Eileen Diss (1931-) is a British theatrical designer. After studying at the Central School of Art she worked at the BBC as a design assistant on a number of children's programmes, dramas and musicals before becoming a freelance designer. Notable television credits include *Maigret* (1960-1963), *Porterhouse Blue* (1987) and *Jeeves and Wooster* (1990-1993). In addition she has worked on a number of films including *84 Charing Cross Road* (1987) and *A Handful of Dust* (1988). In addition, Diss also designed a number of theatre sets, working notably on Pinter productions as well as designer sets for the work of Simon Gray and Brian Friel.

(cut off) 1994 Tape 1 side 1 Eileen Diss, interview number 323.

I: Where were you born?

ED: In Hackney, East London

I: Ah, what kind of schooling did you receive?

ED: Very ordinary Elementary School and the 11 plus to the local Grammar School which was Guilford County High School for Girls and that was during the war I think I must have gone to that school in 42, left there in 49 and went to the Central School of Art, did Theatre Design for three years there and Jeanetta Cochrane[1] who of course has the theatre named after her now, the art school theatre. I was there for 3 years and she was actually running the department then

I: Can I ask how you came to do theatre studies?

ED: Yes, I met, the real actual catalyst was *Henry V*. I remember, to this day, when I first saw that. It was just after the war, a few weeks before the end of the war. I think I was in the third form, and we were taken, one morning at eleven o'clock to the cinema. I mean that was a big enough event and we were taken to see *Henry V* because it was educational. But I used to go the cinema a lot with my mother; I did used to love the cinema anyway. We were regular Saturday cinema goers, but this was a total knock out. I'd never seen anything like this; I thought it was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Anyway, when I went home from school I dragged my parents back to see it in the evening, then on Saturday I saw it again, saw it three times running because you could do that those days, I think I went in at one o'clock and came out at eleven. And I've thought about nothing but cinema after that, and then when I went into the fifth form and then into the sixth form I had a friend who was also a movie addict. We used to go miles to film societies and I would see all the French films and the Italian films. It was that period immediately after the war when all the French output, of course we'd never seen during the war suddenly came over. You know we used to save pocket money and go to Studio 1 and the Academy, the Academy was wonderful and I was seeing everything from *Caligari* onwards. We

[1] Jeanetta Cochrane was a theatre designer and practitioner, specialising in costume and scenery design at the Central School of Art and Design. The theatre that was named after her closed in 2012 after the school moved premises.

talked about hardly anything else except cinema and we actually played truant one day, I think we were in the fourth form as a matter of fact. We chose a day when we had double chemistry because we both hated chemistry and we went up to town on the bus and we had lunch at the Corner House. We'd saved for this form months and months and we went up to the Academy and saw *Le Jour Se Leve* and we came home and she wrote me an excuse note and I her and got away with it actually, that was a great day. So anyway I could draw, Art was one of my best subjects, also History which I did love so combining them and this addiction to cinema it became natural to want to go into that area but there was no such thing as a film school

I: No

ED: So the nearest thing was to do a theatre course, which I did. It was heavily biased towards costume actually because Jeanetta Cochrane and several of the lecturers there were really costume people so I did an awful lot about costume which oddly enough I've never done since but the really valuable days were Mondays when we did life drawing we had some wonderful teachers, Mervin Peake was one of them and Fridays when we were thrown out to the museums and that was an education spent whole days at the V and A and the London museum and places like that so anyway that went on for three years and came out of that at the end

I: Were your parents supportive?

ED: Well as a matter of fact they were once they'd realised I was serious because at that moment at the end of the fifth form when we'd just done and you had to opt for the science 6th or the arts 6th. My father wanted me to be a dentist as a matter of fact he thought it was a really good solid profession. Of course they'd come through the depression and the war and I was on only child. He really wanted me to have a secure future and he thought this was a secure future and a respected profession, and they said well art is wonderful, but you can always do that, you can paint it's a wonderful hobby. I went along immediately to the sixth form presented myself to the science sixth and got laughed out of court of course because I think my last science marks had been D, Chemistry was E I think and they wanted to know what I thought I was doing there. So anyway I came at the end of that day in floods of tears and they realised that I was serious, that it wasn't going to work so a bargain was struck that I could go into the arts sixth if I went in for architecture. Architecture was now considered to be the secure profession and so I did, I went into the arts sixth and I took History and French and Art and loved every minute of it, it was wonderful after years and years of doing all those subjects you didn't like to spend all day doing the ones you did. So then after I took higher schools they called them in those days, it's A Levels now, I then wanted to take this theatre course. I think the Central was one of the few schools that had a theatre course. So another compromise was reached because I was so really desperately keen on working in the cinema somehow and I was allowed to go and do the course if I spent evening classes doing architecture. So I spent 3 years doing architecture in the evenings and the theatre course during the day. Anyway at the end of all that there wasn't any work anyway (laughs). Obviously,

evening class it would have taken me years and years to qualify as an architect anyway at that rate. But I had my diploma, the art school didn't give degrees in those days so I had a diploma, from Central School and I wrote around, I wrote to lots of film art directors, some were very kind and wrote back. And one of them, my father oddly enough had known during the war, he worked in Ambulances during the Blitz in the control centre, which was in Shoreditch and quite near the Gainsborough studio and one of his fellow controllers where they used to sit night after night was a really nice man was an art director at Gainsborough. Now the appalling thing is that his name escapes me, it was John, and I cannot at this moment remember it. But he was the man who virtually invented independent frame at Pinewood; do you know who I mean? I wrote to him too and on the strength of the past acquaintanceship with my father, he said well come and see me, bring your portfolio, which I did and he got in touch with Roy Oxley[2] who had been a fellow art director, now at this time, which by now was 1951 he was at the BBC. Now the head of design there at that time was Peter Bax[3] and they, now what happened, oh I think it was the usual thing, they said apply, and fill in the form and I did all that and sent it that and heard absolutely nothing for six months. Well I did all sorts of other jobs in the meantime. Anyway, after about six months I actually had a letter from the BBC asking if I would like to join a course, which of course I would, which was a producers course in those days, but they used to have a couple of designers tagging along, it really was for producers and directors. They used to run at Marylebone High Road I think, it was for six weeks, met Paddy Foy[4] there and people like that. So I did jump at the chance because the film industry was really going through quite a depression at that time, there was this vicious circle where you couldn't get a job unless you were a member of the ACTT and you couldn't be a member unless you had a job and so it went on so, people were quite kind but really there was nothing doing so television was the answer.

I: Several studios had to close down hadn't they around 1949 so it was probably the worst time to try and get into movies.

ED: Well the early fifties were really bad I think, after that tremendous spate of films in the late forties and it seemed to have died down. So I went on the BBC course which started in December 52 I think it was.

I: Did they pay you while you were on the course?

ED: That was the extraordinary thing. One of the things that had worried me, I wrote back and said, how much would it cost, because obviously I had no money at all and they wrote back and said no, we will pay you (laughs). I couldn't get over it; we will pay you nine pounds a week

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[2] Roy Oxley (1899-?) was a British production designer at the BBC, he won a BAFTA for his work on *The Portrait of a Lady* in 1969.

[3] Peter Bax was a production designer at the BBC, he worked on productions including *Hamlet* (1947) and *Macbeth* (1949).

[4] Patricia Foy (1922-2006) was a British producer and dance for programmes including *The Magic of Dance* (1979) and *The Margot Fonteyn Story* (1989).

I: And were you still living at home at the time?

ED: I was. Well my mother had died in the interim and I was actually looking after my father so I was still living at home. In fact, I always had to because I was cooking for him and what not. So I went up to Marylebone High Road and we had talks, and Michael Barry[5] as head of drama and practically everyone came along. And we had a final mock programme

I: Was this the first time you'd been in a studio, or had you managed to get inside one?

