

Joan Kemp-Welch (actress, stage director, television director) 23/9/1906-07 - 5/7/99

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BIOGRAPHY: One of the first women directors to work in British television, Joan Kemp-Welch began her career as an actor, working initially in the theatre and subsequently on screen. Her film credits include *The Citadel* (1938) and *Goodbye Mr Chips* (1939), both for MGM-British, and *Busman's Honeymoon* (1940). She spent much of the 1940s and 1950s directing for the theatre, and after the launch of Independent Television in 1955 she moved into television, working particularly as a director of television plays. Her credits include adaptations of Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1960), Sophocles' *Electra* (1962) and a highly popular staging of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1964), starring Benny Hill as Bottom. She continued to direct into the 1980s, producing the *Armchair 30* (1973) series of short plays and contributing to Granada's *Lady Killers* (1980-81) crime serial. **SUMMARY:** In this interview, conducted by Roy Fowler, Kemp-Welch proves to be a lively and engaging subject. She discusses her early life as a stage actor in various touring productions before addressing her work in cinema in the late 1930s and early 1940s. She reveals that her early success was partly due to a non-speaking role in *The Citadel* which happened to feature prominently in a publicity image for the film. She describes her work as a stage director, and particularly the problems she faced as a woman in the profession, before giving an account of her move into television. Some interesting details are provided, but this latter section of the interview, to which fellow director John P. Hamilton also contributes, is rather less than coherent.

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Interviewee: Joan Kemp-Welch

Tape 1, Side 1

Roy Fowler: '91 and we're at John P. Hamilton's in Paddington and we have a very distinguished lady, Joan Kemp-Welch, of, I think, absolutely formidable achievement. So we'll start at the very beginning, Joan, and the origins. When and where you were born, family background, things like that - all the things that led you into the business?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, where was I born? At number one, Belvedere Drive, I think, in Wimbledon, in a big grey house. My father was a doctor and my mother had met him when she was a hospital nurse and they were married. And that was where I was born, in Wimbledon. We

had a great big garden which, now, of course, is all houses, but in those days ran from the middle of Wimbledon Hill to the top, and I remember there were horse buses in those days. Because, as children, our great pleasure, we had - halfway up the hill, where it became steep, they had what was known as a dray horse and this was linked onto the horses that drove the bus, all but - it can't drive the bus. I don't know what you would say - pull the bus! And the dray horse was linked onto it, so they had a third horse to pull it up the hill and we used to go out and feed the dray horse. And I remember the excitement when the horses left and we had the first car buses, though what year that was, I couldn't possibly remember.

Roy Fowler: May I ask the year that you were born, just for the record?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, 1906.

Roy Fowler: 1906, right. It was September 23rd?

Joan Kemp-Welch: September the 23rd.

Roy Fowler: Right, and so, they're among you're very earliest memories - of the horse drawn buses?

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Chuckling]. Yes, well, I have many early memories, perhaps the one I remember most clearly connected with the theatre. I think I was about five or six. We always were taken to the pantomime and the first pantomime I saw, which I shall never forget, and that had Seymour Hicks in it and Ellaline Terriss and it was called Bluebell in Fairyland. And I remember it very clearly because, pantomimes in those days always had a transformation scene, where the scenery changed and they had - which now, alack and alas have all been nailed up in most theatres - but they had wonderful traps and things that came down from the ceiling. And in the transformation scene, which was always at the end of the first half, the wonderful things came down from the ceiling and flowers and things grew up from the ground and the ballet danced, this was always the great transformation scene. And I remember so clearly this pantomime, because it had bluebells, great arcs of bluebells that came over the stage like that and primroses that grew up from the bottom, and to me, this was total and absolute magic, which I have never forgotten. That is my earliest memory of the theatre.

Roy Fowler: Do you think it was formative in that sense? Did that set the wheels in motion?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes, yes. I remember my mother telling me, although I don't - I do remember going down to the box office and ordering a box for a show. And, I think I was only about a year older, because they rang my mother up and said, "Do you know your daughter is ordering a box for the theatre tonight?"

Roy Fowler: And you were a tot, where you, at that time?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Hmm, yes.

Roy Fowler: That was very much a family activity, was it not, in those days? To go to the theatre, there wasn't a great deal else?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes, we used to the theatre every week. I remember, though I can't remember the play, seeing Dennis Nielson-Terry and - no - Fred Terry and Julia Nielson. Because I, long after that, worked with Dennis Nielson-Terry, but I remember, that must have been many, many years ago.

Roy Fowler: Hmm. What about schooling, was it a conventional one for the time?

Joan Kemp-Welch: The - which?

Roy Fowler: Your schooling, was it conventional for the time?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well it was, it was, I suppose, for a time. When I was twelve I went to Roedean in Brighton, which was a famous girl's school. But unfortunately I - well, my elder sister was there at the time and my family couldn't afford two of us at Roedean, which was very expensive. And a rich uncle paid for me, but unfortunately, when I was sixteen he died, without leaving any money for me to finish schooling. And so I left and had to get a job, and I got a job as a matron in a girl's school, and it's the only time I ever really contemplated committing suicide. It really was a hell of school and I was there, I think, for a year, a year and a half. And then an aunt gave me some money to - because in those days, to get a job, you had to have an exam, not the matric[ulation], it was something else, I've forgotten what it was called.

Roy Fowler: Well there was General School's Certificate, was that it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: That's right, General School's Certificate. And she gave me enough money to take a correspondence course to do that, and I did that and I got an honours pass in it. And the County Council gave me a scholarship to go to the Froebel and the Froebel also gave me a scholarship, which paid for my total fees there for three years. But this, of course, was to be a teacher and my only ambition really was to act. However, I did the three years course and got an honours degree. But at the end of the course my luck changed because I joined an amateur society - this was during my last year at college - which had classes on a Saturday and Sunday, and this amateur dramatics society was run by Jack DeLeon and his wife Beatty DeLeon, who died aged, I think she was ninety two, this year. And I saw Beatty just about two or three months before she died and she was very busy writing a book about her life. But she ran this dramatic society to which I belonged and I remember, we did a play called The Kingdom of God in which I played a prostitute - it was by Anne Hall] and afterwards, done at The Westminster Theatre - which was a marvellous play and I had a good part in it. Yes, it was towards the end of my third year when I played in this play and just about, I suppose, a week before my third year ended, somebody fell ill in the permanent company. Because Jack DeLeon had a professional theatre at the Kew Theatre, which was famous in its day, in which everybody, stars and everybody worked in. And somebody fell ill and they rang up and said would I like to take over? And as I'd only got a week to the end of college I, needless to say, jumped at it and said, "Yes!" And so I took over the part, which was the small part of a maid, and I can't even remember the name of the play. But anyway, Peter Godfrey who, at that time, was famous - he had, I suppose, what now would have

been called a fringe theatre, but it was a famous theatre in - not in Orange Street, in Floral Street - which, anybody who remembers that time, it was a famous, famous theatre, little theatre. And he was just about to branch out into another theatre, it was called The Gate...

Roy Fowler: What, in Notting Hill?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yeah and this theatre was at the bottom of Charing Cross. It's now a little restaurant and it held about a hundred people and he had bought it and was going to open up a theatre there. And he came into see the show at the Kew Theatre and offered me a year's contract, as to, sort of, stage-manage and act and everything. So I never taught, because I went straight into work with Peter Godfrey in his theatre.

Roy Fowler: Before we pursue that, let me just take you back a little while. Now, can we clarify when it crystallised in your mind that you wanted to act, to be an actress, to go into the theatre?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I can never remember a time when I didn't.

Roy Fowler: It was always there?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Right. And the other thing I'd like to ask is, you sound, in a sense, rather precocious, for example, you were a matron at the age of sixteen, which must have been quite...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, I should have said under-matron.

Roy Fowler: Under-matron, ah, right, yeah.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Under-matron, that's what was so terrible.

Roy Fowler: But then you got an honours degree, and there's always been a cerebral aspect to your work. What was your subject in your degree, what did you study at college?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh well, I've got the certificate at home, the thing that I've done, but - I can't remember - botany and zoology.

Roy Fowler: Ah, it didn't relate to the arts particularly?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Mostly - literature, I think. I can't remember, I can't remember anything else. I wasn't interested in teaching at all.

Roy Fowler: Were you consciously preparing yourself for a stage career?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No! No, indeed. At that time I had no other thought but that I would have to teach. Of course, we needed the money, we had no money, well, I mean very little. Not enough to keep me, as anybody out of work in the theatre... so that I would... And anyway, I had done

teaching, in our third year we did a lot of teaching and I used to teach at the council schools, which we were sent out to, in which we would have a class of about thirty, forty children, sometimes. So that it was - I had never consciously prepared myself for the theatre, no.

Roy Fowler: Hmm. Was there any family resistance to becoming an actress - your parents?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, not with my Mother, and by that time, my Mother and Father had separated and my Mother always encouraged it. Certain members of the family, I remember there was a brigadier Kemp-Welch, he objected very strongly that I should use the name Kemp-Welch, because it was my Mother's maiden name and the Kemp-Welch family goes back to something like 1580, or something, the family tree goes back. And my Father, whose name was Green, when he left my Mother, we adopted her name.

Roy Fowler: Was there a stigma attached at that stage still, to young ladies going on the stage, or was that beginning to end? Was it difficult for a middle class lady to...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes I think there was, I think there was. There was certainly a stigma and there was no such thing as women directors or anything like that.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Not at that age. Although, later, in the period where I'm saying I worked for Peter Godfrey, there was one woman director, Auriol Lee I remember, who was a great friend of John Van Druten and so she did certain of his plays, and then, later on there was Leontine Sagan. But the interesting thing about Peter Godfrey, harking back to when I joined The Gate - his show at The Gate - the interesting thing about him was that he did very, in those days, sort of avant-garde plays and on a tiny scale. When I say a tiny scale, he had very little equipment...

Roy Fowler: The mic's gone again.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh.

[break in recording]

Roy Fowler: A couple of more questions about you coming into the business, before we talk about Peter Godfrey and the company. What I really want to ask is, it took a great act of will on your part, I am imagining, to make this decision?

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Chuckling]. Yes, I am afraid - wait a second, before we go on. I am totally deaf in one ear, I don't know whether this has happened since I met you, I'm turning it up so that I can hear you a bit better.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I had an accident in Germany when I was doing the show...

Roy Fowler: Oh dear!

Joan Kemp-Welch: And broke a blood vessel in my inner ear, so I'm totally without one ear now.

Roy Fowler: Oh, that's awful. Is it this ear - or I mean, where ?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, this is the one I am hearing with, this one's completely blank.

Roy Fowler: Right, OK, I'll try and project.

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, that's all right, that's fine. I can hear, that's fine.

Roy Fowler: OK, lovely. So, my question was - was it, in effect, an act of will, great will, determination on your part, to become an actress? Against - here is a well educated, I am sure extremely proper, middle class young lady, deciding to go against the Canaans.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well no, I don't think I ever thought of it. I was quite determined that the one thing I wanted to do was to be an actress and when this heaven-sent opportunity came, I just grabbed it, it was just as simple as that. I must say that I lived for at least two or three years in terror over the fact that when I accepted the scholarships, I had it in a contract with the - whoever they were - the council, that I would teach for three years. And, of course, leaping straight into and accepting Peter Godfrey's - you know, offer - I was always apprehensive that the council would come down on me and ask for the money back, but they never did, it was just one of the few miracles that happen. And so, you know, I never taught at all.

Roy Fowler: Was that generosity on their part, or was it just bureaucratic incompetence?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I haven't a clue, I haven't a clue! Probably somebody lost the papers.

Roy Fowler: Right. And now, you become a member of Peter Godfrey's company without any formal training, it's just the amateur experience that you had, is that right?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well it was just the amateur society was just like amateurs, who rehearsed and did a play, I mean it was a society like that, for putting on plays, so that you just did it. So I'd had no training at all of any kind and I was very 'green' because I do remember that, actually the first play I did was a play called [Twenty Below] which was about people being asphyxiated in a submarine. And then, this was at a - I don't know where it was, but it was at a small theatre, not The Gate because that hadn't been - the building wasn't finished in time. But the first play which opened at The Gate theatre, this famous little theatre in Villiers Street became famous because of Peter's work there. This was a play called 'Maya' and Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies was in it, playing the lead, who of course is now ninety-two and is still alive. She was very beautiful then with long scarlet hair, I remember, very beautiful. And I remember that Peter Godfrey gave us a speech, a sort of an opening speech, for the first day of rehearsal, when he said, "This play takes place in a brothel," and I remember saying "What is a brothel?" and having everybody laugh! So it shows you how 'green' I was. And also, I do remember that at lunchtime we went to a pub across the

road in Villiers Street, which still exists, that pub. And we - I was asked what I would like to drink and I'd never had any drink at home, because we never had any, and the only drink I knew of was gin, so I said, "A gin", and they said, "Single or double?" And I thought, you know, I must pretend that I know all about it, so I said, "Double", which I thought sounded better. And then they said, "Will you have water with it?" And I thought, "They know that I don't know about my drinks", so I said, "No, thank you very much." And I remember I was really absolutely pissed at the afternoon's rehearsal!

Roy Fowler: Mother's ruin!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Much to everybody - I'm sure - their amusement! And I also remember, we had a stage manager and he used the word "bloody" - he used to say "foot-bloody-ball", do you know what I mean? He would use it all the time and I thought this was very clever, and went out and went home and said, "Where's the bloody lunch?" I remember, to the horror of my family! However But the plays that we did were quite remarkable in this little theatre which just held a hundred people. We built all the sets ourselves, myself and Peter Godfrey and his brother, he used to come and help. We had - there was a small stage and a dressing room each side, one for the men and one for the women, and the only exits and entrances were from a door at the back of these two, sort of, little corridors (like that). And I worked in the men's dressing room, where I really learnt the facts of life very quickly! I used to work the lighting board, and the lighting board consisted of the old dimmers, um...how can I explain it? There was a - sort of - an electric wire that went down (like that) with two little studs at the bottom and you pushed the stud up (like that) to increase the light and you pushed it down to take it off. And they had a cover to the lights (like that). Because I remember, I went in one day and somebody had taken the cover off and I put my hand in, in the dark, to put it up, which is how I always used to put the lights up when I arrived and, of course, I was knocked out flat by it. So they must have been very primitive. And we had eight lights, that was all, we had eight spots, and the effects that Peter got from those spots were absolutely fabulous. And this started an interest in lighting, which I have had all my life, and, in fact, really until very recent years I have always done and, indeed, still do my own lighting. Because it's one subject that I really know a great deal about, and that's been a great help all my life. But, in Peter's plays - Maya was a play about a prostitute in a brothel and I remember there was Norman Sherry in it, Michael MacOwan, Gillian Lind, Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies, they all became big personalities afterwards.

Roy Fowler: There wasn't a permanent company was there?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, no.

Roy Fowler: These came in for the production...yes?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No...and we did The Hairy Ape by Eugene O'Neill, was one of the plays in which there was George Merritt and Pixie Hardwicke.

