having lunch and they said, 'Oh well come and have some lunch, come and have some lunch, sit down, sit down'. And Monica said to me, 'What am I going to eat, what am I going to eat?', you know. And I said, 'Oh go on, have a prawn cocktail because that'll keep you going for the rest of the day', you know. And this prawn cocktail arrived in a very, very tall glass and poor Monica couldn't get her face in it, couldn't do anything with it, and she was shaking like a leaf, she was so embarrassed, and her spoon was going bang, bang, bang, bang, bang in the top of the glass. And fortunately somebody at the table very nicely said, 'You don't want to worry, take it off the table and put it on your lap and then you'll be able to get at it'. So she took it off and put it on her lap and ate her cocktail in the Drake Hotel and she's never forgotten, well she's never forgotten it. She was always saying to me, 'Do you remember when we went to that posh 'otel and I couldn't eat me shrimps?' [laughter] She was a sweet little thing. My God, she was exploited.

What about The Sky's the Limit, *did that carry on as long as* Double Your Money*?*

Oh well, then *The Sky's the Limit* went on for quite a long time and then I couldn't stand that any longer.

Was it you gave it up rather than…

Oh yes.

So you handed over to another…

No, I walked out in a huff, it was all very dramatic. I walked out in a huff because Green was being so loathsomely beastly to the director, I just lost my head and fortunately I had all my goods and chattels at my feet, so to speak, because normally we were having drinks and everything was spread about, and I just happened to have everything to hand and I simply picked up my things and stood up and said, 'Green, you've lost your question

writer' and walked out. And they thought it was just a gesture, and at about ten o'clock they rang me up in the hotel and said, 'I say, about tomorrow's show…' and I said, 'There ain't gonna be no tomorrow's show'. 'What do you mean, you can't do this!' I said, 'Oh yes I can', my agent was shrewd enough to put a clause in my contract to the effect that if for any reason there was no show for two weeks or something, I've forgotten exactly what it was, that I could give you notice to quit of two weeks, and there isn't and I am, and goodbye.

I see. It was the end of that series…

No, it wasn't, it was just that there was a… it was done in such a way that there was a fortnight's gap and a fortnight was all they needed to be told that… because of course they thought it would never happen. So anyway, I walked out and then there was a shower of letters and telephone calls asking me to reconsider and so on and so forth, and that was it.

So what happened, did it come to an end?

Oh no, they had to fumble about…

They had to find another…

Well, they had to go back to the Encyclopaedia Britannica and a… I don't know what Britannica did, they got quite a good girl, she was a bit pedestrian but she bailed them out and she got on quite well with Hughie I think.

[45:02]
And did they carry on for some time?

Not very long, no.

Well, it was probably getting towards the end of its natural life anyway wasn't it, by then?

Well, it was still pretty popular. But the fact is, nobody realises what a difference the questions make. They think you can just put in any old thing that people can answer, but

it is true to say that practically every show that I've been connected with that I left has folded within eighteen months to two years.

Really?

And it is because people don't understand how complicated it is doing suitable questions for that particular kind of competitor, that particular audience, that particular presenter. Everybody seems to think, like that fellow [Fred] Housego or whatever his name was, the taxi driver, you see he thought that just because he'd won answering questions…

[45:52 - end of side]

[46:44]
Okay?

Well, where were we?

Fred Housego.

Oh well, I was just saying that people like Fred Housego and producers who ought to know better, think that having been in a quiz show they can write quiz questions, and they kept asking him to do it, on and off, and I used to hear them once or twice and think, oh dear, oh dear, why doesn't he realise that you shouldn't put it like that, or that's ambiguous, there's another answer that's just as acceptable. And he obviously didn't make much of a success of it because I haven't heard of him as a quiz writer. But I'm constantly, you know, listening to quizzes more or less by accident and every time I do it, I think oh God, you know. I had a wonderful assistant, a girl called Deborah Sutherland, who discovered, so to speak, how to do it and did it very successfully, I mean she took over from me when I gave up the quiz business and worked for absolutely everybody, and was dead reliable as far as not making mistakes of fact and so on and so forth, and there was a time when she and I were constantly comparing notes and saying, did you hear what they had… What was that show that was so popular where you won a cut-glass bowl on the BBC, with Magnus Magnusson [*Mastermind*]? Do you remember?

Yes, that was…

At that time Deborah and I were in fairly close touch and they did ask me at one stage, would I do some questions for it and as I didn't know anything about the show I watched it a couple of times and said, 'Not on your nelly, mate!'

I think it was called Mastermind.

That's right, *Mastermind*. And Deborah was just the same. They asked her to do it and she said, good gracious, you know. And we used to compare notes and there, I don't know, but I suspect, because there was no money involved and it wasn't a big money-spinning show, I mean it was very popular but…

No, very popular wasn't it?

…I suspect they edited it and juggled about with it and did all sorts.

Do you think so?