ED: No this was the first time, I was terribly impressed. I had one little contact before, but very small. It was whilst I was art school there was this Arts programme I think it was some kind of precursor of *Music For You*, something like that and they just sent round the art schools and said that they were going to offer a chance of somebody having a design on back projection for an opera, an aria during this programme if anyone wanted to send something in and I did a backdrop for *Rigoletto* and sent it in. And we didn't have a television but my grandmother did who was still living in Poplar at the time, and went over there, she had a nine inch screen, and waited with bated breath to see what was going to come up, and it was, it was mine and, I mean there was no credit or anything like that but it was on the screen and it was absolutely wonderful, anyway so this was really the first time I'd been into a studio and I remember we did a little exercise at the end at Ally Pally and it was during those last four or five days of that big fog and I remember getting over there on a bus somehow and walking up the railings because you couldn't see, I could just see the railings all the way round to get in. Anyway after that we were allowed six weeks, in the departments we were going to. The other designer was Peter Rice who in fact is still a theatre designer, he went back to theatre, and he didn't like television very much. So, we were sort of seconded to the design and started on children's programmes, *Prudence Kitten* and *Muffin the Mule*

I: What did your work entail?

ED: Well, actually doing the set for them, I mean going along and asking what the producers wanted. There was Dougy Mare was one of the small programmes, one of the children's small programmes, you used to do three in a day, I mean the requirements were not enormous, and of course the graphics department was nothing like established, I think there were a couple of sign writers, so you did all the graphics for them as well and charts. And I remember doing star charts of the night sky for, oh god the names do go, the big man, *The Sky at Night*, you know who I mean. The producer of that was David Attenborough[6], a very young David Attenborough who I adored right from the start and lots of other little things, but I used to go along to see Dougy Mare in his office and see what he wanted and I quickly learnt not to go along to the office because he was always on the phone, I

[5] Michael Barry (1910-1988) was a British television producer, who became head of drama at the BBC in 1952.
[6] David Attenborough (1926-) is a British broadcaster, best known for his nature programmes. He was also Controller of BBC 2 and later became a Director of Programmes for both BBC 1 and BBC 2.

would go in and sit there, and get two words out then the phone would ring and I would sit there like a dummy for half an hour. So, I caught on after a few days that the thing to do was to phone him (laughs) and then of course you were actually able to talk to him. Oh I've forgotten, to say that the invitation to this course came after I did go up to a board, travelled up on the tube with a theatre model actually and Peter Bax was chairing the board and Roy Oxley was on it and I can't remember who else was on it and that was the only time I met Peter Bax because between that day and going on the course he died, which was very sad. His name is still, at least it was until a few years ago was stamped over all the illustrations in the reference library because he started that library, collected old Edwardian *Country Life* and that sort of thing and still has Peter Bax stamped on it, though I think it's all gone now, sadly

I: I think it was sold off, wasn't it?

ED: Yes, which was a shame.

I: Still exists, but not BBC anymore.

ED: So, anyway after the six weeks were up I kind of hung on and asked was I staying, was I not and never got an answer, so just went from week to week really.

I: What would happen, what were your working hours?

ED: Oh, well I mean very regular, 9 til 5.30 except of course when we were in the studio when it was earlier and later. Anyway after a couple of weeks they gave me a play to do, a children's play, which was staggering really considering how totally inexperienced I was. It was all about Robert Louis Stevenson and Shaun Sutton[7] was the ASM, as a matter of fact I think he wrote it, and John Gregson[8] was in it, he played Robert Louis Stevenson and this was pre *Genevieve* so he wasn't well known and I did various appalling things such as putting backings only two foot away from windows and things like that but I learnt, it was a packed studio. Of course we had the South Seas, and Davos in Switzerland and somewhere in Scotland. As usually everything was crammed into H, that long narrow studio.

I: How much time did you have to do it?

ED: Oh I don't remember.

I: Days?

ED: Oh yes, it was all a very quick turnaround we were all in one little studio, went on live at five o'clock, set it up at eight and went out at five and after that I went through a round of children's programmes, usually there was a play or something like *Whirligig*, what was that one that Kevin Sheldon used to so with the family, The Appleyards, which was the big Saturday one, I think *Whirligig* and *The Apple Yard*

[7] Shaun Sutton (1919-2004) was a British television writer, director and producer. He was head of Drama from 1967-1981.

[8] John Gregson (1919-1975) was a British actors whose credits included *Above us the Waves* (1955) and *The Longest City* (1962).

used to alternate on Saturdays, and *Crackerjack*, and on the whole they were quite large pieces, I remember doing a waterfall once, quite a large waterfall I think that was *Crackerjack* or *Whirligig* and there was a wonderful plumber called Alf Massey, leaping all over the place, getting it all ready.

I: I thought you'd painted it!

ED: Oh god no, we had real water and pipes everywhere and taps and tanks and that was all knocked together in a day and I did *Billy Bunter* and again that was with Sean Sutton, and later on lots of those children's serials that he used to do, it was a Sean Sutton repertory company, there was Paul Whitsun- Jones[9] and Barry Letts[10], and what was his name, the one who always used to play the foreigners, no I can't remember it, I'll think of it, Roger Delgado. There was a lot of sword fighting all the time, I learnt not to put too much furniture in because it always got struck with the swords.

I: Where did you get the furniture from?

ED: Well we mostly hired it, it was mostly, I mean there wasn't anything like the number of hire companies that there are these days, Cosh was there, that was well established, Times was well established, I passed that the other day and it is all knocked down now, that's gone, mind you the furniture is still around I still see pieces that I hired in the early fifties. Battered but unbowed, they're still around. That went on for a few years, I did some nice things for children's television, I really enjoyed it, *Little Women*, I think Phyllis Calvert[11] was Mrs March in that one and *The Railway Children*, that comes round every once in a while, all of those, but the big ambition was to a proper grown up play in D, D was the object. So and I did musical shows, dreadful things that Dicky Attlee used to do, *Jukebox*, with the gates that never worked and of course everything was live which was an interesting exercise just in planning. I used to enjoy doing the studio plan because not only was it planning the sets but also the rotation of cameras, you had to make sure that one was able to leave to pick up for the next scene and of course the artists had to get around and get there and we had to make sure that was all possible without cable knitting. And in the light ent programme like *Jukebox* and Dicky Attlee specials they were singing away on one side of the programme whilst you were changing the set on the other. Again, the logistics were fun to organise, there was always so much packed into the studio and you had to keep changing it and of course until tele-recording came along when in fact you could take a break, or the other thing of course if you had film, if you had tele- cine like *The Railway Children* we knew that we had two minutes and they'd shout "on film" and everyone would skate around like crazy trying to get the next scene ready and then freeze when, coming back to the studio, it was a good deal

[9] Paul Whitsun- Jones (1923-1974) was a British character actor, he was in television programmes including *The Avengers* and *Doctor Who.*

[10] Barry Letts (1925-2009) was a British actor, writer and producer best known for his work on *Doctor Who* as producer and director.

[11] Phyllis Calvert (1915-2002) was a British actress, who acted in over forty films during her career.

of fun. Then I did get to do drama, I did the *The Voice of the Turtle,* years and years ago I think about 57, 56 I think that was one of the first things I did Alastair Gowen was in that.

I: Oh.