Roy Fowler: Well, unless there's a particular reason to talk about the cast, I think it may be better to talk about the productions and what was going on, because casts, obviously can be looked up.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, well, yes. I quite agree with you, but it's interesting, like Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies...

Roy Fowler: Indeed, yes, right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...because she will be somebody that is still known today.

Roy Fowler: Two questions, one a short one. Do you remember how much he was paying you, Peter Godfrey, when you went there?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, I think I probably got between thirty shillings and three pounds.

Roy Fowler: Yes, well even that wasn't bad, I suppose. We're talking now of what, the twenties, aren't we?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: So, three pounds a week actually was not at all bad.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I think it's much more likely about thirty pounds. Because, going on tour, which happened to me not long after that, I was getting three pounds a week.

Roy Fowler: Thirty shillings, do you mean?

Joan Kemp-Welch: So I should think it was probably, at The Gate, about thirty shillings.

Roy Fowler: Right, OK. Could one survive on thirty bob a week?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, I was living at home, I was living at home.

Roy Fowler: But you had fares and meals to buy?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes but fares were so very cheap, fares were very cheap. And anyway, I was going to say that after The Gate, where I was for a year and then, you know, started looking for work, I actually went back to the Kew Theatre for about six months. But then started to look for work and I walked up - we lived in Hammersmith and I walked up from Hammersmith to the West End every day and back, looking for work.

Roy Fowler: Really? Was that to save money, or because you enjoyed the exercise?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, it was to save money.

Roy Fowler: Yes, right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And I used to go up every day to look for work because in those days you walked around. There were no such thing as special agents, there were only about - there weren't a lot of agents. But, you went in every day and you knocked on the door...

Roy Fowler: Of all the management's?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, all the management's - well, they were agents really, and they would say, "Nothing today, dear", or something like that. Or they would hand you a card for an audition that was on at some theatre and then you would go and the auditions were given, you know. The theatres would say, "There is an audition for (something) at ten o'clock", and you would go and wait in a queue at ten o'clock and give an audition.

Roy Fowler: Before we leave The Gate, your period at The Gate, let me ask you about Peter Godfrey, your memories of him?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well he was - I really thought he was so clever and I hung, really, on every word that he said. He was a marvellous director, he worked, as I say, with his brother and myself, and Peter - we built the sets ourselves. The Hairy Ape for instance, had a double stage (like that), with the - I don't know if you know the play, but part of it takes place above deck and part of it takes place below deck, and so we built that ourselves. And I always remember, because I went to see it about a year ago at The National, and it was nowhere near as effective as Peter's production in this little theatre. Because he had below, he had just a board (like that) and where the stoke holes were, he just had lights in the stoke holes (like that) and so that when they opened them (like that) all the naked men were lit up. They were greased and they were lit up by these lights and shutter gear, so it was remarkable that all those years ago, he really and truly was using effects like that.

Roy Fowler: Yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And we did...oh, a lot of plays, I can't remember half of them.

Roy Fowler: What sort of person was he?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, I don't know, he was just splendid to work for and, otherwise than that...

Roy Fowler: Withdrawn or flamboyant, how so was his personal demeanour?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, no, it's funny, I only just think of him as being a tremendously hard worker and always there and enthusiastic. He then went out to Hollywood and became a great lighting designer in Hollywood.

Roy Fowler: Yes, he directed one or two films out there, didn't he?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes and he died, oh, I suppose about twenty years ago, didn't he?

Roy Fowler: I can't remember when he died.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Something like that.

Roy Fowler: He made, as I remember, Outward Bound [N. B. no record of this] as a film, did he not?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, he was originally married to Molly Venes was it? And I think she had died, as a very old lady, and she was a marvellous actress. But when they opened the new theatre at The Gate, they split up, so that I never really knew her very well, although she worked for me afterwards in television when I was a director once.

Roy Fowler: Was The Gate successful?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, enormously so and it had this very great reputation. But, as I say, Peter only stayed with it about a year, about a year and a half after I joined and then he went to Hollywood.

Roy Fowler: I see, and you left when he left? Was that the reason for your leaving?

Joan Kemp-Welch: And I left when he left and the theatre then never really - it never really succeeded very well after that. I remember Flora Robson did a show there, the Eugene Brieux play about white slaves. No, about venereal disease or something, which they did, was it? No, I can't remember...

Roy Fowler: I don't know.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I can't remember.

Roy Fowler: Right, fairly dodgy subject for the Lord Chamberlain in those days, I would have thought.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: The Gate was the theatre club, presumably, was it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes...[chuckling] I did it years later, it was put on at Whitehall when the last war started.

Roy Fowler: What would it be, Damaged Goods was that it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: 'Damaged Goods'. Damaged Goods, and I played in that when it - it was an old classic, wasn't it? 'Jealousy' was the name of the thing that Flora Robson did, with Griffith Jones if I remember rightly.

Roy Fowler: We're now, what, late twenties, early thirties?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, I couldn't really tell you, I couldn't really tell you. It's awful that I don't remember the years, I'm sorry, but it must be about that time.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because - yes, I don't...

Roy Fowler: Well, you left The Gate and became freelance, yes?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: And you were saying that you had to make the rounds every day?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well I can't - yes, we used to look for work every day and very often I used to look for work with Max Adrian and Robert Morley. We used to have - and it shows you how poverty stricken we were - that we used to have our lunch, a currant bun and a glass of iced water at the ABC, which we had...

Roy Fowler: Which ABC was that?

Joan Kemp-Welch: The one opposite the Arts Theatre now, which I think is Cranks or something like that, it used to be the ABC.

Roy Fowler: So that was an actor's hang-out, was it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: But of the theatres that I did, after The Gate, the ones that stand out in my memory was... I staged managed, because I had stage managed, you see, at The Gate, so I started off getting stage management jobs. And one of the first ones I had, after leaving The Gate was with - stage-managing Ghosts at the Wyndhams Theatre. I think it was the Wyndhams theatre, with Mrs Patrick Campbell playing Mrs Alving and John Gielgud, who then was very young and, you know - up and coming, playing Oswald and Ursula Jeans playing Regine.

Roy Fowler: Some cast!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes. And I remember this, and Mrs Patrick Campbell who then, of course, was elderly.

Roy Fowler: You must have memories of other productions, and Mrs Pat, do you? Any anecdotes to tell?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, well, I remember seeing her in Mrs Taqueray and she was marvellous. But the anecdote I do remember about her, the things that I remember about her in that production at Wyndhams of 'Ghosts', which I often tell is one - that she was not very good on her lines, but if she forgot a line she didn't just take the prompt, she used to say, "Please!" like that, to the prompt caller. And I always remember once, the ASM obviously gave her a not very good prompt from the corner and she would say, "What dear? Louder!" [Chuckles]. And the other

thing that I remember was, that I was outside the door, the exit that led to the open country or wherever it was, outside the set, you see. And when she got to the end of the play she always liked to have a cup of tea, you know, which she loved to have ready and waiting for her. And in the last scene, where Oswald is going mad, sitting at his chair going mad and Mrs Alving is in great distress. And he's just said the thing about cherry coloured velvet, soft to stroke, and she realises that he's going mad, and she rushes to the door and bolts it. And she cries "Oswald!" rushing to the door, and then, having bolted it, she rushed back, "Oswald!" with tears. Well, she used to have tears pouring down her face, and she used to rush to the door saying, "Oswald! (Put the kettle on, dear.) Oswald!" she would say, with the tears [chuckles]. And I've always quoted that as my idea of great acting. Because you could hear the audience crying in their seats when she did this and that, to me, is acting, you know... really great acting.

Roy Fowler: Is it, though, a style of acting that would be accepted today in our naturalist, realist approach to things? I mean, these were bravura performances, weren't they?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well yes...

Roy Fowler: Didn't the technique show?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I really think that an awful lot of nonsense is talked about this fact that you have to, in order to play a part, know who your grandmother was and - you know, which really and truly - that school of acting, I think, is a lot of nonsense. I think, you know, acting, of course you've got to become the person, but acting is two different things. One is feeling it and the other is sitting on your shoulder and knowing exactly what you're doing. And all the really great actors that one has had the good fortune to work with, they know exactly what they're doing. You know, it became awfully flash for them to say - to write articles about who your grandmother was and who your grandfather was and where you came from, but I really and truly think it became a sort of thing that actors felt they ought to do.

Roy Fowler: Well, there are...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Much more important is to know, if you're going to convey an emotion to the audience, you've got to know how to make that emotion touch the audiences' heart.

Roy Fowler: So, to what extent do you think technique is - what percentage of the actors' apparatus is technique?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well for me, all the people I have ever admired were people with great technique.

Roy Fowler: How about Mrs Pat? It sounds almost as if she had become a parody of herself towards the end of her career, is that true? I mean, did audiences go to see her perform or to see her give a performance? I mean, was she almost sending herself up when she played Mrs Alving?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well I don't know, I don't really know about that. What I do know is that, I think the season we did, it was a limited season of about twelve weeks and it packed out. Gielgud was marvellous in it, I remember, he was marvellous in it. And then after that, she did, John Gabriel Boorkman with Nancy Price, and I went with them - she asked me to go with her and I went with them and stage-managed that at The Arts. That, I don't remember very much about, but everybody was surprised that two ladies got on very well and everybody said that it would be very difficult, but it wasn't, they got on very well.

Roy Fowler: Was she particularly fond of Ibsen?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't know, I really, honestly don't know.

Roy Fowler: Of course, they're great vehicles, they were vehicles for her, weren't they? Great, um...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, they were, I think. It was - she gave a marvellous performance as Mrs Alving.

Roy Fowler: What I'm really curious about, is the extent to which, that kind, that style of acting would be acceptable today. I'm curious about how you feel about that.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well I don't think it was a style of acting.

Roy Fowler: No, it was acting?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't think - you know, it's very interesting, the acting - a sort of truthful, really great actor, one of which I think is Spencer Tracy, to jump to somebody else. If you see one of the old films of Spencer Tracy, and his acting could be today.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Would you agree?

Roy Fowler: Oh, absolutely, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Really and truly, they don't date These people don't date, the really great actors. Richardson hasn't dated, his acting.

Roy Fowler: I'm not sure though, there isn't a difference between that kind of absolutely inner motion picture performance that Tracy gave, and Mrs Pat camping it up slightly on the stage, which is the impression I get, you know, if she's calling "Put the kettle on" into the wings?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, no, she didn't. Just because I rather 'camped it up' when I was telling you that story - that is not true, that is not true, you see - it rang, absolutely, sincerely. Mind you, I think it's a difficult question you're asking me because, quite obviously, one's tastes change as

you get - as time goes past - just the same way as art changes, music changes, the audience changes, and you change with it, don't you?

Roy Fowler: Well fashion, the fashions change. Is a lot of it fashion?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, is it a fashion? I mean, it always has interested me, that music and art has changed in every country, even countries which were separated from each other. The same sort of change, it's as though there's a kind of wind of change over the world, which has really happened in music and in art, hasn't it? That the artists of one country are changing, even though they haven't got much contact with each other, and, I mean, now, of course there's every contact, because of all the exhibitions and things that go round. But in those days there wasn't that amount of contact, and yet the style of feeling was changing.

Roy Fowler: Well there was between, what - London and New York, say? There was an enormous theatrical interchange from Victorian times on and so...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, there was, but then that change happened in both the countries, didn't it?

Roy Fowler: Hmm, and one listens to, say, recordings of Barrymore playing Hamlet and it would be totally unacceptable to an audience today. It's like Peter Sellers sending up someone giving that kind of performance.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes I quite agree with you, that is true. But then you've got to remember, as I say, that the audience has changed as well, so that the acting then struck the audience as totally sincere - it struck them as totally sincere. I know what you're meaning, because my mother always used to talk about an actress who played - a famous actress - ha, I'm not gonna be able to remember her name now - who played Camille, and mother always - who was it? Rosa?

Roy Fowler: Well, let's not delve for it too deeply, I don't know.

Joan Kemp-Welch: She was very, very famous and she played it when she was young and Mother always remembered this and said how she wept over it and how wonderful it was. And then, years afterwards, when she was rather elderly, she played it again at the Playhouse, and I remember, we were taken to see it, she took us to see it and I remember thinking how terribly old fashioned she was. You know, and mother almost weeping with disappointment that she wasn't - and this is because we had changed, you know what I mean. And she was giving still the same performance.

Roy Fowler: That's what I mean about fashion, because audiences at any given time are taking their own set of attitudes to a theatre or to a film and...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes exactly! This is exactly what I mean.

Roy Fowler: There are no absolutes, quite obviously. I think we'll turn over the tape at this stage.

[End of Tape 1, Side 1] [Tape 1, Side 2]

Roy Fowler: Right, so we were talking about Mrs Pat, who obviously was a marvellous character to work with. Were you fond of her, or was she a bit of a gorgon?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, you know what it's like when you're ASM with a big star. I don't think you ever get fond of somebody. You either admire them or you don't admire them, and I think I admired her very much because she was, even in my time, more or less a legend.

Roy Fowler: It's always, I think, very exciting to - when one is young - to work with legends. They stay, they remain legends for the rest of one's life, do they not?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes it is exciting.

Roy Fowler: And they're great mentors too, I think they have an enormous effect on people. How about the young Sir John? (As he then was not.)

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, well, I...

Roy Fowler: Was this prior Richard...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I thought he was marvellous too and he was... You know, I was going to say my great impression all the time when I was young was how hard these people worked. So that you didn't, beyond perhaps stopping to have a sandwich for lunch or something like that, you really didn't have a social life with these people at all. But you were very much... For instance, the stage director - the backstage staff in those days consisted of a stage director - now the stage director was tremendously important. If there was a director who directed the performers, he left after the show had opened and I have very little recollection of directors at all. But this stage director, who always was in the prompt corner in evening dress, every single night - he ruled the show absolutely, with a rod of iron. You were never late, such a thing didn't happen, you were never late by the half-hour. The slightest thing that you did, the slightest mistake you made in your acting, or anything that happened, you were in front of him at his desk at ten o'clock the next morning for an explanation. And this was somebody who really was your life, do you know what I mean? And as far as the actors were concerned, you treated them - as an ASM - with great respect, and did everything, you know, that was required of you to look after them.

Roy Fowler: Did that go equally for the, what we would now call - I don't know what we'd call them actually - I was going to say 'off Broadway', but they're not off Broadway. You know what I mean - a place like the Arts, which was very much actor and experimentation orientated, and the West End managements. Was that equally true of the West End?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, I think it always happened, you see the stage - I think even in the Arts, the stage director, if I remember rightly, would be in evening dress. I mean to say, they were never seen by the audience or anybody, but they nevertheless were in evening dress and a black tie.

Roy Fowler: Well audiences used to dress in those days, didn't they?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, the audience, you never sat in the stalls unless you were in tails. In the front of the stalls, you always had tails and a white tie and you were in full evening dress as a woman. And in the dress circle, you wore a black tie and a dinner jacket, at the back of the stalls.