Oh, I'm sure they did. Because it was, you know, I used to listen to the questions and think this is inconceivable, haven't they got any idea of the standard of difficulty, don't they understand… I once heard an unfortunate woman who said she would do as her special subject, diet, and was given a whole series of questions which were all about the biochemistry of nutrition, nothing to do with diet, and she couldn't answer them, she could answer a single question. Fearfully embarrassing. And absolutely unfair and I don't, I'm not given to writing or ringing up but I was very near ringing them up and saying, how dare you put that woman on and ask her questions which have got nothing whatever to do with the… well.

Yes, of course they're recorded well ahead aren't they and they have to keep very secret towards the end of the series.

Yes. But the questions were extraordinarily sloppy. But the chief thing that annoyed me was this…

The number of questions they have to dig out for the…

Yes, but it was the way they yaw about between saying what was the date of William the Conqueror to something very abstruse about a character in the Bible, which is…

It's alright if it's a specialised question.

[49:49]
Well no, but I mean among the general knowledge questions. They never had any idea of standard, because it's always the same old story, they don't know what people know, and this was the one thing that I discovered, you know, what people know, what they're likely to know and what they absolutely won't know. And if you ask them questions that they absolutely don't know and which is quite beyond their reach, it throws them psychologically for the rest of the show.

You have to, in other words, have to choose, get the right questions for the sort of person, the person who is…

No, you have to get the right question for anybody.

For anybody.

I mean we all know, roughly speaking, what the broad field of general knowledge is for most people and we all know that there are certain things that are quite outside that unless they happen to be specialists, you know, you can't ask them questions about linguistics, you can't ask uneducated people questions about vocabulary, you know. You can't ask people what philoprogenitive means, because even if they know they can't express it on the television.

The Treasure Trail *questions were a bit more…*

Yes, but you see, all the big money winners are specialised subjects, you're all within a narrow field and there you're entitled to suppose that if they said they know all about

Richard III or whatever it is, they really do. But that doesn't mean that you can ask some ridiculous question that occurs in one book in which he says he wore one yellow stocking and one white stocking, unless it's really got some bearing on what happened afterwards. But that's the sort of thing that people who write quiz questions without knowing what they're doing are constantly doing. They look up something in a book and think, oh that's interesting, and make a question out of it, which is fatal. But it doesn't matter now because they don't do it, I mean all the questions are sort of silly general knowledge and, you know, there's no finesse at all in the way it's done. Even Deborah's given it up. I don't know anybody with any pretensions to education who writes quiz questions now. It's all in the hands of a lot of jolly amateurs.

Well, I suppose in a way, I mean Mastermind *must be the most popular general knowledge or quiz show…*

Yeah, oh I'm sure it is.

…in recent years and it has a colossal audience viewing it, but as you say, it doesn't involve prize money so it's not so crucial.

No, so it doesn't matter, it's just…

And also, there are so many questions, I mean sometimes…

Yes, it's terribly exciting.

…up to thirty or something. So it's a different ballgame in a way isn't it?

Yes, and people don't actually, I mean they like to know what the outcome is, but they don't care about the outcome. But if there's a lot of money at the end of it, they care passionately about whether or not the man's entitled to his money and whether it's fair and whether it's harder than last week. But you see, all that element is inexistent in things like *Mastermind*. It's an awful thought, but I mean it is because of the money element or the prize, whatever it is, travel or anything else, that the commercial ones get so much excitement and people get so tied up in it.

So anyway, The Sky's the Limit *eventually… well, you left that.*

I left *Sky's the Limit*.

And therefore there was a slight hiatus as far as you personally were concerned, perhaps?

I'm just trying to think what the devil I did after that. I never can remember. I can't remember the order, I can't even…

At what point did the Bob Holness thing come up?

[microphone dislodged?]

Now what on earth… how did that… Oh, that was quite interesting, actually. I'd done something, I did a pilot for a thing called *Family Fortunes* and I had the good sense to say to my agent, put a clause in to the effect, since I've got to make the bank of questions and enough for two whole shows, I am not having somebody else coming along afterwards and inheriting a bank worth several thousand pounds and all these questions and me not get the job to do the show. So she put in a clause to say that if I did the pilot it was on the understanding that if it went to series I would be employed to do it. And I had one of my extraordinary bits of what, psychic, whatever you call it, and after I'd left ATV temporarily and was doing something, Ian Messiter had taken over *Family Fortunes* from me, or was it… yes. He had taken over *Family Fortunes*, which I'd been doing and had got very thick with the chap who owned the format, and I never heard anything more about this thing I'd done the pilot for and there was a very long gap and then somebody said that they were going to do a series of the show and I had a sudden insight, I thought, I bet that's Tony Gruner, he's been working with Messiter, he forgets he's got a previous contract with me and he's going to ask Messiter to do the questions for the other show. So I rang up Ian's wife and said to her, 'Has Ian been asked to do the questions on this other show?' and she said, 'Oh yes, he signed the contract yesterday'. And I said, 'No you didn't, because I have an absolutely unbreakable prior contract. You can go and tell Tony Gruner that he's made a nasty mistake'. And she said, 'I'll kill him, I'll sue him for every halfpenny…' I'll this, I'll that, I'll the other. And I said, 'Oh don't be so silly, go and

make a fuss and get back a couple of thousand quid'. And she said, 'Yes, but I'll put the wind up him', and so on and so forth. And then fortunately, there wasn't any question about it and so I was put on to it and that show was… what can it have been? Because it wasn't *Family Fortunes*, it followed on from *Family Fortunes* and was very successful.