ED: Stuart Burge[12] directed, and it's the only time I've ever worked with Stuart Berge and we've tried frequently over the years and it never quite worked and I still see him and we say, we'll do it one day but we never quite have yet. Where do we from there, well I spent 7 years on the staff of the BBC happily doing children's plays and a few proper plays and all these programmes thrown in because you had one big programme a week, either one of Dicky Atlee's musical programmes or *Music for You*, not that I ever did *Music for You*, Stephen Taylor used to do those, very wonderfully, or an actual play, you did one programme like that and three or four little programmes, Before Dick Lemont brought in Natasha Kroll[13] and they established what they called the RDU, the SDU, Studio Design Unit, because he was so tired of the rag bag of styles that went into talks programmes like *Panorama* he took over all that and gave it to Natasha who was a very proficient designer with great taste who had actually came from Stinson she was an interior designer and she made it all work. She actually bought furniture, for the first time, for programmes and use for those programmes and it all became very organised and started to look decent. Dick Leven[14] said quite rightly that television should educate and entertain but educate in a design way as well and once the Festival of Britain had happened, house and garden started and people were beginning to become quite design conscious and it was quite important. Oh god I had a year on the Grove Family, a year, I used to go to Dick and say can I do something else and he'd say, no it's good for you. So that went on twice a week live

I: Just that nobody else wanted to do it

ED: it was your purgatory before you were allowed into heaven and studio D and the play, but it was all good fun it was quite manic, it used to go on at half past five live or 6 o'clock. I remember that because that was one of the things that Dick hated was the way that *The Grove Family* looked, because like *Coronation Street* today it was designed to reflect the taste of the ordinary man which he wanted to revise and educate so he insisted that the set was redesigned and made modern and I think that the life of it went out of it after then. It was a praiseworthy idea but it wasn't the Grove family. Anyway I had my first child in '56 and I was expecting another one in '59 and began to feel like it would be a good idea to go freelance and not work all the time so I left the BBC and Dick Levin was all for this as what he wanted to do was what Drama was doing, in effect, there were by the end of the fifties relatively few staff drama directors they were beginning to use freelance and you know it was

[12] Stuart Burge (1918-2002) was an British actor, producer and director, his productions included *Julius Caesar* (1970) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1986)

[13] Natasha Kroll (1914-2004) was a production designer, and headed the Studio Design Unit for the BBC.

[14] Dick Levin (1910-2000) as Head of Design at the BBC from 1953-1971

making things move, a new breathe of life. It went on like throughout the sixties until Sidney Newman[15] came in.

I: Do you think this was partly a result of independent television coming along?

ED: It could very probably have been I think it might have had a lot to do with it, there was a feeling that things ought to change and get faster and move and the writing too was changing, it was moving out of the Rattigan era to the kitchen sink and Dick Levin in design and Sydney Newman in drama started what was a clean sweep into what was called the grey drapes era and I think that independent television had a lot to do with it. Dick brought in people like Sean Kenny[16], not for very long, he couldn't stand it for very long but he was there. Things were changing a lot, people were much more design conscious. I went freelance, Natasha went freelance.

I: Can I just ask something about the BBC Art Department, how many designers were there?

ED: Well when I joined in 52 there were 10 designers and two draftsmen and then I became the third. Then Dick Levin came along and brought more designers and he created the design assistant instead of the draftsman so I became a design assistant. It was still pretty hierarchical, you did your bit then moved along, but later on at the beginning of the sixties he would have liked to have gone for a completely freelance design department, he got quite a long way there. They were called contract designers, I became a contract designer, I didn't have a year's contract, or anything like that I just went in for the show but shortly after that in 1960 they gave me *Maigret* to do, and of course that went on for three and a half years and really nobody knew I was freelance in fact there were people years later who thought I was still on the staff, but I only did that freelance. Of course it happened so regularly that it seemed like being on the staff I used to get paid per episode; I got 56 pounds for the first *Maigret* And that included, filming in France, filming in Ealing and all the studio filming.

I: Was some of that actually filmed in France?

ED: All the exteriors were, well most of the exteriors there if it was south of France you couldn't go that far, they drew the line at Paris, you didn't go south of Paris you could do anything in the north of France, we were allowed to Normandy and along the coast, if it happened in the south you had to go to Torquay or something. But there weren't many in the South they were always set in the north of France around Paris. but that was a wonderful three and a half years.

I: A wonderful series.

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[15] Sydney Newman (1917-1997) was a Canadian film and television producer, and Head of Drama at the BBC. He initiated the creation of *Doctor Who* in 1963.

[16] Sean Kenny (1929-1973) was an Irish set, costume and lighting designer. He is most notable for his work with Lionel Bart on musicals including *Oliver!* (1960).

ED: I tried to make it look as much as possible like all those French films.

I: I think you succeeded.

ED: Absorbed for so long, of course it was black and white which helped and also it was tele- recorded which is very grainy and you kind of got that sort of feel. We were in France quite a lot, my French got much better. I began to know Paris almost as well as I knew London, looking for locations, became very much a way of life back and forth to France. Yes that was three and a half years, quite a long time.

I: Deciding you wanted to work less you were actually working full time and coping with travel.

ED: Yes, I never had to work less, I'm grateful to say really. It never worked out like that.

I: Was it the first big series that your name was associated with, did it establish your reputation?

ED: Yes it was, it did me a lot of good, it was really great.

I: Do you know how you got chosen for it?

ED: I think it was James Bold who ran the office and he rang up and said do you want to do a detective series and I was glad to do anything. Then of course the scripts came along and it was *Maigret*. They were only going to do six but it was so successful that there was another series, then another. In fact we did 52 which was nearly all the *Maigret* stories that they were. And they were never ghosted, they were always genuine Simeon, and I met Simeon, amazing fellow. Anyway, very good 3.5 years, it was great.

I: Fascinating.

ED: so after that it was back to the old drama, just trying to think what those early ones where, oh there was a Keith Waterhouse[17] called *All Things Bright and Beautiful*.

I: Were you still mainly working for the BBC?

ED: Yes because I hadn't got over to the other side in fact I'd never been asked to. There was quite. BBC was occupying me pretty fully and I was a bit frightened of ITV. So I went on doing plays for the BBC and I think that the first ITV one was I can't remember what year but I think it wasn't until '68, quite late into the sixties, because there were some quite wonderful things going on in the BBC in the sixties. I did my first Pinter[18] play which was *The Tea Party* then I think that was 64 then *The Basement* a couple of years later that he acted in himself.

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[17] Keith Waterhouse (1929-2009) was a British novelist, newspaper columnist and television writer. His screenplays include *Whistle Down the Wind* (1961).

[18] Harold Pinter (1930-2008) was a British playwright, director, screenwriter and actor. His plays included *The Room* (1958) and *Betrayal* (1978).

I: Was that daunting?

ED: It was, it was a very big production *The Basement* was the play they chose for the European play. We were into Euro television by then and they had this wonderful idea called *The Greatest Theatre in the World*. The theory was that every country in Europe produced the same play on the same night and they all did *The Tea Party*. We did it in, the centre, we had studio one TC1, the big studio and you could really do a lot in those big studios, you really could. It was great and it was wonderful for exteriors too, I used to love doing exteriors and gardens, I did quite a lot of Shaw *Mrs Warrens Profession*, built half Surrey there, a cottage exterior. All the things you would go out and so on there was relatively little, you built it all in the studio, just as in the old days on cinema. And the other things that was beginning to happen, no that was the seventies, colour separation, no we're still in the sixties, still we were drama, but of course colour happened which as a new direction a new world. I mean a lot of hot air was talked about it, people talking about saturation, desaturation.

I: Did you have to go on a course?

ED: You had to go on a course and you were told that real greenery was too bright and it would all have to be sprayed down grey green, all sorts of things like that, but that wasn't really the case, they could cope. I think David Attenborough was head of BBC 2 then and I remember meeting him in the lift and he said is it going to be much more difficult and I said no of course it's not, because it wasn't.

I: I would have thought it would be more difficult the other way.

ED: What with black and white?

I: Yes.

ED: Well in many ways, one had to constantly think about contrast but the thing about colour was not to use too much because all these riotous backgrounds tended to swim to the foreground and that was not on, so just to use your natural taste really. I mean I always disliked brightly coloured backgrounds because I think that should be the foreground and not the background. Got myself lost now, where were we, sort of towards the end of the sixties, when I did *Up the Junction* with Ken Loach[19]. That was a departure.

I: Could you go through what would happen when you were doing a play, you would walk in on the first day?

ED: What after getting the script?

I: No, could you start with getting the script?

<u>Eileen Diss, Tape 1 Side 2</u>

[19] Ken Loach (1936-) is a British film and television director, known for his social realism. His films include *Kes* (1969), whilst his television work includes *Cathy Come Home* (1966).

I: You were going to take us through to what you do when doing your production design work; you receive the scripts and then what happens then?

ED: Well, I get a series of images as one does reading any script.

I: Does that always happen? I don't think I'd get a series of images.