Roy Fowler: Were they good audiences, Joan? Were they there to see the play, or were they there to be seen?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh no, they were there to see the play, they were there to see the play and they were very critical too, they were very critical. But it was an occasion, and in the famous Sunday night shows that there used to be, like the repertory players, to which I belonged - if you were a member of the repertory players, if you weren't actually in the show - they used to do these Sunday night shows, you sold programmes. And everybody selling programmes on a Sunday night show would be in full evening dress, you know, just like that. Because people dressed, you would never dream of going to the Savoy or any of these restaurants unless you were fully dressed. In fact, you wouldn't be allowed in the room. And I remember being at the Savoy and Mae West came in and she wasn't fully dressed, she hadn't got a long skirt on, and she was not allowed into the room, she had to go and sit with her friends in some separate place. And, as far as - I was going to say, as short a time ago as when I was with Rediffusion I remember I took a director to Simpson's to lunch and he hadn't got a tie on and we were refused admittance, because he hadn't got a tie on. So in those days, the Mrs Patrick Campbell days, everybody was dressed, and this was a wonderful sight to see.

Roy Fowler: Where did the audiences come from? Were they suburban? Were they Mayfair? Especially say, at the Arts - who would go to see Ghosts at the Arts?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, Ghosts actually was at the Wyndham, as it was. 'John Gabriel Borkman', that was at the Arts. But, they would come from - do you know, I don't know. I never asked myself where they came from.

Roy Fowler: Hmm, they were just 'the audience'!

Joan Kemp-Welch: They were just 'the audience'! [Chuckling] But I knew that they were dressed, I used to look through the curtain to see them. And, as I say, I do remember when people thought to go to the opera, you know, still in Vienna they wear evening dress in the gallery at the opera, a lot of people go, so it dies hard.

Roy Fowler: Yes, yes, tradition, indeed, has a lot to do with it.

Joan Kemp-Welch: But it was fun anyway, you know, because when you went out, you felt quite special when you went out, it made a special evening of it, the getting dressed. And, of course, it cost you about three shillings in a taxi to go from - I was going to say, where we're living now, to the Savoy. And you got your dinner for five pounds, so...

Roy Fowler: It would cost you about one and sixpence to have a dress shirt laundered?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, exactly, exactly, you see. So...

Roy Fowler: I'm not sure you responded to the question about John Gielgud, the young John Gielgud? Was this before or after Richard the Third ?

Joan Kemp-Welch: This was before...

Roy Fowler: Not Richard the Third I mean Richard of Bordeaux ?

Joan Kemp-Welch: This is long before. This, I imagine, was one of the first plays, when he was - you know - is starting to be noticed. As again, it's so sad I can't remember the date, but it must have been way back, about 29 or 30, something like that.

Roy Fowler: And was it clear that there was a certain magic quality to Gielgud?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, it's difficult for me to answer that question. I remember thinking he was very good, but then, I wasn't looking out for people who I thought had got magic to become great actors. I was a very humble person, learning every single thing I could, by watching performances.

Roy Fowler: I see, but obviously...

Joan Kemp-Welch: You know? And so I was aware that people were marvellous. Not long after that, there was a play on in town called By Candle Light and this had three of the greatest comedians that we possibly have had. And that was Yvonne Arnaud, [Lesley Faber] and Ronnie Squire. And there was a fourth - there were two other minor characters, but these were the three big stars, and they were marvellous comedians. And there was an actor in it who played one of two small parts, called Frederick Lloyd and he also had been, in his time, a stage director, who I had worked with. And he said to me - I wasn't working at the time - and he said to me, "Now come down to the theatre every night and I'll put you in the prompt corner and you can listen and learn how to play comedy." Now that has been marvellous for me for the rest of my life, because listening to these three playing it, you realised how they phrased the lines. It was like listening, with the same thing as watching a tennis match. They would take the ball (like that) and the laughter in the house would come up (like this) and just as it was going down, the next one would pick it up and say the line. And it was so marvellous and I really learnt how comedy should be spoken in those weeks that Freddie Lloyd had me down standing in the prompt corner. So this is what I really mean - you weren't conscious of "Was this person going to be a great actor?" You were conscious of thinking, "This is something I must remember, this is something I've got to store up for the future, for my future", you know?

Roy Fowler: But was he impressive as Oswald?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Er, who?

Roy Fowler: Gielgud? I mean, not particularly concentrating on him but, in other words, recognising talent? I'm curious if he was an impressive young actor or...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Who, John Gielgud?

Roy Fowler: John Gielgud, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't remember anything except working with him.

Roy Fowler: Ah, right, OK. Well then lets - how long? You're freelance and how do jobs develop?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes well, one job, you know, would lead to another. I did a very long tour with Owen Nares and Zena Dare in a play called Cynara . And that went on for nearly a year and it was a very top tour, because we went to all the big towns and all the big places and played it at the right weeks. You know, we were at Liverpool for the Grand National week, etc, etc, etc. And Owen Nares was a wonderful actor and Zena Dare - I think the Dares were so beautiful, she and Phyllis. They were still beautiful, even though they were middle aged. And it was with Zena Dare that - she took me out, one place where we played, where Ivor Novello was playing at the same time, and I remember she took me out to lunch with Ivor Novello. And I remember so much that I was nervous at meeting him and he made you feel absolutely marvellous, within two minutes he made you feel the most important person in the world, I always remember that about Ivor Novello. And I remember, on that tour - but this must have been much later, because it was in The Blitz, because I spent the night of the Birmingham Blitz with Zena Dare and - I'm going mad - great tenor?

John P Hamilton Tauber?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, yes.

Roy Fowler: Ah, Richard Tauber?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, we drank champagne while all the bombs were raining down, so this must have been much later.

John P Hamilton 1940?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, because the...

John P Hamilton the regional Blitz?

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...the other tours were much earlier.

Roy Fowler: Yes, Owen Nares. By coincidence I'm just in the middle of reading his biography, or autobiography, which he wrote in 1925, when he was still - well he was very much on top. He seemed a very simple and unassuming person, judging from...

Joan Kemp-Welch: He was, he was. He was somebody I really became friends with and this was - this was the difference, you know, that he wasn't like a star. We were on tour and he was

absolutely charming. And I always remember, he had a great reputation for being very well dressed and I always remember saying to him, "How marvellous your suits are." And he turned it in and showed me his pockets and his suit was twenty years old! [chuckles] I always remember this! And he used to sometimes drive me from one place to another, instead of having to go on a train call. And he was - and he used to tell me all sorts of things and, again, he was a very dedicated actor.

Roy Fowler: What sort of things did he tell you?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, things about - mostly work and what he thought about the theatre and...

Roy Fowler: Hmm, do you remember anything in particular that he said? Because he was both a matinee idol and also a film star wasn't he?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes he was, but he said, "Never believe in your own publicity," you know... "remain an actor, because adulation means nothing, but the main thing is to be true to yourself", he always used to say. And to be sincere, he always said, "You must be sincere", which I think is good advice. In his early days, somebody gave me an introduction to Sybil Thorndike and this was when she was playing her St Joan and I went to see her, she said she would see me. And I went to see her and she came out of her dressing room and she said, "Let's sit on the stairs dear, where we can be private." I think she must have been sharing her dressing room with somebody. And we sat on the stairs and she said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "Well, I want advice" you know, this was very early on, and, "I want advice as to what's the best thing to do if you want to get on in the theatre?" And I always remember her saying, "Well, dear, if you've got a skin like a rhinoceros and you can work like a black and still believe in the theatre, you'll do all right!" I always remember that, because to have a skin like a rhinoceros I think is very apt [chuckling] it's what you need in the theatre, because you get a lot of knocks, I think.

Roy Fowler: Well then, continuing with your career, you seem to have been backstage as much as on stage at the beginning, is that true?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, I started - the backstage was all the very early stuff and then - I was trying to think where this comes, but - I was, one day I was looking for a job and was waiting in the comedy theatre to see Jack DeLeon who now had become a man who put on West End shows. And he passed me by in the theatre and just acknowledged me, (like that) with a nod, and then he said he couldn't see me, so I went home. And then that night I got a phone call to say somebody in his production up North had fallen ill, could I learn the part overnight and go up and play it? And I went up and played it and this was a thing called - oh, it's a picture in the book (looks through book) - this one, that one. And I played (the top one there, the thing at the Lyceum)...

John P Hamilton Traffic.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Traffic. ! Which was a thing about the white slave traffic. And Cecil Parker who, afterwards, made such a success in Blithe Spirit, he was playing the lead with Dennis Nielson-Terry and Mary Glynne, who were famous in those days. And I went up and played this

girl, who was caught up in the white slave traffic and Cecil Parker slit my throat and I had to fall off a table onto the floor, and I played that for about three months. And then Jack was putting on another play at The Comedy and this had a part of a prostitute in the first act - my play at the Lyceum was in the second act - and then I did this as a part in the first act. And he got me to do this, I think, in order to save money. Because I got three pounds a week for one and five pounds a week for the other. And this was to play somebody who was strangled, by Robert Harris in a play with Marie Lohr, at The Comedy. And I used to play that and then, after the - after the first act was over, I used to have a taxi waiting and go by taxi to The Lyceum and change and play the other part! And I always remember that I shared a dressing room with a girl, an understudy, and she never stopped talking and having boyfriends in. And I asked the stage director one day, I said, "Do you think - there is an empty room, do you think I could move my things over and be in there?" And he looked at me and he said, "Stars like you should be made to dress in the lavatory." I always remember him saying this - that was the answer I got for that, so I didn't ask again! But I climbed up three flights of stairs, because there was no lift and I had to climb up three steps of stairs and change my makeup and be down for the next bit, however! So from then I got, you know, I got a lot of acting parts because the good notices I got. I got very good notices for the Lyceum show and good notices again for the Robert Harris show and then I went out on a tour of Basil Foster's, one of his famous Shaftsbury Theatre farces. I can't remember which one it was, but with Jane Baxter that time, which went out, and I think I got five pounds a week on that one.

Roy Fowler: Out of which you had to find everything, did you?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, but then you got a combined room for twelve pounds [corrects herself] - twelve shillings...

Roy Fowler: Twelve shillings, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and you had to provide your own food. Or you could have, it was all in for about twenty-five bob and the landlady fed you, and you got a fire in your room. So you used to save, I used to save money on that. I used to reckon to save about nearly a pound a week and come back with some money to last me over.

Roy Fowler: Were the tours among the big cities and towns, or were they...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes! You went to nearly every - I think I've played in every town in England and every pier, on every pier according to [chuckling] what they were! I think the big towns - this again, you see, was wonderful training, because you would play, for instance, the big Liverpool houses and places as big as the Coliseum up North and in the big touring dates, and you would do those for about, probably, six or eight weeks, the big houses. Then you'd go to the number two circuit, if you stayed on with the tour, and you played the smaller theatres. Or, if you were with a tour that wasn't so hot - if somebody like Barry O'Brien would send a tour out, then you would be playing piers. But you did play, sometimes, a huge theatre one week and a small theatre the next week. And so the first thing you did, when you got to the theatre, was, you had a call and the stage manager, who was taking you round, or the stage director who was in charge of the tour, taking you around, and everybody would speak, go on the stage and speak. A bit - say, a

speech, whatever it is they had to say - something like that, and he would be at the back of the theatre and give you the sound for it, you see? And you learnt, you learnt to be able to speak into a theatre, so you could pitch your voice, and this became second nature to you. And it's something, when I was directing - I am directing - I always try to impress upon the actor, you know, that you must throw your voice. It's difficult to explain to somebody that you can throw your voice into a theatre, so that you can be heard by every seat in the house. Because, of course, in those days there were no microphones and so playing at the Lyceum, as I did in Traffic, the Lyceum has an upper circle, a dress circle and a gallery and you had to be heard at the back of the gallery. And the stage director would go up every night and visit all these different places in the house, which nobody ever dreams of doing now. And if you weren't heard, you had a rehearsal, you know, so that you learnt to do it. And this is the sort of thing that never happens now, because you go to the theatre now and you can hear one actor and you can't hear the others, and I'm not - I mean, I know I'm deaf now, but people - before I was deaf this happened. And people are constantly saying to me, "You can't hear."

Roy Fowler: We were saying that actually before you arrived today, that films and theatre both nowadays, television...

Joan Kemp-Welch: You see, there was a tremendous discipline in the theatre in those days, which does not exist now, and that, I think is the great difference, and I think it is a pity. There was a great discipline.

Roy Fowler: Discipline and attitude, it's a combination of the two things. Tell me, was it an enjoyable life...um...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh I loved it!

Roy Fowler: Train calls on Sunday and theatrical landladies and, you know, sausages in the pan, things like that?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Train calls were such good fun, they were such fun! You all travelled together in carriages and we used to play endless games and they used to be, oh, long ones. You would do Bristol to Edinburgh and things like that, with waits on the station. But, we used to play endless games. One game we used to play, I remember - and again, so good for us, was that somebody would say, "You're dead!" You know, you're kissed on the back of your neck and you had to immediately react as to what it was like, you know, to be dead. Or you saw something that terrorised you, or you saw somebody and you're going to fall in love with him, and you had to express this immediately, and if you were more than - if they could count more than five before you did it, you were out. You know, which we used to play, all these games, silly games, and the train calls. So they were great fun, and the landladies used to look after you like mothers, and I must you that some of the landladies that I stayed with - and I remember in Edinburgh. The first time that I went to this landlady, her name was Mrs Underwood and she was very severe and I remember she said, "No men after eleven o'clock!"

Roy Fowler: That was generous!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, "After eleven o'clock." And she was very strict, because I remember we had - the girl I was staying with, who now is married to an admiral, she had a boyfriend in Edinburgh Castle and I remember we had him in the rooms after eleven o'clock and hid him in the bed! And the beds, the Scottish beds in a lot of the houses where the theatre digs were, the beds were recovered, you see. And so you had a sitting room and say, for instance, that was the door, you would open the door and there was a cupboard and in the cupboard there was a bed, you see. And I always remember my bed because it had brown paper parcels underneath it and I was so intrigued by these brown paper parcels, and one day I opened them and they were lumps of coal tied up in brown paper! And, years afterwards, I asked Mrs Underwood why she had these things with coal under the bed? Which she kept for as long as I knew her, and I stayed with her every time I went to Edinburgh. I think the last time was, oh way - when I was working for the Wilson Barrett Company. And she said that coal was so precious and they were so poor that you wrapped it up, so if the time came when you were out of work for a week or a month, you had a piece of coal that was there. And coal was kept in the kitchen, but she - always the coal was wrapped up in brown paper parcels, not to be touched, under the bed! And she, Mrs Underwood, also kept her false teeth on the top of the coal, she didn't wear them during the day, they were only for special occasions, so they wouldn't wear out! And they were kept on top of the coal, in the coal cellar, in the kitchen.