[55:49]
What was it, sort of a…

I can't… oh, it was another set of four people sitting up there asking questions competitively, but I can't for the life of me remember what it was called. Went on for ages. And that was when ATV, that was when ATV – that was the other thing – when I went to work for ATV, as opposed to Rediffusion and the BBC, ATV was notorious for being an absolute hive of union activity.

Oh right. I was going to ask you about how did the union figure in it by now?

Everybody said to me, including John Brittany, whatever you do when you go out to Elstree, don't let on you… I said, but it's alright because I'm now a member of the Writers' Guild, which is recognised as a union, so they can't do it. But they all said, well they'll ask you, take your card with you, and you know, be careful because it's an absolute nightmare up there. And I went, rather nervously, to the gate.

It's my union, ACT.

Yes. And was, you know, said to, what I'd come for and everything and they told me, they'll ask you for your card at the gate, but they didn't. And I said, 'What do I do, where do I park my car?' and so on and so forth. And while all this was going on, a very large, very soldierly looking fellow marched across from somewhere and kicked his heels in front of me and said, 'Very nice to see you again after all these years!' And I said, 'Oh yes, very nice to see you, what are you doing out here?' And he said, 'I'm in charge of all the transport here, I'm very glad to see you. Have you come out here to work?' And I said, 'Yes, I have' and off he went with this military march [laughter] and I said to the man in the box, 'Who's that? I can't remember him'. And he said, 'Oh his name's so-and-so, he's an ex-regimental sergeant major and he used to work for the BBC' and he

was something to do with the transport at the BBC, and he was the chief driver of BBC OBs, and I'd completely forgotten him, but I'd known all the chaps in OBs. But anyway, that was quite an auspicious start, and it was all nonsense. When I got in there, there was no more union activity than…

Than anywhere else.

There was a lot of chit-chat in the bar, you know, and there were occasional flurries. But I was in and I was alright, so it didn't matter, but it was rather nerve-racking because I had been told, you know, that it was liable to be very difficult and… [sound dips, microphone dislodged?] nothing really happened. But then when they moved to, when they moved up to Nottingham…

Oh, that's Central Television?

Yes, and became Central Television.

Now that was…

We had the most wonderful union problems because there, there was, there really was trouble up there, but by that time it didn't affect me because I was alright, I was accepted, I had a card, but they were always having trouble with the electricians. And so I thought to myself, this'll be funny because electricians and people like that always cotton to me and I'm always better with the technicians than I am with the artistes [laughter] And I got up there and I coined a very original phrase, which was 'Fu-u-ckin' electricians!' and every time I saw an electrician or had to have a typewriter moved and an electrician had to come and do it or something, I used to say, 'Fu-u-ckin' electrician!', and they thought this was a huge joke [laughter] and it all went swimmingly for about two years and then I went up to do a show and everybody said to me, 'For God's sake, be careful, we are on the brink of the most awful trouble with the electricians, don't, you know, don't have any of your jokes'. And I went into the bar and Jon Scoffield and Tony Wolfe, who was the producer/director, and one or two of the others were sitting at one end of the bar having a chat and all the electricians, about five of them, were sitting where they always sat on their chairs, their seats high up at the bar, I came in and took one look at this…

And then they…

[59:48]
I didn't, I went straight over to the chief electrician, who was a tremendous chum of mine, and I turned my back on the others so they shouldn't see what I was doing you see, and I started waving my arms about at him like this, and I said, 'Go on, pretend we're having a terrible row' [laughter], I said, 'That'll put the wind up them'. So we stood there with me going on at him and the other two who were sitting further up saying, 'Yeah…' and I turned round like this, slightly, to see and I could see Scoffield and Wolfe sitting there absolutely rigid with terror, thinking what's that woman doing, she'll have them all out, you know. And then when we thought we'd had this game going long enough, one of the electricians leant across to the man behind the bar and said, 'Gi' us a bottle of bubbly'. [laughter] And the bottle was handed over like this and with a great flourish they pulled the top off and the champagne went everywhere and they gave me a drink and I gave them a drink and we all laughed and flung our arms round our necks and I literally think that that may have stopped the strike. But it was a dreadful moment for poor old Scoffield and Wolfe because they were absolutely convinced that I was stirring up trouble which could never be put right.

So that was the… which series are we on now?

Oh well, by that time it was… must have been *Blockbusters* by then, I think. Yes, I think I went to Nottingham to do *Blockbusters*.

Yes, that's Bob Holness…

Yes.