ED: Well that's what I'm paid for you see, yes, you can see, as you read through you can see certain images and groups of people and relation to people to backgrounds. Just trying to think of one, I did *Uncle Vanya* for Christopher Morhan[20], and an image that came was, in the first act they're having tea in the garden at the table and the summer bar is there and the nurse is there and Yelena is swinging gently and I had an image of seeing this through the door from inside the house that it was out there and it kind of built on that because once you had that image and that relationship you know I knew then that the door was here the garden was there and you've got to go out here you've got to go into the garden and you've got to look up to the birch trees and when you were in the house you were into the salon and there were doors into the dining room and so it went on, I mean a pattern and I think that's how a plan does form, you know and then you draw it with those positions and the layout and how you see certain moments, of the play the images that come to you and you trot along to the director and he either says, "Oh yes, I like that, I see that or no no I didn't see it like that at all, I saw it like this" and so you go through it and it's quite a long discussion

I: Are some directors less concerned with what you do and others almost want to do it themselves?

ED: Yes they vary enormously but basically you really have to end up seeing the same pictures and come to a design that the director knows he's happy working with and then you go away and draw it and work out some more sketches and then you have to get down to the nitty gritty of doing a working drawing and you probably have an assistant to help with that and you have to draw the whole layout for the workshops to build and then a model is made it goes to rehearsal so the director can constantly refer to it when he's planning shots and there's all sorts of other things that I mean on Vanya we had a big cyc and a gauze and a lot of artist painting is involved and they all have to have drawings and references and those sorts of things. Then you have to start propping it there is all the furniture to choose and to dress and the whole garden to do. You've got to to get the turf and the trees and I mean for *Vanya* we had 24 foot high birch trees and they all had to be suspended obviously from the gantry and spotted and then you have to work quite closely with the lighting director because he's got to make all of this live and breathe, we had Bob Wright on *Vanya* and he was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. He used to start with a dark studio and just walk about with his walkie talkie and lights would begin to come on instead of flooding the whole thing and oh no, sculpt it in fact, and he did have a

[20] Christopher Morahan (1929-) is a British director and production executive. From 1972-1976 he was Head of Plays for the BBC.

wonderful idea for *Vanya* which was all the windows of the house which face onto the garden we put a cyc a very tall cyc right away round the other side on which he reflected clouds which we never actually saw but they were reflected in the windows you see and it suddenly gave it this extra reality but a magic reality which was lovely. Anyway having got everything together.

I: Where do you get all your props?

ED: Oh all over, so many places now, in London anyway you can hire almost anything from, it's an industry in itself and then there are places that can dig up whole fields and bring the grass in and cut down trees which is dreadful and bring them in, so you go in there and they build it overnight, at the BBC they do anyway. So you have the bare bones when you start at four o'clock in the morning

I: You start that early?

ED: Oh yes, well I used to go in earlier, I used to go in all night on *Maigret* because we never had a lot of time the next day just in case something went wrong. I think these days might be more luxurious but you only had that morning to put it up overnight, you'd have a prop crew they'd come in at 8 and then you'd have until lunchtime to put everything there because at 2pm they'd come in and start technical rehearsals and they were also lighting through that morning so it was highly chaotic. But I mean this thing on *Vanya* for instance was that we had to spot all these trees, there were a lot of them and each one, it took quite a long time. Before we did that we laid tarpaulin all along the floor.

I: For the leaves?

ED: Then the trees were spotted then the grass went in then the long grasses and the bushes you know you had to spend the morning gardening, also of course getting the inside ready, putting all the furniture in and hanging the curtains and all that. it's like moving in all in four hours but the thing about old fashioned television, when I say old fashioned television I mean where you would do a technical rehearsal for that afternoon and the next day and you would record at 7 o'clock the second evening until 11 o'clock, I loved that because that meant you could twitch and titivate and you were looking at it, you could see it and this is the advantage over film when you have an idea but you're not absolutely sure most of the time unless you're a real nuisance and keep on asking if you can look what is actually going into that shot but with television you've got all the monitors there and you can see exactly what each shot is and you can go down and alter things, change things, move them about, bring something in take something out without bothering anybody, you just get on and do it while, so that by the end of the second day when they come to record it's pretty well how you hope it might be. And a great moment of adrenaline, I mean it's wonderful when they all come in after supper and do the countdown, obviously there was far more adrenaline when it was live, but even on a recording. Actually some of the earlier plays, I did musicals, I did a few musicals that were really enjoyable, wonderful with directors like Bill Hayes and John Gorey we did *Laha a*nd *Count of*

Luxembourg and *The Merry Widow* and some Offenbach. I did *Tales of Hoffman* and what was the other lovely one, *Play de Mouse*, Strauss. I mean they were really lovely ones to do, the added dimension of having an orchestra and a chorus give the studio such a lift. That first day, of technical rehearsal you'd have piano and the repetiteur but at the end of the first day when you came back from supper you'd have an orchestra. They wouldn't be in the studio, they'd be in Maida Vale, or they could be in another studio, but they'd usually be at Maida Vale and it was all done with monitors and the repetiteur in the studio had a monitor of the conductor and the conductor had a monitor of the whole show and somehow it was all perfectly timed and beautifully, I mean the sound engineers, mixed it all from studio Maida Vale so wonderfully and the moment when actually you came back that night at 7 or whatever and the overture began, magic absolutely magic after this thin piano all day you suddenly had this full orchestra and those were magic ones to do, lovely. I did one big show, I did *Kiss me Kate*, I think that was for the opening of BBC 2, was that for the opening of BBC 2?

I: i think it was, there was a major musical,

ED: And didn't they lose the generators that night?

I: Yes, there was a power cut

ED: No they brought in generators because they'd lost the, that's right they were lined up outside the ring road.

I: Because on one of those television evenings, I remember, these archive things they showed the newscaster continuing to talk because they couldn't go to anything.

ED: These there was a big power cut, a blackout, they did do it, it did go out, and that was a great show Howard Keel came over for that and Patricia Morrison.

I: Oh

ED: I mean the numbers are so wonderful and Millicent Martin[21] was in it and David Kernan[22], and we had TC1, the big studio, I think we had more than one studio. Anyway we had this enormous scaffolding rig, which ran so that we could take a tracking shot started on stage and went back and ended up in the dressing room of the two principals you know. But that was a very exciting one to do. Sadly that was black and white; it wasn't colour it was before colour. But colour would have been wonderful on that one. But the other musicals I did were colour, *The Merry Widow* was colour and then into the seventies we started using colour separation which again was another dimension and that was very enjoyable. I did a few of those with Jim McTaggart and also Wednesday plays with him and all these things so.

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[21] Millicent Martin (1934-) is an English actress, singer and comedian her credits include *Alfie* (1966) as well as roles in television programmes including *Frasier* more recently.

[22] David Kernan (1938-) is a British actor and singer, nominated for a Tony Award for *Side by Side by Sondheim* in 1977

I: I think you were about to talk about Ken Loach and *Up the Junction*

ED: Yes, of course that was a Wednesday play, yes there was a lot of film on that he went out into the street a lot but again all the things you would film outside on location we actually filmed in the studio, like the pub and the dance hall. A lot of things like the factory we would have gone out to do these days. I thought what a breath of fresh air he was; well he still is, he's still doing.

I: He isn't half a character.

ED: Hasn't changed his commitments a bit, I admire him enormously and he still looks about, he always looked like a sixth former and he still does.

I: thin and gangly.

ED: Yes he hasn't aged and his energy has abated. Of course Jim McTaggart was largely responsible for the Wednesday play, produced it and directed quite a few himself I did quite a lot of those and did the first colour separation one with Jim which was *Candide* and then we did Alice through the looking glass after that, but *Candide* was the first one, he said you probably won't be interested in this because it will all be up against a blue background but in fact that was a fascinating one to do because it all had to be storyboarded you just have to storyboard every shot, every scene to make it work.

I: A lot of work.