[Laughter]

Joan Kemp-Welch: And, when I stayed with her, right until she - it was while I was staying with her she had a stroke and I heard it in the middle of the night and went and looked after her, and I stayed with her until she was taken to hospital. For a fortnight I nursed her, Mrs Underwood. And we cleaned out her kitchen and she had things that she had kept from a child, things that she'd never thrown away, you know, which was fascinating. Dear, blessed Mrs Underwood. Because I adored her and she, of course, adored me but the time, as you can imagine, over a period of about twenty years I stayed with her, always in Edinburgh. So that was the landladies. And I had another wonderful landlady in Cardiff, and her name was Mrs Walrus. And I remember her for two reasons, one was the fact that my bed sit, that I had, you could only just about walk round the bed, but it was an enormous double bed with brass bits to it over the back and over the front. Everything else, including the wash stand, had blue serge draped (like that), with bobbles on it. And you had - of course, your water was brought into you, you know - you had a can of hot water brought into you, because you had a jug and a basin and your loo, your chamber pot, which was in the cupboard by your bed, you see. And there were three pictures in the room and they were all of the late Mr Walrus, and they had been photographed, you see. On one he had his Mayor's chain around his neck, on one he'd got his sea captain's hat on and the other was the day that they had been married, or engaged, or something. And all the photographs had been taken with him staring straight at the camera (like that), so, just like The Laughing Cavalier wherever you were in the room, Mr Walrus was looking at you! I always remember feeling slightly embarrassed when I undressed [chuckling] with Mr Walrus staring at me like that, which made me laugh! And the other thing was, that she had a brother and he had been shipwrecked and he had been in the water for a long time and had got arthritis and he was bent double. And he used to come into my room, bent double, every morning, to light my fire before I got up. And he used to recite Kipling's 'Boots, Boots, Boots' to me - always, every

morning. He said, "Shall I?" And I used to say, "Yes, Mr Walrus." And he would say, "Boots, boots, boots..." So, you see, digs were quite fun!

Roy Fowler: Indeed, indeed!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because these people always had theatrical people around them. Theatrical digs have ceased to exist!

Roy Fowler: Well, touring companies such as that have ceased to exist, haven't they?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, because you see, they would book up, these people would book up for a year ahead. And you would go and they would look after you like a mother. There was a wonderful woman called Vina in Edinburgh and she - Peter stayed with me, with her, and that is about twenty five years ago, I suppose.

Roy Fowler: Peter being your husband? Peter Moffatt?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Being my husband.

Roy Fowler: Right, for the sake of the tape, we'll clarify.

Joan Kemp-Welch: When he was working at the Wilson Barrett Company. But Vina was wonderful. She had had a sister before I knew her, who had really done all the housekeeping and everything, and Vina had been the social lady, and had gone to the theatre. But when Jessie died, she had a castor oil plant that she always fed with a pot of tea every morning [chuckling] which Vina still did! And the plant had grown up, hit the ceiling and was growing down, and was almost at table level!

Roy Fowler: Like Mr Walrus!

Joan Kemp-Welch: And also, in the kitchen, there was a bird cage, which was covered in mould and moss. And when I asked why she didn't take the bird cage down, it was because she had had a lodger and the lodger had gassed himself in the oven, you see, while she was out. And she was very annoyed because he had killed the bird in the cage and wasted her gas! Because she was very fond of the bird, so she'd never touched the bird cage, it was there, and all that she - unlike Jessie who looked after the house, obviously, she never did! So all the ornaments in the cupboard, the china had got (about that much) of dust on them. The only thing that was clean was the tablecloth and the bed. And she used always come to the show, and this was when I was directing rep in Edinburgh. She used to come to the show and she used to serve our meals with a cigarette end hanging out of her mouth! You always sort of, hastily, you know, hoped it wouldn't drop on the food! And she used to say, "Ochh, it was a gorgeous wee man, that man in your play! Ochh, he was gorgeous, I lost my heart to that sweet wee man." And I used to say, "Yes, Vina, I know, because I directed the play." And she had to go and tell me the entire story of the play every night. And she had a room that was always locked and Peter and I were so intrigued as to what there was in this locked room. And one day - we knew where she kept the key - and one day when she was out, we pinched the key and we opened the door, and when we opened the

door there was a bedroom. The coverlet was back, and I'm not exaggerating, there were mushrooms on the coverlet, which was torn and padded, there was mould everywhere. There was a hairbrush that was still full of hair, on the dressing table, and the pillow - there was still a sort of mark of a person's head. And this was the room in which Jessie had died, we discovered. Jessie had died and she had locked the door and never opened it since. Can you imagine that? That's almost Miss Haversham isn't it?

John P Hamilton Ugh!

Joan Kemp-Welch: So, lots of stories about...

Roy Fowler: Genuine eccentrics in those days.

John P Hamilton Wonderful story.

Roy Fowler: Developing your career then, Joan, from that - from the touring days and, um, those - what - general jobbing actress roles?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, after the touring days, which really and truly, I was going to say, brings me up to the war...

Roy Fowler: Well no. No, no, um...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes it does, really. I don't remember anything...

Roy Fowler: Well, we haven't at all discussed films yet.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, yes, films.

Roy Fowler: What was the first approach to you to appear in a film? How did that come about?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, a man who became, and I think still is, unless he died in the last year - a famous agent, Eric Goodhead, was the sort of office boy to an agent, whose name I can't remember. And he was one of the people that I went up on my round of agents. A lot of them still, actually, almost exist. But he had a small part in a film and Eric took me to in to see the agent - he was the office boy - and said how good I was. I think Eric, at that time, was a bit struck on me and made a great thing - song and dance, about how good I was. And I got this small part in a film and then, from that, I got quite a few films that came and they are most of them, in that book, because I couldn't really remember them.

Roy Fowler: Well, we'll see, we'll go down the list and we'll see if any particular memories come back.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I can't remember.

Roy Fowler: One question first is, what was the attitude of a working actress to films? We're talking now about early thirties? I suppose we are, aren't we?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, I don't know...

Roy Fowler: Was it just a job or?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, yes.

Roy Fowler: Money?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, early thirties. No, it was marvellous if you could get it. I mean, it was absolutely marvellous, because you got more money.

Roy Fowler: Right, so the economic imperative was important or predominant?

Joan Kemp-Welch: You see, as I say, I'm sorry my memories are so muddled, because I only remember vague things...

Roy Fowler: That's all right, most people's are.

Joan Kemp-Welch: But, for about - you used to walk on in the theatre for about thirty bob. I walked on in a show called When Knights were Bold and I got about thirty bob for this. I remember being terribly envious - there were a couple of prostitutes who were also walking on, because they took anybody to walk on. We all dressed in the same room together and I was so envious of them because, they both of them, had fur coats...

Roy Fowler: Yes...[chuckling] not from walking on!

Joan Kemp-Welch: I was desperately envious...no! [Laughs]. I really and truly was. And then...

Roy Fowler: But how often did one have to do that? That was just filling in between times, I suppose?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes. I would take anything. This is another thing Sybil Thorndike told me and, funnily enough I saw - somebody said this the other day, somebody like Judi Dench, or somebody like that. No - Peggy Ashcroft, said she took everything. And Peggy, of course, is really my contemporary, and she took everything, and I took everything. You know, I would walk on, or I would do anything, just for the money, just for the salary. You never felt degraded, or anything like that. The one thing that you did feel humiliated was, people would pass you in the street and say, "What are you doing?" And if you weren't working, I would cross if I saw anybody I knew I would cross to the other side of the road, so as not to be asked the question.

Roy Fowler: What um, I think we'll....

[End of Tape 1, Side 2] [Tape 2, Side 3]

Roy Fowler: Joan Kemp-Welch, tape two.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't know what we were talking about even. See? I can't remember anything.

Roy Fowler: Well, we're embarking on your film career now. Before we lead into the individual films from this book, did you take to it happily - to filming? Do you remember what your first impressions were?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh I adored it, absolutely adored it. I can't - strangely enough, I was thinking last night in bed - I can't remember the first film I did. In fact, looking at those pictures, I can't - they must have been (not that one, but that one)...

Roy Fowler: What style were these?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh it's terribly funny isn't it? When I was about thirty, playing that...

Roy Fowler: I was going to say, let's ask - the film, it's labelled The Jewish...

Joan Kemp-Welch: I played a Jewish lady and I can't remember what it was, except that I had to speak Jewish in it.

Roy Fowler: The Jewish grandmother in The Melting Pot. [?] Now why, in God's name, would they cast you as a grandmother, when you ...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't know, I don't know. I don't know, in the least. [Chuckles]. I haven't a clue! As I say, I took anything and everything that was offered to me.

Roy Fowler: Any memories of that particular film?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No. This one...

Roy Fowler: This one being Admiral's All ?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I do vaguely remember, because this was somebody - a big American film star who came over. That's a big American film star that came over...

Roy Fowler: We'll pause while we try to...

[break in recording]

Roy Fowler: So we're talking about Admiral's All and you played Miss Parsons in that, and it was a John Stafford production. But other than that - was it a film about films? What's this camera doing in the background?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh I think, you see, in the early films that you did, they would take a shot and then they would take stills. They never developed stills from the camera, you know - from what they had done. You stopped and the still man came on and either took close-ups, or everybody posed for a picture.

Roy Fowler: Right. But what I'm asking is, whether the film was about the films?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, this is a posed picture.

Roy Fowler: Right. Well I mean, usually the still man would take what the camera set-up was. He would take it separately on an 8 x 10 but he wouldn't just um...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, no, they took publicity pictures.

Roy Fowler: I think, you see, she's looking at film there, so although it's black leader, it's nevertheless...[chuckles].

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: I think the film must have been about filming, because you see, there's a sign on the camera that says Colossal Pictures so...

John P Hamilton What, the story was about a film?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I think possibly it was.

Roy Fowler: And you say there was an American in it called Gibson?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yeah, I seem to remember her, she was a...

Roy Fowler: Well we could find out about that from the BFI.

Joan Kemp-Welch: She was an American, and the only thing that impressed me was that she had a separate lavatory with a gold key, which we weren't allowed to use!

Roy Fowler: Well! How about that!

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Chuckling] So we had to walk a long way, because she insisted on having her own lavatory, I remember.

Roy Fowler: Do you remember where they shot it, the studio?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No.

Roy Fowler: No? Probably - well, anyway. I will look that up when I go home.

Joan Kemp-Welch: This I remember more about it, because Richard Bird, who died some years ago, Marjorie Mars, and myself...

Roy Fowler: Now this is *The Crouching Beast* and you played Mimi in that, according to the caption.

Joan Kemp-Welch: It was a thriller and, again, I was a prostitute, I seemed to be perpetually playing prostitutes! And that was a thing out east somewhere, in the market and it was, sort of, white slave traffic and things, that one.

Roy Fowler: Any idea what they paid you for that sort of thing? Would one be paid by the day, or by the week, or by the role?

Joan Kemp-Welch: By the day, for anybody like me, because I would go down and do two or three days work. And you would be, when you're, say, 'under contract' you would be on call over a period of about three weeks, or something like that, and then you would be paid per day. And I can't remember what I was paid, but I would think - it always seemed princely - so I imagine it would be in the region of about five pounds or ten pounds a day, something like that.

Roy Fowler: That was princely, was it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: To me it was.

John P Hamilton What are we talking about? 1932 or '33?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well I don't remember when these. Look at the dresses, look at the dresses.

Roy Fowler: It's middle thirties, I would think, would not you?

John P Hamilton '34, '35?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, I think it would be early thirties.

Roy Fowler: Early thirties, well yes. I mean, looking at yourself there, what would you, would you guess an age?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No.

Roy Fowler: No? Right. OK, moving on then. There's another, Maudy in *While Parents Sleep*.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, and that's MacKenzie Ward.

John P Hamilton I saw the Harry Hanson Company do that on the stage, *While Parents Sleep*. If it's the same story?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes it is, yes it is.

John P Hamilton Ah yes! I saw it in the Palace Theatre in Hull, when I was a lad.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, that's right.

John P Hamilton In the Gods.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And I played - I did this twice, because we did a French version and an English version, and we were dubbed into French. Because I used to do a certain amount of dubbing at this period as well, dubbing sound onto pictures.

Roy Fowler: What sort of, um, job was it? Foreign?

Joan Kemp-Welch: What do you mean?

Roy Fowler: Well I mean, were you your own voice, or other peoples?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, no, because I was a French girl talking in this. But I used to do dubbing in those days, which was a very curious process, which I will tell you about in a minute.

Roy Fowler: Right, OK, let's not forget that.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And then this one was with John Stuart, which I had a better part. That was Paramount.

Roy Fowler: It's just labelled Paramount.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: It says, OT 24. I wonder what 'OT' stands for?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't know.

Roy Fowler: No? Right, OK.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, this one...

Roy Fowler: It's a film in Gainsborough called All In.

John P Hamilton That would be Lime Grove then, would it?

Roy Fowler: No, no. That would have been Poole Street, Islington.

Joan Kemp-Welch: This was Lime Grove and this had - I think, this was - no, this was a Paramount and I think that was at Elstree. Would Paramount be at Elstree? I think so.

Roy Fowler: Originally, they converted the power house on Poole Street in Islington to a studio but I think, probably, by that time they had given that up to Gainsborough and they would be working in other people's studios. But we could check that, don't worry.

Joan Kemp-Welch: See I'm afraid where I'm muddle minded, is the fact that the film in my mind is separate from the theatre. They ran concurrently, but I couldn't remember in what order they came. I can remember the order I did the films and I can remember, more or less, the order of the theatre, but I...

Roy Fowler: If we have title, it's no problem. I don't want to spend time trying to remember things which are not necessary to remember.

Joan Kemp-Welch: No. This had Marie Tempest's husband in, Willie Graham-Browne...

Roy Fowler: Really?

Joan Kemp-Welch: And she, again, was somebody - I used to go and watch her shows, because of the way she acted. She was so marvellous. I learnt how to walk and how to sit down on a chair from Marie Tempest.

Roy Fowler: Did you know her personally?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well yes, through Willie Graham-Browne.

Roy Fowler: Yes, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And she was lovely. And when she was in the theatre, Willie, dressed in full evening dress, used to fetch her every night, in the car, with all her fans. And she used to come out of her dressing room, in full evening dress...

Roy Fowler: They used to live quite royally, didn't they?

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and step into the car, with Willie Graham-Browne kissing her hand, and sat in the car. Of course, the audience loved it. Nobody has that kind of glamour now.

Roy Fowler: No, no. Well I suppose motion picture stars...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Now this is, what do you call it? Ralph Lynn isn't it?

Roy Fowler: Well the film is All In and that is Ralph Lynn, so, yes...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes it is Ralph Lynn, it is Ralph Lynn.

Roy Fowler: Right, that's the same picture. There is Marie Tempest's husband again.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Right. OK. Well, unless you have very specific memories of filming, or how the studios operated, or who the director was and how the director worked?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, I can't remember who the director was of that.

Roy Fowler: No, OK. It's probably...

Joan Kemp-Welch: I have various memories of that, but not for the film.