…sitting in the chair.

Had we done that in…

Or did you do it earlier somewhere else?

I can't remember. No, I think we did it all up there. But I wish I could remember the name of that show where Gruner got the contracts muddled up. Because that again was a funny situation. We had some extraordinary extras who used to turn up and pretend to be contestants when one wanted to do…

Dressing the set?

…when one wanted to do pilots. And two of them were rather eccentric and turned up for this show and caused the most frightful mayhem because we had a question in which it was – that was *Family Fortunes* – where you had to say, name an object made of something, name an object made of rubber, and then according to whether you said what the hundred people had said, you got more marks. And of course it was a silly question to have put in, but it was put in deliberately because it might be funny, and this stupid man who was an extra, when he was asked to name something made of rubber, said 'A French letter'. [laughter] And I don't know why, because I'm sure they could have dealt with it, but we had to chuck away the whole show. It cost ATV £30,000 or something, you know, there were figures floating about and everybody… Well, I hadn't seen him for years, this chap, and suddenly I was in the canteen in Nottingham and this man came up to me and was full of chat and I couldn't think who the hell he was, I couldn't remember any of this incident or who he was until suddenly he said, with a complacent grin, 'I cost you £30,000 didn't I, just by saying French letter' and then I knew who he was.

Well, you say this was a pilot?

Yes. Well yes, but I mean if the pilot's a success and if the show goes on, they can use it.

It reminds me of something, because presumably all these series start off with pilots, don't they?

Yes.

I mean do you remember Charlotte Jennings…

Oh yes, she came on to…

She came up too, and that was a pilot presumably?

No, no, no, it was a real show, she was a contestant answering questions on film. She chose to do film as…

Wasn't it titles of…

Yes, it must have been. She chose to do film as her special subject and she came unstuck as so many of them do, you know, because she spoke without thinking, she just hadn't listened to the question, she…

The question was…

She was asked for the director – no – she was asked for the producer and she gave the director. She said Harry Watt instead of Grierson.

And of course that could always have been a slight sort of doubtful…

Bone of contention.

Bone of contention, because Grierson never gave the actual grades, a craft for each name, he just gave a list of names and in fact the director was Harry Watt.

Yes, but she wasn't asked for the director. She was asked for the producer.

The producer was Grierson?

Yes.

Is that what she got wrong?

Yes. It was absolutely open and shut, there was no ambiguity about it, it simply was that for her Harry Watt was the most important person associated with the picture and she bounced straight into it.

I remember she was…

She was furious about it. No, I mean everybody's furious if they can't answer a question or if they think they've got it right.

It's just a sideline, but when you mentioned the pilots I…

Yes. No, no, no, that was a genuine show.

It wasn't a pilot, yes. So anyway, there you were up in Nottingham and getting on very well with the electricians.

[laughter] And getting on best of all with the lovely special effects chaps. Anything I wanted, I used to go down to George Leuenberger [ph], who is the most astonishing man, and get the special effects to make me, or give me or steal me whatever I wanted. And once when I was down there asking George if he could get me a reel of camera tape, and you know they used to chain it up to stop people stealing it, because everybody stole it, and I went and said to George, 'Do you think you could get me a reel of camera tape?' 'Oh yes' he said, 'It's alright'. And while all this was going on, one of the security men happened to walk by, and he said to me, as we were strolling together down towards the canteen, he said, 'You want camera tape, why didn't you ask me?' [laughter] They were a funny lot up there.

[1:05:35]
What – Bob Holness, so he was the frontman on that was he?

Yes.

What was he like to work with? Quite different from…

Don't be indiscreet in your questions!

No, I mean because he always seemed sort of a very calm and cool gentleman.

He's the most terrible amateur old tortoise, to be unkind about it. I mean really and truly it was very funny, he had once done a show called *Junior Criss Cross Quiz* in the, was it Granada had that theatre in the King's Road, Chelsea? One of them had it as a studio, the theatre next…

Granada, yes.

It was Granada. Well, anyway, I worked with him on that and it must have been twenty years earlier when he'd just sort of begun to do these things, and suddenly somebody suggested that he would be suitable for *Blockbusters*. And I mean he's perfectly efficient and all that in a sort of way, but I don't know why, but…

He's got a great track record hasn't he?

He hasn't got any track record at all.

And he's still going strong.