ED: It's a lot of work, I mean you're not putting a great deal into the studio but the initial preparation is enormous but you can do wonderful things, that's steam age now compared to what they can do with Quantel and all those things. It was good fun,the sort of things we could do when *Candide* was thrown out the palace and bumps his way down the steps, we had the graphic, the drawing of the palace, but the doors were real they opened, Conga was Ian Ogilvy[23] actually and what we had was a blue pad with soft padding and he just bumped his way down it and of course for all the world he was bumping down the steps. lots and lots of things like that, real magic you could do what you like and of course it's taken off even more now and when we did *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, the little oysters coming out of the sea we had all these oysters in rows on long sticks, in little waves and the prop guys were just bouncing from one to the other and they actually came out of the waves when it was actually put on the picture of the beach and the sea, great fun all that. But about the time we were doing *Candide* I got my first film, actually, actually got my first film. It was with Joseph Losey, it was *A Doll's House*, the Jane Fonda[24] one and we were perched on the edge of the arctic circle in northern Norway in this little town called Roros which was very beautiful it had been a copper mining town and the mines were still up at the top of the hill. And consisted just of two streets with these very old

[23] Ian Ogilvy (1943-) is a British actor and writer known for *Return of the Saint* (1978-79) and *Death Becomes Her* (1992).

[24] Jane Fonda (1937-) is an American actress who has won two Academy Awards for *Klute* (1971) and *Coming Home* (1978).

houses, practically untouched, it was a wonderful location, wonderful. Very, very cold about twenty degrees below most of the time and very difficult to work I knew nothing about what sort of crew I ought to have, I think I had one English prop man and two Norwegian boys and the prop transport and one of them whose name was Ole and it was his van but he had a group and he used to vanish with it when it had a gig. It was quite hard work that one.

I: Was most of the work done on location?

ED: It was all done on location, they took over a big, big apartment which was a wonderful apartment, Engzelius house, and it was the family really that really ran the town, had a big, big store. It was Madame Engzelius because her husband had had a hunting accident, they'd shot an elk and they'd tried to get the elk into the boat and the whole damn thing sank and he drowned in icy water and the only survivor was this great big English spaniel who swam ashore and was still around. And that had happened really quite recently, but she was wonderful she gave over most of the apartment

I: Did you change it much?

ED: Oh yeah, because I mean it was furnished in a sort of fiftiesh there was a few old pieces but not many and we had to re furnish it and re paint some of it. I remember the entrance hall we actually put tongue and groove border all the way around because they had some very modern fittings there. Also, there was no such thing as a prop house in Oslo or Norway anyway everything had to come from either antique shops in Oslo or we had to put advertisements in the newspapers and anyone who had anything we'd go and see and in fact unearthed some wonderful things and all the sleighs came from around the countryside and they had them in barns with the hay on top you had to dig out the hay and discover they hay underneath but it all got put together it was fine, it was long and hard and cold

I: Do you know how Josepth Losey happened upon you?

ED: Yes, it was Harold, actually Harold Pinter because they'd worked together a lot. Joe always worked with a designer called Richard Donald because I think he was off in the desert doing I think it was Jesus Christ Superstar or something like that. A big movie anyway and his next person that he always worked with was Carmen Dillon and she was doing something else so he really was casting around and Harold suggested me, which was great and there was, it was a great experience working with Joe , although once we actually got to shooting I didn't actually really see a great deal of him because he was embroiled in his own troubles with Fonda and Delphine Seyrig. They were constantly rewriting the script and all this went on and I just had to re-write the script and hope it was all right. I saw a lot of him before in pre-production, we recced all the locations together but not a lot once we got underway we were grinding away too hard by then and he had his own troubles. Anyway it was my first movie and it was wonderful to have got one done.

I: It was quite a good movie as well, I liked it.

ED: I was trying to think what the next one after that was; oh I think the next one after that was I think about '79

I: I've got a list of things, but I don't think it's complete and it's not in date order.

ED: I haven't got my glasses, oh we're going backwards, *Doll's House* was that 73, oh yes it was wasn't it, oh I tell you what I did before that too in '71 which was a BBC film was *Cider with Rosie*, which was a wonderful, wonderful one to do I did dearly love that because we were in Slad with Laurie[25] which was the original cottage that he was born in.

I: It became a huge hit didn't it, quite a cult at the time.

ED: It was, but the cottage, haven't changed a lot, in fact we couldn't use the inside of the cottage.

I: Why?

ED: Because they'd put in tiled fireplaces and things like that so we had to take over another place and virtually rebuild it, we did actually build the living room of this cottage and the bedroom in the shell of an empty cottage and match it in with the exterior and I don't suppose you remember there's this steep dip into the cottage from the road where mother grew her cabbages and that sort of thing and into Laurie's house. Well when he had lived there subsequent owners had built a rather nasty little porch that we had to take away. Well the reason for that porch was that when it rained very hard the water came flooding downhill and gushed into the living room. In fact Laurie writes about it in Cider with Rosie when they used to have to get up in the middle of the night with the brooms and sweep all the water out of the kitchen. This is exactly what happened to those poor people when we took their porch away. So, anyway we rebuilt if for them afterwards. The marvellous thing was being in the village and I think that year 71 was the last year we could have done it. We went back the next year for *The Duchi of Malfi* fairly close in Oxfordshire and we went over to see Laurie for the day and the school which was empty when we had gone in and we had put it back to 1921 or whenever it was had been sold and totally modernised and the old cottage we used for one of his uncle's suddenly had picture windows and it had gone, it had suddenly gone in that year and it was so marvellous to have caught it in the right year.

I: It's awful some of the things which are done in the name of progress.

ED: Well I have to say even Laurie himself has got a picture window in the house he's moved in. He had this wonderful cottage and went into a bigger one with this great big picture window. Mind you it's got the most wonderful view right over the Slad valley and I said why and he I said I thought I'd had enough of my Mrs Tiggy winkle image. So they all did it I'm afraid.

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[25] Laurie Lee (1914-1997) was a British writer, best known for his autobiographical trilogy that includes *Cider with Rosie* (1959)

I: Easy to be po about things when you don't live in the house.

ED: Yes, and even the nasty little porch had its uses

I: I'm more sympathetic about the porch; I wouldn't like to be drowned every time there was a rainfall.

ED: Oh, *Behaving Badly*, you've got, that was Judi Dench[26] that was a really nice piece.

I: Oh yes, that was really very enjoyable, I liked that. That was fairly recently wasn't it

ED: Yes, I mean all of these were fairly recently

I: '80s I think

ED: Oh no, that was 89, yes, yes that we did we filmed exteriors and built, we built at Elstree as a matter of fact, all the interiors her little flat and her house and the kids flat. *Nobody here but us Chickens*? Oh that was that rather bizarre little series, I remember Daniel Massey and Jack Shepherd pretending to be chickens.

I: Yes I remember, it was bizarre.

ED: Yes.

I: Can I just ask, how do you work with the costume designer?

ED: Oh pretty closely very closely, really obviously mostly importantly for colour we need to know what each other are doing for colour. Also to have a seam I think really that is important.

I: Which comes first, your sets or the costume?

ED: Well as I say, it's this thing of having images, the costume designer has images as well. We talk about it, I mean I'm because I really like neutral backgrounds it's probably not too difficult. There's things I can't manage at any price and one of them is virulent royal blue, or anything like that that's a killer for me. I mean most of the costume designers I work with we are very much in sympathy. I think I've only once ever had a real upset with a costume designer I think that was on *The Tales of Hoffman* where we'd all agreed, I mean there were three stories, the first one is the doll and what was her name?

I: Was that the Coppelia one?