Roy Fowler: It wasn't an Aldwych farce, was it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Hmm?

Roy Fowler: Was it an Aldwych farce? Would it have been Tom Walls?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes. No, it hadn't been in the theatre, I don't think. The thing I do remember, again, films which I do remember very much, were The Citadel ...

Roy Fowler: Yes, right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...which I remember, with Robert Donat.

Roy Fowler: Yes, The Citadel is quite important, so we'll talk about that one. What you can remember?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I also, this is Busman's Honeymoon .

Roy Fowler: That came a bit later, didn't it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: That came a bit later, did it?

Roy Fowler: That was MGM also, with Robert Montgomery.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't know why, I thought that came before The Citadel? That's a big one?

Roy Fowler: No, no. That's around 1939.

Joan Kemp-Welch: But this, I remember, this is the one I told you about when I went down for the part of the manicurist, dressed up to the nines!

John P Hamilton Good story!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because Harold Huth, I never can remember how I got to know Harold, but he was a great friend and a great help. And they were seeing people for The Citadel and there was a part of a manicurist in it, which I wanted very much. And I went down after the part, dressed up to the nines. I remember I had just come back from doing a tour in South Africa, a

theatre tour in South Africa, and I had wonderful fox furs. So I went clad in my fox furs and high-heeled shoes, for this part of a manicurist, and when I got in to see - King Vidor it was, wasn't it?

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Joan Kemp-Welch: He said, "I'm sorry, the part is cast", and you can imagine how crest-fallen I was. And Harold Huth was outside the studio when I went in, because he'd taken me in and said, "Mr Vidor, this is Miss Kemp-Welch, who I think will be right for this part", and he said, "Oh, it's already cast!" Like that. And so Harold said, "Don't despair, there's another part I don't think they've cast, but you must change your clothes for it." So he took me upstairs to the wardrobe and put me on an awful old coat and skirt, I remember, and some flat heeled shoes and scraped my hair back, and said, "Now, you're just an unpaid wet nurse in Wales." And took me down again to King Vidor and said, "I think this girl might be right for the wet nurse" and King Vidor never recognised me as the same person! And he asked me to walk across the room, which I did in rather a slovenly fashion, and he said, "OK, that's fine, that's lovely, thank you very much Mr Huth." And I went out and we had a sort of terrific hug and a drink together to celebrate. And I went home and I remember I waited for the script, he said, "We'll send you a script." And when it came, I hadn't got a word to say in the film, not one single word! And I remember, in floods of tears, really because I was so excited over the thought, you know, that I'd got this film part, and I was so broken hearted. However, I went and did it, I had about three or four days on it. And Bernard Miles' wife played the woman who was having the baby. In the beginning of the film, you know, Robert Donat delivers the baby, and this was the first time this had ever been done on film, it was a daring thing to do! And I played the nurse, while she was having the baby, and he delivered the baby. And then he gave it to me in my arms, you see, and this is the picture of it. That is Robert Donat just before confinement started, and this is the picture that was taken when he gave the baby to me and I held it, gazing at him with adoration. And it just so happened that this picture was picked out by the newspapers, because it was such a scene that was talked about. And in every single newspaper sent to me, from Spain and France and everything, there was this huge picture of Robert Donat and myself. And Rosalind Russell who played the lead, and all the rest of the things, were all in little pictures, you know, round about. And it was shown at the Empire and a full sized picture of Robert Donat and myself was done in hardboard outside the Empire Theatre. And as a result of that, MGM gave me one of the leading parts in Busman's Honeymoon, so it was. Why I remember the story is, I often tell people, you know, do anything, it doesn't really matter...

Roy Fowler: You never know what's going to come from it.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Sometimes you get the - the manicurist, incidentally, was cut out of the film, so I would never have been seen! And that, you never know what brings you luck in the theatre, don't you agree Daphne?

Daphne Shadwell: Yes, totally, totally.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And the other film that I did, round about...

Roy Fowler: Well, before we move on, The Citadel ? Tell us about King Vidor as director.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh marvellous!

Roy Fowler: Yes?

Joan Kemp-Welch: He knew exactly what he wanted. He knew exactly what he wanted and he explained what he wanted to get out of it, you know. That you are now, sort of, very professional and very nervous, but helping him and being exactly what you wanted. And it was so marvellous when the baby was born, you know, that you were as excited as he was. He explained it all.

Roy Fowler: Had you had direction of that quality in the films that you had made before that?
[Chuckles] Films directed by the British people?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I can't remember the - Herbert Wilcox, who I made about five films for - he was also a marvellous director. And then Mr Chips , which came after The Citadel , didn't it? With 'Mr Chips' there was a scene in which the maid has to come down the stairs and say that her mistress had died, it's when Mrs Chips dies. And the girl who played this - I can't remember who she was - they didn't like the performance. And Sam Wood, I think it was Sam Wood who was the director...

Roy Fowler: It was Sam Wood.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...he asked me to come down and do it, and there was nobody else there, just myself in the studio, and he was re-taking. He'd got the morning to re-take this shot. And I remember that I did this twenty times for him, and every time, between each take, he would put his arm around me and walk round the studio and say, "Try it again and just give it a little bit more there" or "a little bit less there." And I remember, I did this, walking down the stairs, until I thought I can't walk down any longer, I'm going to fall! But he got what he wanted, you know, obviously. And I was delighted. So, that was something in the films I remember.

Roy Fowler: Were you contracted by MGM? All these are MGM films, did they give you any kind of contract, or did they just call you?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, no, they, you know, they just called you back. By that time I had an agent and they got on...

Roy Fowler: Right, they obviously liked you?

Joan Kemp-Welch: They offered me a contract at the beginning of the war, in 1939, to go out to Hollywood. And I often think, if you look back over your life and you see things that would have changed your life, that you didn't do. But my first husband, I thought was going to be called up to go to France, at any moment. He had been called up and then I thought he was going to go overseas and I thought, I couldn't go to Hollywood if he was, you know, and so I turned it down. So I often think that would have made a difference, had I gone, because that was something like a seven- year contract.

Roy Fowler: Yes, yes. But it was almost unforgivable to, once the war was on, to leave the country, wasn't it? Those who did, I don't think were ever forgiven.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, yes. No, they weren't. Wodehouse never was.

Roy Fowler: Wodehouse, Gracie Fields, Hitchcock also had that kind of...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, it was. It was a thing that if you left the country. And I know I had great heart burnings over it, but I turned it down.

Roy Fowler: Harold Huth, was he casting director? How was he involved in The Citadel ?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, he was a, sort of, head of the studios or, manager of the studios.

Roy Fowler: Well he probably had some kind of executive position within MGM?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes this is what I mean, he had, yes, he had.

Roy Fowler: The studio was Denham, which - maybe he was working for other studios?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, that's right. Because of course, in those days, everything was done in the studio.

John P Hamilton He was the production manager?

Roy Fowler: No.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Probably...

Roy Fowler: No...

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and everything was done in the studio, because I remember doing - when I did Busman's Honeymoon we had the thatched cottage, thatched and built in the studio, you know, and you had background. I've got a film of that at home, and we often look at it and laugh, you know, at the backgrounds of the film. But I remember there was an absolute chaos, catastrophe, because of the heat and the dampness in the studio, the corn sprouted! And one day we came down [chuckling] and there was all the green corn on the thatch, which had to be done, which was... So, you did everything in the studio, you never went outside, you never went outside at all. But Robert Donat, doing 'The Citadel', had the most appalling asthma - he died of it, you know, he died of the thing. And we used to be held up, you know, for hours while he, sort of, lay and fought for breath. He was on a very strict diet. But he was wonderful to work with, he was wonderful, and such a nice person, he was really so nice. It's amazing how these good people all are so helpful and so nice.

John P Hamilton The best of them.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because - the man that you just mentioned in Busman's Honeymoon ?

Roy Fowler: Robert Montgomery?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Robert Montgomery. This was the first time working on a film that I didn't stand in for my own work. You know how you always used to have to stand for hours while they lit you and, you know, put the marks on the floor where you had to walk to. So by the time you came to do the shot, you knew which was your light, because you'd stood for hours while the lighting person had lit you! And you knew the marks, because you'd walked it and they'd put the block on the floor, where you'd got to walk to. But when you had a stand-in, you didn't do any of this, and you had to automatically - you were expected to know where, you know, your main light was. In other words, you'd just be shown it, or something, and you did it, and this was very difficult. And Bob Montgomery used to come down early on the set when we were working, in order to teach me how to walk onto the set and find the light, you know, the key light that I was in. And how to walk to a mark on the floor without looking at the floor, and seeing it. So he taught me so much, and they were really so marvellous, these people, the way they - Because Bob Montgomery again, talking about discipline, when he was called on the set he used to walk on the set as the clock ticked, and there was hell to pay if everybody wasn't ready to work with him! He knew every line of his script before we started filming. We didn't film in any, you know, you don't film in any chronological order. He knew every line, and when we were supposed to finish, he walked off the set, didn't matter what, he walked off the set. And he was like that, the extras were never kept waiting, you know, it was amazing. And the other person I worked with in television, and that was Bing Crosby, on one of the shows, was exactly the same. You know, it's this sort of discipline, with important actors, really, I think, hasn't altered, has it?

John P Hamilton No, never will.

Roy Fowler: Well, I suppose the primary reason for it was that film making in a home studio, whether it be MGM or Paramount, in Los Angeles, was an industrial process.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: They had to be slotted in and, although they were stars, they had to conform to discipline and procedures.

Joan Kemp-Welch: It was the personal discipline. I think it was the personal discipline that you had. You know, that you didn't - I remember, you know, Edith Evans, the famous Edith Evans, when an actor walked in late and she was in it, and he said, "Oh, good morning Dame Edith, how are you?" And she said, "Punctual!" and turned her back on him! You know, because he'd kept her waiting for a few minutes. And you didn't keep people waiting, and you were dressed in time.

Roy Fowler: And if one were late, one would apologise, it was expected and one would do it.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes. And I remember in a show I did with Griffith Jones, we giggled, we giggled hopelessly, he's a terrible giggler, Griff - I really was too. And we had every reason to

giggle for this. Ladies in Retirement , which was the first play to open after the war started, at the St James' Theatre. And I played his girlfriend, and it was a murder story with Mary Clare and Mary Merrall.

Roy Fowler: I remember it.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And at the end of the act, the most exciting act - the murder had been committed, but the body had not been found, and we had to open the oven door, which had got bricks in it, you see, it was bricked up. And I had to say, "It's all bricked up." And he had to say, "No!" like that. Well, came the night when he opened the oven door and Griff Jones is as blind as a bat, do you see - can't see a thing! I mean, he couldn't see you, John, if you were sitting there, without his glasses on. And, in the oven was a stagehand's head, putting in the thing of bricks, he was a bit late, you see! I, of course, went off into a peal of laughter, because I couldn't speak, and Griff Jones in a fury, said my line, and said, "It's all bricked up!" Whereupon the audience was convulsed! And I was sent for the next day, with Griff Jones and we were told, "If such a thing ever happened again and we laughed in front of the audience, that we would be sacked!" But it really was such an excuse to laugh!

Roy Fowler: Indeed, indeed. Have we skipped over Busman's Honeymoon ? Or is there anything more to be said about that? You obviously enjoyed doing it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh Busman's Honeymoon? Yes. Robert Newton was in it, you know, I played his fiance - unwanted fiance. And Busman's Honeymoon again, was, well it was Robert Montgomery who I remember most of all, and I also remember, if I may say, a lovely story about Seymour Hicks. And that is, that he was always a very austere person and sarcastic, Seymour Hicks. Nobody every really liked him very much, or liked working with him. And there was a scene in which he had to - he played the butler, and he had to put his head up the chimney, and a whole lot of soot came down on him, I mean that, basically, was the shot. And they were lining it up and his stand-in was told to be under the thing to do it, because they were going to have a trial shot, you know, to see. And the stand-in said, "I'm sorry but you must excuse me, I can't do this." And a tremendous row ensued and the director or the floor manager said, "You have got to do this, this is what you're paid for! You're a stand in!" And it turned out, I remember, the man, going crimson, said, "This is the only suit I have and I can't put soot on it!" And I always remember Seymour Hicks, who was sitting in the studio, got up and said, "And you're perfectly right, and I shall stand in for my own shot, thank you very much!" And this man nearly wept with gratitude, you know. And I always remember that, because I was terribly moved by it myself. You know, there was this man who had this reputation and not a trice, no question about it - he wasn't going to let this man spoil his suit. So that was a nice story wasn't it?

Roy Fowler: Hmm, yes indeed. I can't remember who directed Busman's Honeymoon , do you remember? I don't think it was anyone of any great importance, as we perceive now?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I should have remembered that.

Roy Fowler: Just out of curiosity...

John P Hamilton Just as a pinpoint...

Roy Fowler: 1938 was it? I thought it was a little later, but obviously not.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And, of course, the other thing I did for MGM, which they gave me one of the leading parts here in England, and that was They Fly Alone [NB They Flew Alone], the Amy Johnson film. And that was Herbert Wilcox, who was the director. And I had done a one-line part for him in 'Sixty Glorious Years'. I was in the crowd that was watching Anna Neagle, come out of a hospital, she came out of a hospital, you know, as queen. I've forgotten what queen she was doing! [Chuckling].

John P Hamilton Victoria Regina?

Roy Fowler: Victoria, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, Victoria, sixty glorious years, Victoria Regina. And I remember, I had to turn round and say to a woman who was next to me, "She hasn't lost a son and a husband too" which I had to say. And about six months afterwards, Herbert was in America with Anna and he cabled Eric Goodhead who was his agent and said, "Find the girl who said that line at the foot of the stairs, I want her to play Mrs Amy Johnson in a film." Which was almost unbelievable, wasn't it? And Eric, I wasn't under contract to Eric, he searched round London and found my agent - it was Filmrights, and said, "He doesn't want to test her or anything, he just wants her for that part." And I played Amy Johnson's mother in They Flew Alone with Edward Chapman as my husband and, oh, Miles Malleon! Miles Malleon and Anna Neagle.

John P Hamilton Wonderful! And the Hull accent?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Hmm?

John P Hamilton You had to have a Hull accent?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes. And we had all Mrs Amy Johnsons' clothes copied, and everything like that. But it's funny, isn't it, how things happen?

Roy Fowler: Yes...

Joan Kemp-Welch: As I say, it's why I always advise people and say, "Play everything, play everything, because you never know when it's going to suddenly come forth." This was The Ladies in Retirement .

Roy Fowler: Right. So all the time that you're making these films, you're also doing theatrical work, in the West End, presumably?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, well, that was - the first thing was Dennis Neilson-Terry, which I told you about when I played the woman who had her throat cut, that was Busman's Honeymoon , when I played a spinster called Aggie Twitterton, who he didn't want to marry. This was Ladies

in Retirement , which was the first show to open in the West End, with Mary Clare, after war was declared, at the end of 1939.

Roy Fowler: I remember seeing it, but I don't think I saw it at the St James', it transferred, did it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, it transferred to St Martin's and I played it at St Martin's as well, so you saw...