Oh yes, I know. I mean he should be, you know, jolly lucky that he got that job and that he's held it down, because I mean what made that show was the kids. Didn't matter who fronted it, I mean so long as they weren't a complete idiot. But he was frightfully funny, very vain. And of course, like all these people, secretly wanted to be a comic, so that he was always having the most embarrassing sort of backchat with the man who did the warm-up. Incidentally, has anybody ever done a sort of study of the famous warm-up men? Because there ought to, they ought to do it before they're all dead, because we had a wonderful man out at ATV, who just jumped about. He was small and he jumped about and he hardly ever put a sentence together, he practically never cracked a joke and he kept the whole audience in the palm of his hand, just by being a nice little chap and being silly, you know, walking about on the chairs and chatting up the girls in the front row and cracking dirty jokes at the nuns. And he was absolutely wonderful. And he'd been a

jockey and he'd been a boxer and he'd done everything, practically. But there were quite a lot of them and then we had a young man with too much hair who came to ATV and for the first few weeks was useless. And to do him justice, he must have been more intelligent than he seemed to begin with, because he gradually got the feel of it and he turned out to be really very good indeed, and I often wonder what became of him, because of course warm-up men always secretly think that they're going to turn out to be…

Yes, one wonders what happens to them, whether they break through and…

I think occasionally. Though of course what most of them did if they're any good is they get club stuff, they get very popular in a district, you know, and they're always in work doing that. But it was very interesting to watch this young man evolve from a rather gauche, inadequate, cracking the wrong type of jokes creature, to being really quite a finished warm-up man.

And presumably you had one in the early days with Hughie Green, there were always warm-up men on?

Oh, we never had a warm-up man in that sense, we had an absolute – that I ought to tell you about – we had a wonderful routine for keeping the audience quiet and for getting contestants. We had a set of rocking horses with holes in their backsides, into which there were balloons fitted, and [laughter] people who volunteered from the audience, preferably women, were asked to come up on stage and then they were made to get on to these rocking horses and of course it was in the days of miniskirts and as soon as they got on to the rocking horses, you know, they were practically naked to the waist, and then they were instructed by Hughie without more ado, you see, to ride the rocking horses against each other, the fastest one would win. And they rocked like this without realising that what they were doing was blowing up the balloon, and of course the winner was the first person to make her balloon pop. And it was wonderful, because I mean they had no idea they were displaying all their knickers and their suspenders and everything, because they weren't all wearing tights and some of them weren't wearing anything, it really was very funny. And of course that got the audience going.
[1:10:10]

And then the other thing they used to do with the men, they would get five or six men up on to the stage and stand them in a row and Hughie used to milk it, you know, that you had to have the tallest one on the left and he had to measure them, and he kept pushing them around as if he was setting up a photograph, you know, get them in a row. And they none of them knew what was going to happen, and they were all standing there and then Vic Hallums, the sort of stage manager's assistant, used to run on to a sort of 'Oh yeah!' on the organ, he used to run on with an armful of roll-ons, complete with suspenders, and he used to give one to each man. And what they had to do was, they had to get it on and then, having got it on, which of course they found very difficult over their trousers anyway, having got it on and pulled it, Green used to say, 'Put it on and pull it right up under the armpits'. And so they used to rush to get it up like this, all looking at each other, and think that triumphantly if they'd got it up to the armpits it was alright, you see, and then Hughie used to say, 'Ah yes, but you haven't finished yet, when I say go, take it off and hold it up over your head'. And of course they didn't know whether to pull it up, to pull it down, they used to get… [laughter] They couldn't get hold of it, they used to get it stuck round their faces. Anyway, and then finally one of them would get this awful thing off and shake it over his head and Hughie would say, 'You're on the show!' And those were the two that we usually did, but you know, there were various things that could be…

It would put you off going.

We once went and did a summer season somewhere. What's that place where you get shrimps? Morecambe, we went to Morecambe with Hughie and the *Double Your Money* lot, and, in the afternoon he had to judge a beauty competition beside the public swimming baths with a chap called David [Whitfield] something or other, who was a tenor singer who'd worked in a Hull Quarry. What was his name? David something or other. He sang a song called [sings] '*Cara Mia why…'* and was terribly popular. But anyway, they got all a bit above themselves and the end of it was that Hughie was pushed into the swimming pool and the result was that he had a very peculiar American suit on which went a funny shape because of the chlorine, but worst of all, his pocketbook, which was his bible, you know, which had all his addresses, everything, got absolutely sodden with this chlorine sodden water and so he was absolutely out of his mind with rage and he just set out to get paralytic drunk as a result of it. When the time came to prepare for the evening show, he couldn't stand up, he was lying in the dressing room cursing and raving and Vic Hallums