ED: Olympia, it's the same story, it's Doctor Coppelius but I think his doll is called Olympia, that was all going to be rococo and pastel, very pale pastel colours and there was Venice and that was going to be the colour of Venice, ochre yellow, terracotta, stone colours, very venetian, these Indian reds and the last one which I think was *Anastasia the Greek Island* which was about death basically which was going to be

[26] Judi Dench (1934-) is a British actress, she has been nominated for seven Academy Awards and won a Best Supporting Actress Award in 1998 for *Shakespeare in Love.*

very monotone, sort of greys and sepias. The first one was wonderful then when we were in Venice they were in turquoise, there was a lot of turquoise and lime green and it just ruined it was gone. In fact even the lighting director tried starting off by putting green light over the scenery and I said why and he said well it's water. You know, but I said it's Venice, these are the colours of Venice, anyway that was alright he took the green light out. I always think this you know you do think very carefully about the colours you use, if I'd wanted it green I would have painted it green, you know, and when you actually, it happened to me also oddly enough another Venetian one, this place set in Venice up in Yorkshire once and they had this lighting director with a penchant for coloured lights, little green reds and yellows. And just effect, but they don't think about what effect, it's irrelevant, totally irrelevant. Anyway. No, normally we have very good relationships with costume. In fact I work a lot with my daughter these days because she's a costume designer, a very good one and we did *Jeeves and Wooster* together

I: Oh that's a beautiful series, the sets for that are absolutely fantastic.

ED: Anyway we do work together well, I've done quite a lot of theatre with her as well. I mean she's going ahead now and she'll be well away. Oh you've mentioned *The Basement* here; yes that was a Pinter,

I: Which do you prefer modern settings or period?

ED: I do like period actually, really because that's where the history comes in and I like to try very hard to make it not a costume piece to make it as real as possible?

I: Do you do quite a lot of research on the period?

ED: Oh Yes.

I: Judging by all the books on the table.

ED: Very much so I mean I love reading social history, very fascinating. These are actually all over the place as far as dates are concerned aren't they?

I: Yes I know

ED: *Sweet William* was the next film I did that was a Beryl Bainbridge[27] story that Jenny Agutter[28] was in and Sam Waterson[29] that's right and that was very, very low budget but it was a nice one to do.

I: Very bittersweet story

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[27] Beryl Bainbridge (1932-2010) was a British writer; her novels included *The Bottle Factory Outing* (1974) and *Master George* (1998).

[28] Jenny Agutter (1952-) is a British actress, who first came to prominence as a child in *The Railway Children* book and film adaptations. She then went on to star in adult roles and won an Emmy for *The Snow Goose* in 1971 and a BAFTA in 1977 for *Equus.*

[29] Sam Waterson (1940-) is an American actor, known for films including *The Killing Fields* (1984) for which he was nominated for an Academy Award, a BAFTA and a Golden Globe

ED: Yes, but I love Beryl Bainbridge, I think her stuff is great. They're making a big movie of hers at the moment aren't they, in Liverpool and Ireland, they're doing it in Ireland, it's about her early life in Liverpool in the theatre, and they're actually shooting it in Dublin because Dublin looks more like what Liverpool did, *84 Charing Cross Road*, oh that was another lovely one. David Jones[30] directed that, lovely man.

I: Did you do just the British bit?

ED: Yes I did there was an American designer, oh what was his name, very good designer, Ed Pisoni[31] did the American, David worked a lot with him in the side, he did the American side and we did the British side which was considerably drabber.

I: Well I thought you'd caught the fifties house really wonderfully, it was very drab but that's how it was

ED: That's how it was, I remember if well and the book shop of course we built we built that in one of those tiny studios in Shepperton, I think it was either H or K. But we built the front of the shop we had the scene doors open and built the front of the shop in the scene doors and that came onto the car park so we'd but the street outside Charing Cross Road and had the buses running up and down and the traffic and they had about six foot turning space at the end to come back again, it worked all right.

I: It was very clever.

ED: You'd feel there was traffic going on outside, that was an extremely nice one to do and I'd been very fond of the book before I'd been asked to do it and I'd seen it on television it was a nice production and in fact after that I'd gone to look at the shop of course it was empty, then I remember then looking through and seeing the shelves lying around and the staircase going up. I remember the stair case going up which I incorporated into the set. Oh it was very interesting because the antiquarian book fraternity was very helpful. There was a marvellous man up in Yorkshire has a bookshop, no wait a minute, I thought he was in Leeds, he's in Manchester, Eric Morton, he knew them all very well, had been to book sales and all of that with them and he supplied most of the books the specific ones we needed and also all the books in the book shop he came down one weekend when we were building and deposited all these books. *Hitler's SS* I think we'll pass over as everyone else did, 1984 we made that that was my worst year ever I had so little work that I was glad to do it, dreadful piece. *Secret Places* that was a nice film that was Jenny Agutter as well at the school. *Betrayal* was the Pinter that was David Jones again.

I: You got to Venice that was another Venice?

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[30] David Jones (1934-2008) was an English director whose films included *Betrayal* (1983) and *The Confession* (1999).

[31] Edward Pisoni was a Production Designer and Art Director, his credits include *The Sopranos* (1999) and *The Big C* (2013).

ED: we got to Venice, we actually got to Venice, terribly briefly I never actually did go on the filming because all they did was shoot him standing on the balcony, we had to build the rest, couldn't afford it. As a matter of fact it was Sam Spiegel's[32] own money.

I: Was it really?

ED: Yes he funded that.

I: I hadn't realised Sam Speigel produced it, it must have been one of his last films, it was pretty late on?

ED: Yes, it was.

I: Did you meet him?

ED: Oh yes very much so.

I: Was he still the big tycoon?

ED: Yes, terribly nice man, I went to see him he had an apartment at the Grosvenor House hotel, he sits at a vast desk with a Francis Bacon picture behind him which you of course have to look at one of the usual gory ones. Anyway we had this chat, he didn't know me and Harold had recommended me which was wonderful anyway he was talking to his secretary on the phone and he said she is charming is that enough but I mean very, very tight for money. But i did have a magical trip to Venice for the recce. The best time to go which was in the winter it was foggy, misty, the time of the carnival and there's very little on the canal on the Grand Canal because it's winter I remember this gondola coming out of the mist with these three men in it with longy costume 18th century costume, everyone wears 18th century costume through the day as well as the evening and it is when it's shrouded in mist like going back two or three thousand years and *Porterhouse Blue* that was another laugh and a half that was very good fun, Rob Knights[33] directed that.

I: and it is a very big success

ED: Yes it was and deservedly so I thought it was brilliantly written

I: Yes I like Tom Sharpe

ED: And the adaptation was Malcolm Bradbury[34] which was a very good adaptation. We shot that in so many places, because obviously we couldn't shoot in a Cambridge college we just had to pretend we were in Cambridge.

I: Oh I didn't know that, i would have thought they gave you permission.

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[32] Sam Spiegel (1901-1985) was an American independent film producer, as producer his films included *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962).

[33] Robert Knights (1941) is a British film and television director, his credits include *The Dawning* (1988) and *A Touch of Frost* (1999-2000).

[34] Malcolm Bradbury (1932-2000) was a British author and academic. His work includes *The History Man* (1975) and *Cuts* (1987).

ED: No absolutely not, so in fact, the only Cambridge shooting was actually in the High Street with the procession going past Kings' because once they'd passed Kings' and tuned the corner we went to Ely and used the walls of Ely cathedral for Porterhouse and Ely cathedral has this big arched entrance but no doors so we had to build the doors that Skullian opens and shots it did have just that little door to a gatehouse so we had his little door there, but the big doors we had to put in so as the procession turned the corner and knocked on the door of the gate, that was in Ely, but when they were opened and we went through into the quadrangle we weren't there at all we were at yet another big house in Northamptonshire, which was empty owned by Harrods but it was a big Jacobean house and that was the courtyard, so the procession then entered the courtyard and met the choirboys so that was three totally different locations for one little sequence. I mean it's a tribute to Rob's direction that he knew exactly when….

Eileen Diss tape 2 side 3

I: Yes, you were saying, you were talking about the London locations.