Roy Fowler: I must have seen you, yes...

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...play the maid.

Roy Fowler: And I remember Mary Clare doing the final speech from Cavalcade after the curtain call, do you remember that?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes! I remember that! This was a boy who joined the fleet air army, he was American, he played it first and then Griff Jones, who couldn't join the army because of his sight, played it afterwards for the rest of time - that's the two of us there in this publicity picture. And that was me as Lucy, do you remember me screaming when Mary Clare...? That was the most difficult thing, because I played this for about a year altogether, then I left it and did The Citadel , or one of those, and then I went back into the St Martin's Lane, when they did that. And I remember that first night, because I was making a film with Wilfred Lawson, a thing called Hard Steel , and the first night they [left] me off early, in the first night. And Wilfred Lawson, bless his heart, they sent him home because he was so pissed, he couldn't go on working! And he insisted on stopping somewhere, and I got to the first night with barely half an hour before the first night of the St Martin's, for this show. But Mary Clare, one night, when we were on tour with it, somebody from the back of the stalls shouted, "Give us the speech from 'Cavalcade'!" And she was absolutely taken aback, and she said, "Oh, I don't know that I could remember it." And they said, "Come on, come on!" And the whole audience said, "Yes, come on!" you know, they all picked it up. And we stood there, and she did it, "Here's to our sons and our hopes that died with them" which is how it starts. And I was moved to tears when she did it that night, and enormous applause, and she was so pleased with that, that she did it every night after that!
[Laughs]

Roy Fowler: [Laughing] It went in, did it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: And this was quite an effort - to stand on the stage and look suitably impressed.

Roy Fowler: It ran forever, didn't it, Ladies in Retirement ? It ran a long, long time.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, it ran another year at the St Martin's, I think with the man who did Sid Field's side kick, who was that, Jerry...?

Roy Fowler: Oh! Jerry Desmond!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Jerry Desmond played in it.

Roy Fowler: I remember it clearly, but I don't remember the detail, I don't remember him.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I remember, the most difficult thing was that right at the end of the play, Mary Clare discovers it's the maid who knows about the murder. And she advances on the maid, to strangle her, and you had to wait until she had crossed the room and got about as far as you are from John, and you then had to scream! And doing that night after night, you used to think, I've got to scream now and it was...[intake of breath]. These are the things that I mean about - technically you've got to know everything in the theatre. You've got to be able to - not to scream from horror, because on the hundred and fiftieth time you do it, you're not horrified. You've got to open your mouth and be able to scream, you know, you've got to... When I'm giving an audition now, with actors, I ask them very often (if I don't know them - I hate giving auditions - never used to in television but today, managers and people always want to see an audition). And I, very often, don't ask them to read a part, but give them a speech out of their part to do and then say, "And now do it falling about with laughter. You know, you think this is the funniest thing you have ever done in your life." And then when they have done that, "And now do it as though it was the most tragic thing and you can't stop crying when you do it." And if the actor can do all those three, you know he can act.

Roy Fowler: Well the fact is, Ladies in Retirement was a very creaky play - it was a terrible play, so it really was up to the cast to make it work.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes it was...

Roy Fowler: It so easily could not have worked.

Joan Kemp-Welch: But of course, when you saw it, it was becoming a creaky play...

Roy Fowler: Hmm.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...because the war had been on. When it first opened, you know, it was considered quite a thrilling play.

Roy Fowler: Hmm, but it was artifice, not art, was it not?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Dear old Nellie Bowman was in it too, as a gaiety girl.

Roy Fowler: Yes?

Joan Kemp-Welch: But I think that is one of the things I think today, which is discredited really, is the importance of technique in acting.

Roy Fowler: Yes, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: It is discredited, and the thing about technique is that you should be taught it when you were young, so that you can then forget it. Because certain things, like your voice production, like, as I say, being able to scream and laugh and cry, you can cry in twenty different ways, you can laugh in twenty different ways, bitterly, humorously, laugh because you're happy, all these different ways of laughing. If you have learnt how to do this when you are young - have hysterics, whatever - you then don't have to think about it, so you can then put the feeling into it.

Roy Fowler: It's true of the director's rulebook too, once you know the rules, you can throw the rulebook away.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, yes, yes it is, it is like - It's like a conductor, isn't it? As you say, it's like a conductor, he doesn't have to have the score. He may have the score because he wants it, but he doesn't have to have a score, because he knows that it's there, and so he doesn't have to think, "Am I doing right or am I doing wrong?" And this is the same with acting.

Roy Fowler: That's true, and with training, it becomes inward and instinctive.

Joan Kemp-Welch: With training, it becomes natural, you know. Because, how many times, I'm sure, John, you have had it, that in rehearsals, an actor has to cry, and they say, "Oh well, I'll do that when I come to it, when I feel it." Well, that's nonsense. And talking about View from the Bridge with Raf Vallone - at the first rehearsal, the script said, "You pick the girl up by the scruff of her neck and you throw her against the wall" and Francesca Annis, when he came to this moment, reading his script, he picked her up. He was immensely strong, he'd been a footballer, you know, Raf Vallone. He picked her up by the neck and he chucked her, and she slid across the floor in the Oval, where we were rehearsing, hit the wall and burst into floods of tears!

[Chuckling in the background]

Joan Kemp-Welch: And Raff Vallone said, "But it says in the script, you're flung against the wall!" Very surprised that she was upset.

John P Hamilton I love it!

Joan Kemp-Welch: And the other thing was that, you know, in View from the Bridge he has to kiss the man. When it came to that moment in the rehearsal, he certainly kissed him! And he kissed him in every single rehearsal [chuckling] and it was so funny to watch the actors' reactions. But as far as he was concerned, it said, "kiss" so you kissed. And you knew how to do it, and what was important to him was how he'd got hold of the man and where his arm was going to be - it's like a fight. Like when we did the fights for 'Romeo and Juliet.' Bill Hobbs, you know - who did the fight, William Hobbs - that fantastic fight he did between the boys, every single thing is worked out in a fight, and when you see it, it looks as if it's never been thought out at all. But that's the only way to make something look spontaneous, is to know exactly what you're doing.

John P Hamilton Rehearsing, absolutely!

Roy Fowler: Well, the great master, you mentioned him before, was Spencer Tracy...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes!

Roy Fowler: ...and the performance is absolutely effortless, but it's based on quite stunning technique!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, exactly! Oh, I think he's so marvellous, Spencer Tracy, I still watch everything, if I see he's going to be in a film, I watch him. Because he's effortless, isn't he?

Roy Fowler: Absolutely so! Yes, there's no appearance of acting at all, an absolute triumph of technique.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

John P Hamilton And nearly all one takes!

Roy Fowler: Well, possibly I don't know, yes, yes, yes.

John P Hamilton Yes, he walked in and did it. And he didn't like doing multi-takes in anyway whatsoever.

Joan Kemp-Welch: You see this is the thing that I think is so exciting about it. Because, for instance, harking back to Ronnie Squire and [Lesley Faber] and Yvonne Arnaud, this was effortless, this was quite effortless, because they knew what they were doing. And when I did Nina at the Criterion, (which was another play I did before the war, with Lucie Mannheim, who had been warned by the Nazis to get out, because she was Jewish, and she was the great actress in Berlin at the time, people used to come for miles to see her 'Laura' and 'The Dolls House', and things like that). And she did a play called 'Nina' at the Criterion, and this play had Cecil Parker in it, who was a great technician, and Hugh Mellor who had been trained by the Habima Players....

Roy Fowler: I'm gonna have to stop you.

[End of Tape 2, Side 3] [Tape 2, Side 4]

Joan Kemp-Welch: And then, as I was saying, there was Hugh Mellor, who had been trained by the Habima Players, who were a famous Jewish company, and Lucie Mannheim who, as I say, had been trained in the Berlin State Theatre since she was fifteen, very beautiful, very intelligent. She played an actress and doubled as her understudy, and the whole play was the fact that she was married to her husband, she wanted to retire, the studio wouldn't let her retire unless there was somebody else, and she suggested that her stand-in, her understudy, should do it. Now the understudy was a common little thing with a terrible, common Berlin accent. And Lucie played both parts, and she was never - the only time she was off the stage was when she was changing. She never had more than a minute to change, there was one where she had thirty seconds. All the time she was changing, she was talking, as the star to her husband in the other room, while she

was changing the make-up. She changed her earrings, she changed her dress and she changed her shoes, she didn't change anything else at all. She walked on as a different character, period - oh! she changed her wig - She walked on as a different character, period. And after the first night, in which she got rave notices, the critics said, "How did she have time to put on padded stockings?" Because her legs looked thick, it was the way she walked, and her hands looked thick, it was the way she held them, do you know? And the way she did it. It was a remarkable performance! But the other thing which was remarkable, which I couldn't have learnt more about, let me tell you, and that was, they worked out, she and Cecil and Hugh, worked out everything. Because this is the way they - Hugh and Lucie - had been trained, and Cecil did it. They had a tremendous row, the three of them. They not only had worked out the pitch of their voices so that it got to a crescendo and then came down, you know, all the high spots and the low spots, but they literally knew where their feet were, they knew what moves they were going to make. And yet when you watched it, this looked the most spontaneous row you have ever seen.

John P Hamilton That's acting, isn't it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Which was staggering. And I learnt so much, and Lucie, (again, talking about the people who taught me) Lucie, again, used to spend hours teaching me things that she knew from the Berlin State Theatre, and explaining to me about things. And explaining the importance of knowing which foot you were going to start off on and if you were going to turn, how you turned without apparent difficulty, if you wanted to make a certain point. And all those things which I try and pass on were things that I learnt from Lucie. And then, I will tell you a funny story to finish, before we break for lunch. I was always a bit absent minded and I played the maid in this play, and I had a moment when I had to come on and say, "Supper is served" the famous line, "Supper is served." And I was waiting one night, and there was a dreadful pause and I thought "Christ, I've missed my entrance!" So I rushed on and said, "Supper is served!" Lucie and Cecil Parker froze with horror, you see [chuckling]. I realised that they'd made a mistake, fell over my feet and fell out - exit actors. And what had happened was that Cecil had had a very quick change and he had gone off and done the quick change while Lucie was - whatever she was doing - cavorting around the stage. And he came on again and he had not done up his flies and everything was showing. And Lucie took one look, froze with horror at him, like that - he looked down, also froze with horror, rushed upstage to try and zip his trousers up [laughing]. I came on stage and said, "Supper is served!" And the audience laughed.

[Background laughter]

Joan Kemp-Welch: So, that's a good story to end.

RW: Well, we'll break, not end. Lovely. [Break in Recording] RW: OK, here we are, the tape is running. We're now somewhere in the very early forties, and let's see what memories come to mind of you as an actress, both on stage and in films.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well if you can switch off for a moment.

[Break in Recording] RW: Right, now, there is Northampton rep to come, but there is a film that you made with Wilfred Lawson, Hard Steel , which is a really very interesting film to see, in many ways.

Joan Kemp-Welch: With Betty Stockfield, if I remember.

Roy Fowler: I don't - well, I don't remember the name, but yes, I'm sure you're right. It's a very confused script, it looks to me as though a great deal has been cut out, but I doubt that was Channel Four, I'm sure that was the releasing. But, what are your memories of the film and Wilfred Lawson, and times generally?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well most of the stuff that I did on the film, I think, was with Betty Stockfield. I was, either the wife of a vicar or somebody like that, but I think the problems of the film came from Wilfred Lawson if I remember rightly, and their marriage, or something like that. And I was the confidant of Betty Stockfield.

Roy Fowler: He was upwardly mobile?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes. And so I don't think I had an awful lot to do with Wilfred Lawson. As I say, he was always difficult, because he was unpredictable, because he was a very heavy drinker, he was a very heavy drinker. Which meant that he was rather like Robert Newton, who I worked with - was not always reliable, but a very good actor.

Roy Fowler: Anything specific that happened because of his intake?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well not in Hard Steel , I don't remember. But as I tell you, I do remember this film that I - well it must have been on 'Hard Steel' that I was doing when I was then going to open at the St Martin's in the, you know, re-opening of 'Ladies in Retirement.' And I came back on the journey with Wilfred Lawson, when he, sort of, got out of control and insisted on stopping the car and having a drink. And the chauffeur, you know, we stopped. With the result that, instead of arriving back in London, which I was supposed to do about three o'clock for the evening performance for the first night, we arrived and I only just had time to get to my dressing room and have half an hour before the opening night, which was, from my point of view, a bit horrendous. But he was an actor I admired very much, he was very sincere, and when he was 'with us worked very hard indeed.

Roy Fowler: Right. Are there any other films at that time that you recall? Or people, or events in the business, anything like that, that relate?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well there was the Amy Johnson film, which I did. I did four films for Herbert Wilcox. I did one with Anton Walbrook, and I can't for the life of me remember what that one was.

Roy Fowler: With Wilcox? No, I can't think.

Joan Kemp-Welch: But the big one I did with Herbert, was the Amy Johnson film, in which I played Mrs Amy Johnson. And this was - I was going to say, what I remember about it was - it was exciting to do. Anna was wonderful to work with, and Herbert too. They worked together marvellously, they were a wonderful couple. And the - I remember so much with Anna, that she would, if there was a crowd scene, or anything like that she recognised, you know, she'd been a crowd artist herself and in the chorus, Anna. Anna became the star, because she was an understudy in a show at the Hippodrome, the leading lady fell ill and the understudy didn't know the part and Anna, who was in the chorus, had learnt every line and she stepped forward and said, "I could do it", because the understudy was incapable of doing it, and she became a star overnight. That was Anna.

John P Hamilton That was in 42nd Street , that, wasn't it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes. But if she saw somebody that she had worked with, you know, in her chorus days or anything like that, Anna would be right over to them saying, "Do you remember me?" and "How we worked together in (such and such) a time?" and "Do please come over and have a cup of tea with us!" And this was typically Anna and everybody adored her, including myself.

Roy Fowler: Well that's a lovely thing to hear. How about filming in wartime Britain, any memories of that in particular? Whatever pressures may have been induced by the war years, anything that relates?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, chiefly I remember - and this, again, possibly is connected with the theatre - I was living in Henley on Thames, I had a stable loft somewhere in Henley on Thames, and I used to come up by train every day and I used to come up with Hermione Gingold and - oh, the person I was talking about...

Roy Fowler: In what?

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...Anna Neagle.

Roy Fowler: Ah, right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, am I right in saying this? Yes I am - no - I'm sorry, I'm off at a tangent again - it was with Hermione Gingold and Binnie Hale.

Roy Fowler: Oh yes!

Joan Kemp-Welch: And we used to come up from Maidenhead and because we were civilians, we not only were rather roughly treated by people who, sort of, thought we should be in uniform, but we used to get stopped for hours on the train. And they used to come round with great buckets of tea, and I remember we never got any tea! [Chuckling] And I also remember that we bought sandwiches one time when we were extremely hungry, and I remember Hermione opening her sandwiches and saying, "Anyone you know?" and putting it back again! I also

remember Binnie saying to her, "Hermione, don't you ever dust your eyelashes, dear?" They were so rude to each other!