and I physically undressed him [laughter], pulled his trousers off, took his jacket off. If you've never tried to put a pair of trousers on a drunk recalcitrant I don't recommend it. Anyway, Vic and I managed to put his stage suit on somehow or other and I kept saying to Vic, but he can't do the show. Vic said, 'Yes he can, yes he can, he'll be alright, push him on stage and he'll go through it like an automaton. You don't have to worry, just get him on his feet, get him in his clothes, give him his props'. And his prop, with which he used to go down into the audience and say to the ladies, 'Would you like this?' and it was a plastic chrysanthemum, rather more than life-size, which he used to hand to this anxious lady, whereupon she would take it and she was always left with the head of the flower in her hand and he took the stalk away and then held up the stalk and said to the audience, 'What shall I do with this?' ha, ha, ha, whereupon she was given a pound and she handed back the thing and she was on the show. But anyhow, we got him on stage, standing upright, holding his chrysanthemum, and just before he was due to go on, he said to me, 'I've got to pee'. So I said, 'Well turn round, up there', because there was a flight of steps straight into a lavatory. So I turned him round, complete with chrysanthemum, pushed him up the stairs, shot up the stairs, he went in and I thought, ooh! He's going to drop the head of the chrysanthemum into the lavatory. And of course he did! You see, he bent down to undo his flies and off went the chrysanthemum, he comes down triumphantly with the stalk! And was just going to go on when I got hold of a stagehand and said, 'Stop him, stop him'. I flew upstairs, pulled the chrysanthemum, dripping with wee wee because he hadn't pulled the plug of course, pulled it out, shook it furiously, dashed down the stairs, stuffed it into the stalk and said, 'You're on!' And he went on, absolutely perfect, went down, talked to the lady and everything and I was standing there, everybody backstage was killing themselves with laughter because of course the bloody thing was still dripping and it was quite obvious that the woman who got it thought that this was a nice gesture, you know, that the chrysanthemum was washed before being used. [laughter] So she held it dripping into the aisle, fortunately not all over her skirt, and it was quite extraordinary because he was absolutely paralytic, but, back on the stage and he went through the show, he didn't put a foot wrong, it was quite extraordinary. God knows, I can't remember what happened afterwards, but I'm sure he must have just fallen flat on his face as soon as the curtain went down. Oh, we had some adventures, I can tell you.

[1:15:44]
That's a very good example of…

Of what used to happen.

…the problems with live television or whatever, or the nearest thing to live television, which it wasn't quite, but if anything had really gone wrong you could have always cut it.

Well, yes of course it's all become technically so much easier now. I think probably consequently everybody's got much slacker about things. I think an awful lot of things depend on doing the editing, which we couldn't do. I mean I can remember going out to Wembley…

The technology wasn't there in those days.

No.

Tell us a little bit about Treasure Hunt.

Oh, I've forgotten all about *Treasure Hunt*. Maybe it was *Treasure Hunt*. No, it can't have been *Treasure Hunt*, that I did.

So that was the first series of Treasure Hunt *that you were at* Treasure Hunt*?*

I only did the first series, because by that time, that's right, because by the time I finished the end of the first series of *Treasure Hunt* this contract trouble had been sorted out and I was ready to start doing *Blockbusters*. So I did one series of *Treasure Hunt* and then went on to *Blockbusters* and abandoned *Treasure Hunt*.

I see, yes, yes.

So I set up *Treasure Hunt*, the first series.

How many episodes did you do? Presumably not all that many, because that's quite complicated?

Eleven, I think, because it should have been twelve, but for some reason one of them was cancelled… Oh I know. Yes, we went to do a show in Egypt with the French people who'd originated it and they mucked it up because Jean-Jacques Pasquier, the French director, got up the nose of the head of the archaeology department and they refused to let the helicopter land. So the French did it with a Land Rover and Malcolm pulled out of it because we can't start a helicopter show by doing a show with no helicopter. So that was a show wasted and we did eleven instead of twelve.

Was it an instant success?

It was very successful, yes. I mean it was surprising how quickly it caught on, considering what a sort of new concept it was.

It was lucky that of course you managed to get hold of Anneka. Was it, you were saying that she stood out amongst the…

Yes, she did do it jolly well. But we had, I mean it was jolly hard work finding the places, because you can imagine, getting permission to land a helicopter in the sort of position that makes it possible to use whatever location it is is not always easy. And when we did… I said well, we've got to kick off with something rather astonishing and in my usual idiotic optimistic way I said, 'I know what, there's a helicopter pad at Battersea, there's a helicopter pad near the river by St Paul's, we can surely find another place to land a helicopter down there, let's go down London river', you know, let's put the things down London river. And of course I didn't realise what I was letting myself in for because getting the permissions and everything was a nightmare. But, everything was extraordinary, we found places, it was all alright, until we got to Greenwich. Now, Greenwich, we wanted to get her on board Cutty Sark, and Greenwich had perfectly suitable places everywhere, and they wouldn't let us do it. They were difficult. The National Maritime wouldn't let us go into their grounds, the navy wouldn't let us go into, you know, what's that building that's just been sold? That Wren building, which has got a perfect helicopter pad, which is always used by Prince Philip and people, but they

wouldn't have it. And we were absolutely desperate because we couldn't find anything that was flat enough to put the helicopter on, and the director, Roger Thomas, just happened to be gazing out into space and he said, 'Look, there's a pontoon there, who does it belong to?' And the chap on Cutty Sark said, 'Oh that, it belongs to the London Rowing Club'. So Roger rushed round to the… was told where the office was and everything and said, 'Can we land a helicopter on your pontoon?' And I said, 'Well, you know, we'd better ask Clive if he thinks he can get down on it'. And Clive said, 'Oh yeah, no problems, so long as there isn't a big sea running, I can get down on there'. So we were saved. And he did get down and I must say, it was a feat to have done it because there can't have been more than six feet anywhere round him on this thing which was just sort of flapping about like this.