ED: yes that's right because we couldn't afford to keep the unit up where we did the exteriors. Well, we were round and about, we were at Charlton house for the long gallery at the top that was where they had all their meetings with the master and the dons and we had two of the dons room at Charlton and the common room, the big common room that actually did have that wonderful fireplace with the naked lady, where the dean, no not the dean, the chaplain fondled her thighs while he fell asleep in front of the fire and we went to the temple, for the kitchens where they were preparing the swans and goodness knows what for the feast. And the actual feast itself was in the hall of Gray's Inn where they all traipsed in. I found that very moving as a matter of fact for some reason when the swans came in, the roast swans and they sort of carried them in you know and they sort of carried them over the heads of the boys I thought that was rather wonderful and then the ox that went round and was garlanded and they threw out the bones that other tradition. God we had this great pile of bones from Smithfield and they'd all been cooked up and my goodness they stank. I had to put this all together what we had was this hospital trolley that I put a table cloth over and fashioned all the rib cage and the horns and everything and this was all going on, just before the shot trying to get this finished, got it all just finished and shoved into shot as it went round, it was one of those last minute panic jobs, but the biggest shoot was for the night of the condoms when the dean comes back and Zipser has pushed them all up his chimney floating off into the ether. Zipser's room we built in a little studio largely because we didn't want all this stuff with the fireplace. On that particular night shoot we started when it got dark, about 7 o'clock with sending off all the balloons. In fact what we'd done is we'd built the tower and the top of the tower and the dome and the weather vane that they ran for bull on it the whole of Zipser's room we'd built up there but there was in fact not set inside because we'd built that elsewhere so the prop guys were up there shoving these

things up the chimney which floated away because we had hydrogen in those and in the courtyard we had ones which just had oxygen in because they were supposed to hover about but what had happened was all day we were preparing blowing them up we had an oxygen cylinder, a hydrogen cylinder, but there was a force 9 gale that day, I mean the last thing you expected. I mean when we tried them out in the quad they all rushed into the corner and stayed there so that was no good so what we ended up doing we had them tied onto 6 inch nails with black cotton and they all had to be staked into the grass. That took all day because the wind was gusting so fast they kept beating themselves to death and we'd have little red lumps of wet rag everywhere which we had to get rid of and replace, so consequently we had to stockpile these things everywhere, the ones we'd had a deal with Mates they were called which I don't recommend to anyone because they were the ones that kept bursting themselves everywhere so we had to send out for some proper Durex and my art director drove around Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire to every Boots buying up boxes of condoms. And came back, I think we had 2000 there we had them on a sale or return basis; I think we used most of them. We had about ten people brought in from everywhere to blow all these up and of course everyone had to be tied up with black thread onto six inch nails, they were hanging over the radiator and all the ones with hydrogen were gathered against the ceiling. We spent all day; I thought you know, if only my mother could see me now. but come the shoot when dean comes back and Skullian is trying to get rid of these things with his broom handle, we were constantly having to replenish them and also they wanted to have them wafting into shot so practically the whole unit that wasn't occupied on camera, including accountants and secretaries were all lined up right across the quad with handful of these things rushing in to replace them when they burst themselves or wafting them across the quad, it was a very bizarre night. And at the end of the night the special effects who had also been preparing all day for the explosion, the explosion which was supposed to blow out Zipser's window at the top and set fire to other windows below which we'd put in specially we'd taken out their frames and put ours in and all that, anyway the special effects guy had got a bit carried in and put a large quantity of petrol into these mortar pots. I mean it was incredibly spectacular but the damage was far greater than we expected. Fortunately my art director had the foresight to board up the stained glass windows and we'd built a hide for two cameras so they were all covered in plywood, but I'd asked the special effects guy how far he thought the glass would be thrown from these windows and he reckoned about 20 feet or so as a matter of fact they hit the opposite wall of the quad when they went off. Anyway we all withdrew to strategic positions, I was feel rather relaxed actually because we'd done all that bit, you know I mean we'd been up for hours and hours this was now about 5 o'clock in the morning and it was still dark, and watching this, anyway they queued the explosion and this fireball shot out across the window and not just Zipser's window, the whole set disintegrated and fell through the roof. causing about a 7 foot hole in this Jacobean roof, immediately afterwards these other two windows were queued and the same thing happened these fireballs shot out and actually caught fire, it was all burning away quite merrily for about ten minutes they had a

fire engine at the back but it was such a good shot that they kept it going for a while before they rushed in and put it out. I think we broke about 47 Jacobean panes, around that quad and there was a large hole in the roof. Litigation went on for some time afterwards actually, about who was actually responsible but it was quite a night and then everybody went home for the Saturday, by then it was Saturday morning they were coming back Monday morning to shoot the day scenes of the ruins so we had to clear all that up that day and put in the great pule of ruins for the actual scene so it was quite an effort. I thought it worked rather well.

I: It did.

ED: And as a matter of fact really if the special effects had only done what they were supposed to do it wouldn't have been half as effective,

I: Well in the unlikely event I own a Jacobian mansion I will make sure I never lease it to a film company.

ED: No, absolutely not, so then there was *Jeeves and Wooster* again it has been four years we've been doing *Jeeves and Wooster*, so I've been, I've got used to starting every August and finishing just before Christmas, and again I mean what do we do, we do six hours of finished film in thirteen weeks which is quite a run actually, we're all dead by the end of it.

I: Are the American bits actually shot in America?

ED: No, well there's never that sort of money, I've never done anything that's had that sort of money, no indeed not, all the dock scenes we did at Harris depository it looked rather like warehouses, it was all on glass shots of the boat. New York across central park was actually Black Park outside Pinewood, we painted in the skyscrapers but I mean it's the magic of the movies isn't it? And the outside of Bertie's New York apartment is Senate House in London, the inside was all built, we built the diner and things like that we put on the musical which I thought was quite fun, we did that in Oxford at the Oxford Playhouse, nobody went to the states. But we did get around the big houses quite a lot which was not particularly around haggardly houses.

I: When you wander around England does your mind start clicking- if ever I do a series in such or such a period?

ED: Oh yes, as a matter of fact *Middlemarch* was one of those, because oddly enough when we were building the tower on the location in Northamptonshire for *Porterhouse* we stayed a couple of nights, what was the name of the town?

I: Ooh, I don't know

ED: Wasn't Hampton was it?

I: No

ED: Can't remember, anyway we did actually stay there and I thought this is a marvellous place it's unspoiled it's an absolute wonderful location and of course they found it and it was, a brilliant location. I remember doing something like that once for, no it's gone, gone, can't remember the name of the piece; it was a Defoe story, girls name, *Moll Flanders*. We went down to Laycock Abbey and turned that into 17th century England with mud in the streets, my god the population hated us as well they might they walk out and suddenly they've got mud in the streets instead of proper paving stones, but for *Cider with Rosie* we had to lay a lot of road because it had all been tarmacked. It's the most difficult thing, I do object to spending money on hiding things, we have to on *Jeeves and Wooster* and all these things, parking meters are the worse we made all these bollards that you had to throw over a parking meter. Lampposts are dreadful, modern lampposts, you know they all have to be dressed and turned into something else

I: I should imagine parking meters are quite difficult because they're close together and they're awkward height

ED: Doubles are impossible, singles you can just about manage. I notice they are getting taller these days, it's getting worse they're not only getting taller, they're coming in pairs. That makes life terribly difficult; the parking meter is public enemy number one for us. Well I think we've practically got through all that.

I: Just a few, there is a question here, that is probably too general. What are the particular problems of location working?

ED: Well I,

I: Parking meters?

ED: Well mostly all that.

I: During your working career has it been a large move from working in studio to working on location?

ED: What do you mean?

I: Were programmes principally shot on location at the beginning of your career?

ED: Oh I see what you mean. Oh yes, very much so, I mean one, I very rarely went out on location.

I: Do you prefer it? Sort of, or does it, different challenges for different?

ED: I mean there are, for exteriors, obviously it's better for that. But then if one wants to stylize something then it's better, it's entirely whether you're going for total realism or whether you want a heightened realism or a stylized version of something, which obviously is better in the studio and its frequently better to build interiors, small interiors not large ones because the practicality of being able to take it all away makes a lot of difference you know and so often one is just hiding things. Frequently a location is so wonderful that it is so much better to be there but when you find it's something you could build and you've gone into a location because this is supposed to be a location picture and what's happened is that they can't light properly so they've had to put these steel rigs up everywhere and they say hide them and you end up with something that's such a rag bag that it would have been so much better to put it in the studio and do it as you wanted to.