Roy Fowler: What did Gingold say to that?

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Laughs] And of course, touring! Touring in wartime was really quite difficult, because you used to go in the blackouts and you would sometimes be held up with air raids. The train - there would be an air-raid and the train would be stopped and you would sit for hours with the, you know, gunfire and everything going on, and it used to take you hours to get to your destination. And really, touring in wartime was really quite something. I had two dogs, two Scottie dogs I took with me, and I knitted them white coats so they could be not trodden on in the blackout, with their basket. And sometimes it would take us about twenty four hours to get to some place from, say, for instance, the bottom of England up to Scotland, by the time we'd stopped. We'd very often had no food or anything like this. I was touring with Ladies in Retirement at this time. We worked in London until the raids started on London and then we were sent out on tour. And we did hit the three-day blitz in Bristol and the Birmingham - the Birmingham Blitz and the Manchester one. And we used to - the Germans were so terribly regular in their raiding habits, and they used to raid the country practically at the same time every night. And so, really and truly, they put the theatres earlier. They used to raid about eight o'clock, and they put the theatre earlier at six o'clock so that people went to the theatre - people really went to the theatre in those days - and everybody got home just before the air-raid warnings would go off. And we used to chase into a taxi and get back, and I always remember the digs. In Birmingham, I think it was where, when we came racing back, our landlady would put our supper out on the table for us, you see, and she would sit under the table, because it was a good solid table, with a saucepan on her head!

[Background laughter].

Joan Kemp-Welch: And the air raid used to start and we used to hungrily, you know, 'down' our supper because we were starving, with the landlady with a saucepan on her head under the table! Which was hilarious really! But there was a wonderful woman in 'Ladies in Retirement' and her name was Elsie Wagstaff. She had taken over for the tour from Nellie Bowman who was very, very elderly. And she was on the tour and she always travelled with a tin of 'Healthy Life' biscuits and a roll of lavatory paper and all her fur coats. She had been very famous in America at one time, she'd played [Raine] with - I don't know who it was that played [Raine] in America...?

Roy Fowler: Um...[Eagles, Jean Eagles].

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, that's right. Well, she had played opposite him, you see. And he had made advances to her, or something, and she had slapped his face in a restaurant, and she became very famous because she'd slapped his face in a restaurant. But she had a lot of fur coats from her admirers in America and when she sat in the train on one of these endless train calls, Elsie would wear all her fur coats. Because she was quite determined that if we were bombed, that she would have her fur coats with us! She used to sit with her fur coats, munching a Healthy Life biscuit and ready with the lavatory paper!

[Background laughter].

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because when you were held up for fourteen hours it was quite a necessary thing to have! So, that's my chief memory of touring in war- time.

Roy Fowler: When you were making a film such as the Amy Johnson Story how did you get to Denham for your call?

Joan Kemp-Welch: The which story?

Roy Fowler: Well the Herbert Wilcox film about Amy Johnson. How did you get to Denham? Denham was never the easiest studio to get to unless you had a studio car, so how did one do that?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well I used to get up at five o'clock in the morning and I used to go by train. But we always got up at five o'clock in the morning to get to the film studio, because I think the make-up call was at half past seven or eight, something like that. And you had to be there in time for that.

Roy Fowler: Were the trains reasonably reliable in terms of running?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes! Yes they were.

John P Hamilton More so than now!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes they were, they were quite reasonable. It wasn't until later on in the war when a lot of the main stations got bombed that it - you know, that the trains - even then I think they were fairly reliable.

Roy Fowler: Yes, right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: It's amazing, you see, they bombed Paddington - a stone's throw from where I'm living now - they bombed Paddington every night for a year, and they never stopped the railway. They hit everything round, they demolished a lot of Paddington, but they just seemed to miss it. It's really rather like the fantastic way so many of the cathedrals weren't bombed, were they? But then Peter always says that "They were never told to bomb a cathedral but they were told to bomb a post office which was next to it" you see. And he said that, Cologne - because he did most of his bombing over that part of Germany - he said, with meticulous care they literally dived down and dropped their bombs next to Cologne Cathedral. Because Cologne was never hit, I think it had a minor mishap. And I think that most of the pilots must have done that.

Roy Fowler: I see. One thing we haven't touched upon is your time in rep, or your times in rep? Did you do rep? You did.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, indeed.

Roy Fowler: When would have been the first time, in the thirties, or was that also wartime?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well I did a year - I did a year in Northampton, and this is before the war, this must have been before the war.

Roy Fowler: Who ran the company?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Robert Young. [Chuckles] I say that looking at John because I wondered if he had remembered him. Because he was the director, he was rather a fussy little man and he was married to the first woman who did Peter Pan, who was famous as playing Peter Pan.

Roy Fowler: Oh yes, now what was her name?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Right at the very start. And Robert, we did a weekly rep and I was engaged to play the leads and I got fifteen pounds a week. I got fifteen pounds a week and I had to provide all my own clothes and I had in my contract, I couldn't wear the same dress twice, not, you know, an important dress twice. So I used to learn the parts, and they were long leading parts every week, and I used to learn them, stitching on cheap organdie and things, and I used to make all my own dresses with yards of organdie, things like that. I remember this so vividly, this terrible business, and going to bed at about four o'clock in the morning and rehearsing at nine o'clock the next day.

Roy Fowler: Equity, presumably, had nothing to say about all this, or no power over things?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh no, because Equity really - I don't know - when did Equity become a closed shop?

John P Hamilton Oh, not until after the war I don't think.

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, that's right, because...

John P Hamilton 48, 49, when [?] came back.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Equity. There was a great malpractice at that moment going on between rather unscrupulous managements, who would engage people for a tour, you know - so much money, whatever it was - six pounds a week, or five pounds a week, or something. Then when the tour had been out a couple of weeks, coming to the Company and saying, "I'm sorry, unless everybody takes a cut to half price of their salary, the tour will come off", and then you were left. Or they would say it to the people who were getting more than five pounds a week, "Unless you take a cut you don't do it." Which was a kind of moral blackmail, which they had.

Roy Fowler: Did it mostly succeed?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Hmm?

Roy Fowler: Did it mostly succeed?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: Yeah.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I think it probably did, I think it probably did. I remember doing rep at Hull, which I had been engaged on a year's contract, to play leads in Hull and after I'd been there a month, the theatre burnt down and there was no money to do anything with.

John P Hamilton Was that The Little Theatre ?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I think it was, John.

John P Hamilton It was replaced by the New Theatre. Yeah, yeah.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes that's right. But I do remember we had to give a performance in order to get sufficient money to get home, to get our fares home. So that - there was never a lot of money in the theatre in those days. But Northampton was a very well known rep and a lot of people who became stars afterwards played there, it was a very good rep. And Sonia Dresdel - that's where Lois Obee, I can never remember - she was Sonia Dresdel when she became famous and Lois Obee when she was in rep. And she had a boyfriend, which was a great scandal in the town, because I think he was married. And she used to drive about in his car and if she saw anybody she thought she knew, she dived to the bottom of the car, which of course, made the scandal worse, you see, not better! And the last - the manager she was having the affair with was sacked - and on the last night of the season she stepped forward and accused the management of unfair practices, and this was front page news in every newspaper.

Roy Fowler: What did she say?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, that they had been unfair and maligned him. She stepped forward with a quiver in her voice [chuckling], I remember it so well. Stringer Davis, Margaret Rutherford's husband was in the cast!

Roy Fowler: These are personal differences, not economic oppression, is that what she was on about?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, they're not - but these, unfortunately are the sort of things you remember about the rep days, isn't it?

Roy Fowler: Absolutely, and Thank Heavens, yes. No, I'm saying, was she criticising the management because of their professional conduct, or their attitude...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh no!

Roy Fowler: ...towards her as a colloquial...

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, towards her as an actress. And she then changed her name to Sonia Dresdel, because there was such a scandal about it, and then became a great star. And the joke was that Sonia Dresdel was two for the price of one, wasn't it?

[Background Laughter]

Joan Kemp-Welch: Everybody said that her acting was two for the price of one!

John P Hamilton But not Lois Obee?!

Roy Fowler: Whatever happened to Sonia Dresdel, I'm not at all sure? She came and she went.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Asa Brown Otem[?] was there too, so - so many people who... Yes, that was Northampton and I was there for over a year, I think. The other thing I remember about Northampton was that it was built over a slaughter house, still is I think, except I think the slaughter house is gone. And we used to have rats (as large as that) running about in the dressing rooms downstairs.

Roy Fowler: Ohh!

Joan Kemp-Welch: That I didn't like!

Roy Fowler: Were you with any other rep companies?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No. Hull and - I can't remember any others - Northampton. All the other reps I was with, was directing.

Roy Fowler: How is the time jump?

John P Hamilton Where did you live in Hull, Joan?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I can't remember, John.

John P Hamilton You were there beyond their blitz, presumably? Are we talking about before the war?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, before the war, it was way before the war.

John P Hamilton We could have run into one another - I used to run to school up and down Springbank!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Really? Yes, we might have, indeed.

John P Hamilton Knew the Little Theatre, when I was a kid, yeah.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I was on tour in something and I can't remember what it was, and we played the Princess Theatre, Manchester. At the Princess Theatre, Manchester, there used to be a woman who had second sight - you know, she held a ring and could tell you what was going to happen to you - which she did. And she came round to see us, she always used to visit the companies that came to the Princess Theatre, Manchester. And you would give her a pound and she'd hold something that you'd worn, and I remember she said, "You are going to sign a contract for a job and you are going to be extremely pleased. But," she said, "disaster is attached and I see flames all round it." And I'd forgotten all about it until I'd signed the contract for Hull to play leads there, when the theatre burnt down.

Roy Fowler: Ah, well, yes. I was wondering if the time had come to start talking about directing? And, that being so, the first question is, when did you, as you recall, have a desire to be a director, an inkling that you had a path in that direction?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, when did the war start? 1939. Well, I should say well by the thirties and had always wanted to direct. Whenever you suggested it, it was just a big laugh, it really was just a big laugh. People thought, you know, you were crazy, you were absolutely crazy. I remember I went endlessly to people to ask them to let me direct. And the first time I did it, one of the people I went to was Harry Hanson, dear Harry Hanson, who said, "Thank you, we've enough trouble in the theatre without women directing!"

[Background Laughter.]

Joan Kemp-Welch: And then I did a show at the Duke of York's with Lucie Mannheim and Marius Goring. I think it was called something Fanny [N.B. Lady Fanny] but I can't remember what it was. It had a circus in it and I know I had to learn to ride a stripped bicycle up and down the alleyway in between the theatre, a bicycle that went backwards and forwards, because I came on as a clown in a pair of shorts or something. But anyway, I got to know Marius very well, and I already knew Lucie. And they were going to do - oh God! What was the play? They were going to do it, anyway, in Ireland - this was a play they were doing together in Ireland, and they asked me if I would direct it. Could it be...? I don't know what it was. And I went over to Ireland with them and directed it - for the life of me I can't tell you what it was. But the three of us went out, and that was the first production that I had done, which I did for them, and they were very complimentary about it. And then after that, soon after that, the - I had gone to the Drama League and asked them if they would engage me to do one of their amateur companies. Because they used to have big, you know, one-act theatre festivals, things like that, and they used to pay quite well for directors to go and direct them. And though they said that nobody would have a woman director, and I said I'd done this one show for Lucie and Marius, and they said, "No, no, no", it didn't make any difference. And then one day, they rang me up to say they had got a very poor company in the East End of London and they wanted a director to do a show, to do Shaw's, 'The Showing up of Blanco Posnet'. And they could only afford just the fares for the director and two pounds a week. So I said, "Yes I'll do it, I'd love to do it." So I went down to this company and they were all East Enders and they did 'The Showing up of Blanco Posnet', and they were good, terribly enthusiastic! We had one rehearsal a week I think, or two rehearsals a week. And they went in for this competition, which was an all England competition, and won it!

John P Hamilton [Claps]...lovely, well done!

Joan Kemp-Welch: So after that, people weren't adverse to have me as a director. And the Drama League then sent me out all over England in different places to adjudicate productions and I used to - you used to do a week and watch productions and adjudicate them. And this taught me a lot, because one was really looking at direction all the time, as opposed to acting really, more or less. And I did the finals, and when you did the finals they were done at The King's Theatre, Glasgow, which was packed from floor to ceiling. And you had to watch three shows and then immediately, without a pause, get up on the stage and discuss and criticise each show, and then make a final adjudication, without any notes or anything like that. And that was a help towards directing to - do you know what I mean?

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Joan Kemp-Welch: That you had to think quickly and do things like that. Have I come unstuck?

Roy Fowler: No, no, we're putting pressure on the wire.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And then the War started and directors then, of course, are being called up. And I went to - I wrote round to a whole lot of people, and one of the people I wrote to again was dear Harry Hanson. And Harry had a director who had been called up and he said, would I like to come down and do a show for him at Penge? I can't remember the name of the show. I went down to do it, it was twice nightly - once weekly and twice nightly, and it was very successful for Harry and he kept me on six months, so for six months I did once weekly and twice nightly, which was quite a thing for rehearsals! And then [Robert Digby] from Colchester, he came down and saw one of the shows, one time, he happened into it. He had got a very good repertory in Colchester and he asked me to go to Colchester to take over the direction of the theatre in Colchester. And that's really when I get onto this page, which is when I did - I did a year there, doing weekly - so I did, I actually did a year and a half at Colchester, which took me through to Peace Day. Because that is the time, I remember the time, because on the day that the war ended, Peace Day, Richard Wordsworth was in the cast and I remember we went out on the town and I leapt onto a dustbin and danced! [Laughing] Fell off the dustbin, sprained my ankle, couldn't walk for weeks. With Richard Wordsworth, who was a wonderful dancer, we danced all down the street together! So, there you are, salad days! But Colchester was a wonderful repertory to work at, because [Robert Digby] was an extraordinary gentleman. He was very aristocratic, I mean to say, he came from a very good aristocratic family. His mother was a die-hard Tory, he was a raving communist!

[Background chuckles]

Joan Kemp-Welch: And he ran this theatre, and he was a wonderful man, [Bob Digby]. He would sometimes come out to the audience in his socks and give passionate political speeches, you see. And we did a new play every week. We were allowed to rehearse in the garden. We always used to rehearse in somebody's garden. After the first night, we all used to go out, the entire company, stagehands, everybody, to the local pub to celebrate. And dear Bob used to often collect us. The war was still on now, of course, that I'm talking about. He used to collect us in a

car, or a couple of cars and we used to go down to the beach at Mersea, whereupon he would spread rugs on the sand, produce bottles of gin and oysters, and then we used to argue about politics until about three in the morning, and then be at rehearsals again at ten o'clock the next morning! And the shows were wonderful! They were wonderful! And we had a fascinating cast - [Harold Caskitt] on his first job, Dora Bryan on her second, oh - Rogers - you know, the famous...?