[1:20:11]
Very dodgy, yeah.

But it was quite fun doing that trip down London river. And then he went on HMS Belfast and she ran around on there.

Was it in any way sort of manufactured, that Treasure Hunt*, because you know, they're sort of running out of time…*

No, it couldn't be.

It couldn't be really, no.

Couldn't. No, it had to be done in real time.

There were some times, you know, when you got very behindhand and I imagine…

Well, that was it. If they got behind they were lost, I mean that was their fault.

That was a hazard that you had to allow for, I suppose, yes.

Yes.

Because sometimes, I mean you might not have even got as far as the last destination.

Oh, they very often didn't. Quite a lot of them didn't make it. And once or twice, you see, it's the old story, I couldn't be everywhere, and I used to say to the girl who went on the show as opposed to the recces, now listen, don't go and put that clue in position in broad daylight in view of the tourists because it'll get moved or stolen, you know. I said 'It's bad luck, but you'll have to get up at six o'clock in the morning and go and put it there'. And of course they didn't, they couldn't be bothered, they were out boozing and kicking up their heels like television crews always do and, you know, it was… when we put the clue in the eye of the White Horse at, you know, on the, where is it, on the Downs, of course it had gone, so that the whole point of finding the golden horse in the eye of the White Horse, you know, which made the clue. And fortunately the cameraman who was the only man who knew the answers in advance, so to speak, he realised what had happened and he was smoking cigarettes that came in a gold box, so he screwed the gold box up and pushed it into the grass so that she could find a gold object and he then, the cameraman did it in such a way that you couldn't see what it was, and so she found it and held it up like this, and it saved us. But I mean it was cheating because he had to say to her, as he did it, it's a golden horse. And the other thing that happened was, we took them up Cader Idris and she had to find golden treasure underwater in a perfectly, you know, it was perfectly plain, and I said to the girl, 'For goodness sake, put it somewhere where you are absolutely sure that it can be seen, provided she's in the right position. And I don't know what they did, presumably they put it and they didn't anchor it with something and there she was in exactly the right position and she couldn't find the blasted whatever it was, I've forgotten what it was now, a gold necklace or something. Well, that was a bit hairy.

Were you involved in choosing the candidates, the people who were…

Not really, but once or twice when we were stuck I went, for instance we had two rather nice geographers, we had a professor of geography and one of his students, which I got by ringing up a friend of mine in the map department at London School of Economics. And we had some volunteers of course, as soon as we started. And I was very, very angry when I discovered that one of the producers had put in a couple that he'd met in a wine bar

and had chatted to them and discovered that they were, yachts, very enthusiastic yacht people, and he'd put them in quite deliberately because he knew that I'd been up and down a recce all round the Isle of Mull and Oban where the clues depended on knowing about sailing. So that, you know, it was strictly speaking a bit of a fiddle.

Bit of a fiddle that. Did they do very well? Obviously they did.

Of course they did! And to anybody who knew as much about quiz programmes as I did, it stuck out a mile, you know, because they'd sussed out almost instantly because they'd been sailing all round Oban themselves, but still.

It's quite a tricky job for Kenneth Kendall, I would have thought, you know. I mean he must have known and he had to just sort of…

No, he wasn't in the know.

He wasn't?

Oh no. No, no, no. But he was supposed to be able to help them, you know, by thinking out the clues and by saying, why don't you do this… but he didn't very often do it I don't think. I think he was afraid to push them around in case it looked as if he was… it was a very fine point, you know, to what extent they could be helped.

It wasn't an entirely satisfactory show, I never felt. You know, I loved…

Well, did you see the first series?

I saw two or three of them.

Oh, because you see the fact is that I only did that first series and as soon as I left, they turned it into Alton Towers. You see, I said we have got a helicopter, for God's sake use it, the whole point. And they said oh no, it's just a way of getting round quickly.

Getting from A to B, mm.

You see, so they wasted all the visual opportunities and it just became a show in which Anneka Rice ran about doing silly things, falling in the water and that sort of thing. And they never, they never paid any attention to the visual aspect of it. Accidentally, sometimes there were good shots, but they just regarded it as a way of getting about.

Yes.

We went to Staffa to do *Fingal's Cave* and the man went down, I said to him be careful, that stuff's rather slippery, and there was quite a sea running, he slipped down and dropped the camera. Fortunately we had a spare camera, but it meant that the helicopter had to go all the way back to Oban to get it, by which time the light had changed and everything, oh God. That was one of the rare occasions where we did have to stop and start again.

Yes, I was sort of thinking it must have been a nightmarish show to co-ordinate, that one. Very successful really, I suppose. Does it still go on? I don't think it does, I think it came to an end.

No, I think it has come to an end now.

So you went on to Family Fortunes *after that, did you? Oh no, you went on… what was the last one you did?*

Yeah, the absolutely last thing I did was *Blockbusters.*

Oh, Blockbusters*?*

Yes, because I did *Blockbusters* after *Treasure Hunt*. And then at the end of that I gave it up. I retired, in a cloud of glory. [laughter]

Were you sorry to give it all up?