I: Can I ask you, did you ever join the ACTT or did you join the BBC union?

ED: No, I joined the ACTT.

I: You joined ACTT?

ED: Yes, it was about 1967.

I: Do you remember who recruited you?

ED: Yes, it was Ken Loach's producer who's still producing

I: Tony Garnett[35] was it?

ED: Tony Garnett,

I: At last a name I remember, I've been feeling very inadequate

ED: Yes, that's right

I: Have you ever worked in TV commercials?

ED: Yes, I've done a few commercials; I guess I do one a year perhaps

I: Is there any sort of difference to approaching a TV commercial?

ED: No, except for the pack shot which always amuses me, amount of time and trouble which is expended on that, but after all that's what it's all about, little dew drops on glasses and things like that, I did a couple with Dame Edna that were good fun, her Southern Electricity ones,

I: Is there any piece of work that has given you most satisfaction?

ED: Oh, a few really, certainly *Cider with Rosie* and the *Uncle Vanya* that I was talking about which I did, I was very happy about, there must have been others. *A Handful of Dust*, I thought that worked in many ways, and *84 Charing Cross Road* but I think *Cider with Rosie* was the one that gave me most pleasure.

I: Do you have a favourite director?

ED: Oh lots

I: And what makes a director good from your point of view?

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[35] Tony Garnett (1936-) is a British television producer for films including *Kes* (1969) and was a producer for *The Wednesday Play* (1966-1969) and *Play for Today* (1973-1978) on television.

ED: Well obviously someone I can talk to and has an open mind and loves his subject but I mean I very rarely come across a director who didn't come into all those categories I should think only about two in nearly forty years that I haven't liked working with.

I: And one final question, are there any individuals who have been of a particular influence on your career?

ED: Oh there must have been, yes I should say a long time ago Stephen Taylor who died very young, I think he was 32 at the time.

I: Very young

ED: He was an innovator and a very good designer I thought and begin many things that hadn't happened in television before, he was a BBC designer and I took a lot of notice of what he thought and said. Apart from that, I really have to think about that rather hard, nobody else I think I've actually worked with but people whose styles I've liked, no I can't fill in any more on that but he certainly, we used to talk about design and I'd never really talked about design with anyone else and it was such a long time ago but still a very vivid memory.

I: Just one final question, I keep saying that, because we now cover the theatre as well, have you done a substantial amount of theatre work?

ED: Oh yes, quite a lot

I: Are there any particular things, what are the difference, is there a difference

ED: Oh yes, it's vastly different, for a start you're seeing everything all the time, from only one view point I mean that's the major difference. It's nothing like as frenetic, at least not usually, and I like it I do enjoy theatre and there is a, working up to that moment of the opening is great, I still prefer having the equipment around I do like a studio full of stuff, I find that more exciting but I have done a lot of theatre. What have I done, well I've done a lot with Harold, and I've worked a lot with him,

I: Did that come out of working with him on television or had you worked with him previously?

ED: Well it began with *The Tea Party* and *The Basement*, and then he asked me to design a production of *Exiles* for James Joyce[36] that he did at The Mermaid, and I think that was the first theatre I did then I did *The Caretaker* and then I did *Butley*, the Simon Grey[37] play I think that was in '71 and Harold directed that and that was the first West End one. Then I did a lot of the other Simon Gray plays *Close of Play, Quartermaine's Turns, Otherwise Engaged,* all of which Harold directed then I did quite a bit at The National. Well the first one I did there, I did a lot of things because Harold introduced me actually, my first national play was because of him because oddly enough he did *Blythe Spirit* which you wouldn't think of as a Pinter vehicle in fact he directed in wonderfully, it was a lovely production and that was a t the very beginning when the theatre was just built. It was supposed to go to the Olivier as a matter of fact but the Olivier wasn't ready so it went into The Lyttelton then I did quite a lot in The Lyttelton . I did *Measure for Measure*, *The Philanderer* and *Caretaker* again and.

I: When you come back to something do you do it completely different to when you did it previously?

ED: Well, I've done *The Caretaker* three times as a matter of fact and The Mermaid of course was a very small production and it was bigger and more detailed at the national, and then I did it again when Harold directed it himself a couple of years ago. I said I don't think I've got another *Caretaker* and he said, oh we'll do it differently this time and we did. I was just trying to think of some of the other National Theatre ones, there was that American one, the Lilian Hellman[38] play, I'd have to dash upstairs and look because I've got all the posters up there but I can't remember what that one was. I've done a lot at Hampstead.

I: Oh

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[36] James Joyce (1882-1941) was an Irish poet and novelist who wrote *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegan's Wake* (1939).

[37] Simon Gray (1936-2008) was an English playwright whose plays included *The Common Pursuit* (1984) and *Cell Mates* (1995)

[38] Lilian Hellman (1905-1984) was an American dramatist and screenwriter, her work included *The Little Foxes*, first as a play in 1939 and then as an Academy Award nominated screenplay in 1941.

ED: Quite a lot at Hampstead. I did *The Hothouse* there which was Harold, and I did Brian Friel's[39] *Translations* which is a lovely, lovely play and I've done quite a lot in the West End, the Tennessee Williams *Sweet Bird of Youth* that Lauren Bacall[40] was in, and oh what else, *Deep Blue Sea*, I'll have to go up and get my CV, I can't remember them otherwise, quite a lot of west end plays and recently I've worked at the Gate in Dublin which is where I'm going with this lot now and I've got a play coming to The Strand in two weeks.

I: Good heavens.

ED: Which Michael Palin[41] has just written.

I: Oh I have heard him promote that.

ED: Called *The Weekend* with Richard Wilson[42] we open that at Guilford, a few weeks ago it's doing a tour and is coming in two weeks. So there's quite a lot of theatre.

I: I'm afraid a bit ignorant about theatre, I'm fairly reasonable at film and television but when it comes to theatre, because we used to be ACTT history project but then the unions combined so now we're supposed to cover theatrical careers, but tend to be that you get to the end of the interview and you think oh god, I better ask about theatre.

ED: No I have danced around quite a bit between television film and theatre which is nice, it's good fun.

I: You get the impression that with being completely ignorant of working practices; I imagine you can sit at home sort of doing it.

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[39] Brian Friel (1929-) is an Irish dramatist whose plays include *The Freedom of the City* (1973) and *Dancing at Lughnasa* (1990) which won a Tony award for Best Play.
[40] Lauren Bacall (1924-) is an American actress, her films include *The Big Sleep* (1946) and *The Mirror has Two Faces* (1996) for which she was nominated for a number of awards including an Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress.
[41] Michael Palin (1943) is a British comedian and member of Monty Python. In addition to his work as an actor he is also known for his work as a travel writer and broadcaster.
[42] Richard Wilson (1936-) is a British actor, best known for his role as Victor Meldrew in *One Foot in the Grave* (1990-2000)

ED: Oh I do, because I'm making models. I must say that making models, it starts of fun but when you get, I'm always up all night before the read through because I'm never finished the damn thing, tend to fall asleep during it. It's fun, making doll's houses but it's terribly time consuming.

I: What happens to all these models?

ED: Well they used to get sat on. I've got one or two but mostly I mean they get taken around the tour to put it up every time, then they finally come into the west end or wherever they're going or they end up in Australia or Dublin or wherever it, *Leanna* I've got running at the moment, the Mamet play that started at the Royal Court it's at The Duke of York at the moment, that model's ended up in Amsterdam because they wanted do it now.

I: So if a production transfers all you do is send of your model and they're able to reproduce it?

ED: Yes, that's right

I: That's amazing, I'd never realised that

ED: And all the drawings, as well. No the big difference for theatre is making the model although models are made for cinema but I don't generally have to do that.

I: One of the extravagances of cinema,

ED: Yes there's usually someone to do that.

I: Well thank you so much for being so patient.

ED: Well, it's been very enjoyable.

I: It certainly has from my point of view.