No, absolutely delighted, [laughter] couldn't wait to get out.

It's a very interesting story isn't it?

Oh, I don't know.

Many thanks. Many thanks. I think we're nearly at the end of the tape.

Yes, I think you'd better stop.

[break in recording]

[1:26:54]
…accept or to apologise or anything, and he immediately attacked me and said that he'd have me for slander, you know, if I said that he'd cheated and I said, 'Well it's ridiculous William, we all heard you do it and we've got it on tape'. And he blustered and shouted and yelled, and I said, 'Well anyway, don't ever do it again', you know. But, I tried to see Jon Scoffield who was Head of Light Ent at that time, I went to see him and said… no, I tried to go and see him, that's right, and his secretary always said, 'Oh, he's in a meeting', 'Oh he's busy' and after about three weeks of not being able to see Jon Scoffield, I thought he's afraid of the situation, he doesn't want to give Bill Stewart a dressing down, you know, he doesn't want to be involved. And finally I saw him, there's a very long corridor at ATV down past the canteen, and I was walking down and I saw John coming towards me and I thought, ah ha ha, he has no escape, ha, I've got him now, he literally can't turn off. And so when he got up to me I said, 'Now, come on'. And he said, 'I don't want to talk about it, I don't want to talk about it'. And I never got to say to him, you know, you should have done something about that, because if you don't, you know, it was a fearful scandal.

It would be a problem, that, wouldn't it?

Ah! Well, I kept saying to them, you seem to think you're out of the wood because nothing's been said, but I said there are hundreds of people in that audience who saw what happened, who worked out what happened, because the show was stopped in order for Bill Stewart to rig it, you see. There was a gale of laughter and he made the excuse that

because there was a gale of laughter the man should have said ‘Chick’, and what he said was, what’s the word they use quite incorrectly for a tart, like tramp or some word like that? Slag, slag. He said ‘Slag’ and everybody shrieked with laughter and he should have said chick. And Bill Stewart realised that he could make the shriek of laughter an excuse for saying ‘Stop, stop’, you know, I couldn’t hear what he said, ‘… show ….’ And while this was going on and they were resetting and so on, he got the chap away and said to him, ‘You say ‘chick’ and you’ll make yourself a lot of money’. And of course the chap went back and said ‘chick’ and made himself a lot of money. But I said to him, but there are all the people in the audience who saw that something went on, some of them probably actually heard it and in any case there’s all the crew, all the sort of odd bods who hang about in studios, they’ve only got to be talking about it among themselves in a pub where the local stringer or somebody overhears it and you know, it’ll be all over everything. But he couldn’t see that, he didn’t think – well, it didn’t happen, but it jolly easily could have done.

I imagine there have been one or two examples over the years when…

A lot of cheating. Oh! Right, left and centre.

I know that they made that film didn’t they, in America.

Oh, well that was what gave rise to it all of course. I didn’t see the film but…

I thought it was quite good actually.

[1:29:55]
I don’t think they did very much research, I don’t think they really knew quite what went wrong, but anyway, it was quite simple, that he was told the answer.

It was implied that he was given…

He was told the answers, of course he was. And that was why I was got into the television quiz business because the then, whatever it was called, the governing body said, ‘There

can't be any more of this, we can't have a scandal like this over here, we must have somebody in between the show and the questions who is incorruptible.

An incorruptible attendant.

Yes. What a lot they were though. They were all at it, because you see they always want everybody to win, at all costs, and certainly if it's a question of are they going to win £1,000 or whatever.

Well, I mean it was the big money wasn't it, that was at stake, like Treasure Trail *was a lot of money wasn't it?*

But the fact is that the people, the public don't like cheating.

No.

I mean they react against a programme on which there is cheating or where they think there is cheating much more strongly than the people in television seem to realise.

Well, it's got to be so dramatic hasn't it, it's got to, you know…

Yes, it's got to be the real, it's got to be the…

It's got to be absolutely right.

It's got to be the real thing, yes.

It's got to be the real thing, otherwise…

But I never got to the bottom of why these people thought that it was in any way desirable to cheat. I had terrible rows with Tony Wolfe, because when he was producing *Blockbusters*, he was forever stopping the show on some pretext because he thought that if they had five minutes to think or if something happened, you know, give them another question, he could get a different result. And I was always saying to him, you can't afford

to do it? Don't do it, don't do it. But no, he would always try it on. I once got so angry with him that I said to him as he went back into the box and I was sitting beside the camera, 'I'm quite prepared to make an issue of it'. And he stalked off and I ran after him and a sort of maddening…

[1:32:03 - tape ends abruptly]

Queries

p.5 – [incomp] question about filming programme (difficult to hear)

p.9 – Anna Insten – spelling? Sister worked in archives at BBC

p.34 – George Leuenberger – spelling? Worked in props at Central TV, Nottingham