John P Hamilton Paul Rogers.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Paul Rogers, Richard Wordsworth, in fact you could go on with all the people who were at Colchester, Trevor Howard, the whole lot were at Colchester. Again, Colchester had the kind of thing, John, that we had with Rediffusion. Whenever Colchester people meet, they talk about Colchester.

John P Hamilton Yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Really thanks to this wonderful man Bob Digby who had such enthusiasm. And he was a wonderful man to fight with, because I used to fight tooth and nail with Bob, because we used to disagree about things, you know. And I always remember Bob, in the middle of one terrible row we were having about some production, you know - not between ourselves but just on the production - he would say, "Listen!" And there would be dead silence from the theatre, everybody would be listening to the row, because the office was in the... He would say, "Come on!" He'd grab a bottle of whiskey, he'd rush on out of doors, go down to the scenery bay and he would say, "...and now, as we were saying," pouring the whiskey and we'd go straight back into the row! So that was a wonderful exciting time of my life, at Colchester.

Roy Fowler: What plays were you doing then?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Ohh...

Roy Fowler: Were they the current plays, or did you do the classics. What sort of thing?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, a great mixture, a great mixture. What do I...?

Daphne Shadwell: ['I Remember Mother']?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Is this Colchester?

Daphne Shadwell: Yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, this is Glasgow.

Daphne Shadwell: Oh yes, sorry my dear.

Joan Kemp-Welch: For the life of me I can't remember.

Roy Fowler: OK, have a guess.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ['??? Of Six'] I remember is one that we did, Desire under the Elms is another, Hedda Gabler is another...

Roy Fowler: So it was serious stuff, it wasn't just drawing room comedy or tennis anyone?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh no, no, no. We did St Joan there...

Daphne Shadwell: 'Of Mice and Men'

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, that was Colchester, wasn't it?

Daphne Shadwell: Yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes that's right, Of Mice and Men .

Daphne Shadwell: And his tragedy, the Steinbeck? That's Of Mice and Men .

Joan Kemp-Welch: This is probably all - these are probably all. No, that's - these are all Colchester, I think. I don't know, you see, I lost the list that mother kept. Yes, Of Mice and Men. We did all of Eugene O'Neill's um... Oh, we did literally everything, classics and 'Doll's House.'

Roy Fowler: To what, a very receptive audience?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes.

Roy Fowler: A civilian audience in those days, or part service?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh civilian, a civilian audience, and of course, you had a permanent company, you see. And so, the company, in those days, places like Colchester hadn't got the access to go to London and the tours didn't reach these towns and, therefore, the public were dependent on the theatre, to go to the theatre, and it was a great night out. And they got fond of the actors, because the company was engaged for a year, you see, you engaged the company for a year, and then they played everything. So they would go and see somebody as an old man one-week and a young man the next week and they became, you know, they would fall in love with one actor or one actress and come and see them. And so it had a great feeling and, as I say, Bob was an enormous personality with it. And from there, I took the company out on a tour of India - it shows you the time. This was after the Western War had finished but the Japanese War was still on. And I took a touring company out to India, where we toured all over India, from north to south, in the jungle and everywhere, playing to these enormous camps that were up in the jungle, where we used to do...

John P Hamilton Between May and August 1945 then?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No...

John P Hamilton Yes, yes, must have been...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

John P Hamilton If you celebrated the end of the war and broke your ankle in Colchester... and August was the end of the Japanese War.

Joan Kemp-Welch: That's right, that's right.

John P Hamilton June, July and August of '45.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because the tour in India, we went out, which was...

Roy Fowler: Were you playing to the Service, or to...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes, to the Service.

Roy Fowler: Right, not to the Indians?

Joan Kemp-Welch: We played to the Service, and before that I had a tour of, I think it was London Wall and something else, which we played up in the Orkneys and the Shetlands, and we played on all the war ships.

John P Hamilton Ah the Navy, yes.

Daphne Shadwell: Oh yes!

Joan Kemp-Welch: We used to go out, we were in the Shetlands and you used to go out on examination vessels.

Daphne Shadwell: Scapa Flow.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I went to every island on the Shetlands, which, again, was fascinating. And we used to play on a lot of the battleships. We were there when The Tirpitz was bombed...

Roy Fowler: Did you play...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and we were there when the plane arrived back from bombing, one of the hundred pound very enormous bombs which...

Roy Fowler: A thousand or ten thousand, not a hundred pounds.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And it came back and it got stuck and they couldn't unload it over the sea and everybody had to lie flat on the ground while it landed at Sumburgh and, mercifully, it landed without a bang and we all got up and went and had a look at the...

John P Hamilton Aircraft from 9 Squadron or 617?

Roy Fowler: Did you play yourself, or were you only...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

Roy Fowler: You did, yes?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I played in the company. We did Pink String and Sealing Wax

Roy Fowler: Ah ha?

Joan Kemp-Welch: And we did that in India too. And the - I'll always remember [chuckling] as Mum which I was, I had to pour out a cup of tea for the family at breakfast, and I poured out the teapot, and instead of the tea coming out, an enormous cockroach came out of this teapot!

Daphne Shadwell: Ahhhrg!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because I cannot tell you what insects were like in India! There was one night when I suddenly saw - all these camps had made these stages, most of them out in the open, you see, and they had footlights, (like that), which you came out and did - and I suddenly, in front of the footlights, saw, strutting up and down, as arrogant as you please, an enormous scorpion, you see.

Daphne Shadwell: Arrghh!

Joan Kemp-Welch: And as we'd all got Victorian clothes on, I hitched mine up above my knees, and said to the boys, "You've got boots, crack it!" [Laughs] And everybody was ... [JKW presumably makes a face]... and this awful scorpion marched up and down until the interval, when one of the soldiers with big boots, I think, went and sat on it!

[Laughter]

Joan Kemp-Welch: And then the other time I remember was, all the loos were outside in the open, you see, and in the dark. And I went to the loo and I sat down and something slithered under my bottom, which I thought was a snake, you see. So I screamed and screamed and the whole of the British Army practically, poured into the lavatory, you see [laughing] and put their torches on, and there on the wall was a rather startled enormous...

[Tape Ends!] [Tape 3, Side 5]

Roy Fowler: Joan Kemp-Welch, Tape 3. Um, we ran out of tape on that last bit, if you would kindly overlap it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, I was just saying that I was taken by somebody in the army, you know, to see varying places which were interesting. And there was this famous temple of the

sacred prostitutes, which was - I mean, was there - a practising one with all the priests and the earls and everything, and these extraordinary pictures everywhere. But in order to get to it, we went through a place, which I shall never forget, and that was an ant colony, of ants, which were as big (as that)!

Roy Fowler: Ohh...

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and I'm not really exaggerating - big, black ants, as big (as that).

Roy Fowler: Well now, "As big as that" means, what - three, four inches?

Joan Kemp-Welch: It must be, quite.

Roy Fowler: OK, because we're on tape, people can't see you.

Joan Kemp-Welch: No. And we were shot! The man who was taking me, the officer who was taking me said, "Shut all the windows!" And everything was shut, like that, before we went through it. And they had built castles which were quite as high as those bookcases - wonderful fairy looking castles, with turrets and things like this, smothered with all these black ants, all at their business, you know, doing whatever it is that ants do, which seems to be never-ending work! And I thought to myself, it suddenly came alive to me that when you read these stories of people having honey put on their heads and left for the ants to eat, what it could be like. Do you know? It suddenly struck me so forcibly, going through this. And then, coming back from this temple, we had an Indian driver and they drive like lunatics! And it was very dark and we were coming along the road (like that) and there was a bit of the road that could have looked, I think, as if there was a turning, it actually materialised. The driver going very, very fast, he swung, like that, onto this - panicked because he went off the road into the sand, into the dirt. He panicked, put his foot on the accelerator and we sunk, like that, down our wheels, and the next thing we knew, he'd vanished! He'd literally absconded. I think he must have been terrified, it was dark and he'd done it and he was terrified! And we hoped that he would come back, that he would do it. And we sat and waited - nothing happened, he didn't come back. And so the man I was with, and I can't remember his name either, said, "I'll have to go." We heard the far-off sound of drums and he said, "I am going to see if I can get some sort of help somewhere, and I'll leave you here." And he, sort of, dug a place in the sand, put the car right in it and said, "I'll be back as soon as I can." And he went, and he was away about an hour and a half or nearly two hours, and I always remember this, because it was an extraordinary sensation, you know, being absolutely alone in the desert. And the stars were like the size of my fist, all over the sky I remember. And then, suddenly, I heard these voices, a great gabble of voices, coming back, and he arrived back with about ten or eleven men, Indians that he had found. And they lugged the car out of the sand and put it on the road, and he said to me, "Now, get in". He was going to drive, you see. And he said, "Now, get in and be ready to go because I've only got one hundred rupee note on me and they're going to fight like murder if I do it!" So we got into the car and he said, "Thanks boys!" and threw it over his head, and we went like - like a bat out of hell! [Laughing]. So India was full of surprises!

Roy Fowler: Joan, a question at this time, what had led you into direction? Was it a dissatisfaction with what you had seen in the thirties, yourself, or was there something more positive, do you think, to it now?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, certainly no dissatisfaction, but I think, right from the time when - a fascination with lighting, a fascination with - I don't know, it just fascinated me. You know, way back from my time with Peter Godfrey and watching people act and the theory of acting, it just fascinated me and I really thought I'd like to do it.

Roy Fowler: So it wasn't any one thing, just the technicalities of staging a production or the performances, it was, indeed, the overall thing, was it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yeah. It was just a growing feeling that it was something I wanted to do, and longed to do, and was terribly happy when I did it. And, as I say, it was ironic that dear - what's the name? Penge - you know, what was the man's name at Penge that I said I worked for? See, I've forgotten now and I just told you...

Daphne Shadwell: Not John Hanson?

John P Hamilton: Not Hanson, No...not Godfrey...

Joan Kemp-Welch: The man who was reputed to wear the silver wig when he was cross and the golden wig when he was happy!

[Laughter].

Roy Fowler: You didn't mention...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Harry Hanson!

Roy Fowler: Oh, right, you didn't mention the wig. Um - hereafter, was it mostly a matter now of directing? Did you largely cease to be an actress?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well I really had this enormous good luck, you see, with directing. Because from doing it for Harry Hanson, I did it for Colchester, and I did the tour, I came back again to Colchester. The Wilson Barrett Company wanted a replacement for Clare Harris, who was a director for them and she had been offered a job in London, and so they had agreed to release her for three months and wanted a replacement. And so I went up and replaced Clare and she came back, and they kept me on, and I did four years for the Wilson Barrett Company, doing a play a fortnight.

Roy Fowler: Where was the Wilson Barrett Company based?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Scotland.

Roy Fowler: In Scotland, in Edinburgh?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, in Edinburgh. And then I suggested to them what I had suggested and we did at Colchester - that they should join up with another company so that, instead of doing weekly, that we could do a fortnightly. And we did this at Colchester, with Clacton. And the Wilson Barrett Company thought it was a good idea, and we linked up and took Aberdeen, His Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen, and so we then did a fortnightly with Aberdeen and then we joined up with Aberdeen - there were three we did - Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen.

Roy Fowler: Right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: So we did all three, we did all three theatres. So part of the year we did weekly, then we did three weekly. No, then we did fortnightly and then we went on o three weekly, enlarging the company so that, at the end, we were a company of about forty people. And it took quite a lot of organisation because if you wanted to move somebody from one company to another, they had to have a certain amount of weeks out. But we played at the Alhambra in Glasgow, which was the biggest theatre, then, in Glasgow. King's Theatre in, um - what did I say?

John P Hamilton Edinburgh.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Edinburgh, no. We played the Lyceum in the Edinburgh, the Alhambra in Glasgow, and His Majesty's in Aberdeen, which we did. And then, I was then asked by the Howard and Wyndham people to do their pantomimes, and so I did pantomimes for three years, and did pantomimes in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen - did their big pantomimes. And then, after that, I came back again to London and did some West End shows. I did Dead on Nine and Eugene O'Neill's Desire under the Elms . And then I had ['Weeko?'] on at The Watergate, and then commercial television started, and they asked me to train as a television director.

Roy Fowler: Ha! OK. Well that brings us to a junction. I've got two questions. One is, before we leave the acting aspect of things, tell me about the casting couch , as it applied in the thirties and the forties. Was that an integral part of the British theatrical scene?

Joan Kemp-Welch: What the casting...?

Roy Fowler: The casting couch ?

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Chuckles]. Oh well, I mean, I should imagine it always happens, but I mean to say, people made endeavours, whether they ever succeeded? Not with me, I'm proud to say, but it did occur, but then, I bet it occurs now too.

Roy Fowler: Oh it does! I'm sure it does, yeah. But I wondered if you had any particular memories of that? You had mentioned that you had an advance, one advance - would you...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Chuckling]. Yes. No, don't talk about dead people!

[Laughter]

Roy Fowler: Well they're the easy ones to talk about, aren't they?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, no, no.

Roy Fowler: Right. OK. The...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because I like them and I've a feeling that we don't finish here, you know...

Roy Fowler: Well yes, but it's all part of history and it's harmless enough. But anyway, if you don't want to, we won't. The more serious question is, had you ever formulated theories of direction? Are you essentially a - as you were an actress - are you now a jobbing director, whatever comes along you'll take? Or do you have any, sort of, slightly more rarefied concepts of direction and theory, at this stage - this early on in the forties?

Joan Kemp-Welch: What do you mean, at the stage we're talking about?

Roy Fowler: Hmm, yes, in the forties. Or are you just...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well I think, I think, um, obviously to start off with, when I was offered these jobs, I took them. [Slight pause]. I think - I've always wanted to go along with the author, um - this has been something I have always - I like to have authors with me, if possible, when they're - when one's working.

Roy Fowler: Is the text sacred?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, not if I think it really needs altering, but if the author is available I talk to them about it. I've always found authors with me, enormously helpful and enthusiastic.

Roy Fowler: Would you tamper with O'Neill, for example? Did you?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Tamper with?

Roy Fowler: O'Neill?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, I don't think I did. No, I think *Desire Under the Elms* is very straightforward, I think he writes extremely well. When I did - when I did *'Midsummer Night's Dream'* and knew we had to cut it, which we did - I had, um, George Rylands, who was the great Shakespeare expert at Oxford. And he was asked to come and be in charge of the literary side of it, because the firm were nervous about the cutting of it and doing it. They were slightly nervous about doing it anyway, because it was the first they'd ever done, as a commercial proposition. And he said to me - when we first met we got on together terribly well, I'm glad to say - and he said to me, "Well, we've got to cut it." We had to cut it for whatever it must have been, it must have been about seventy minutes, something like that. And he said, "I would reckon that we should cut about five hundred lines", you see. And he said, "You cut a version and I'll cut a version", you see. And we both did and do you know, out of those five hundred lines each which we'd cut, we only differed on forty of them.

Daphne Shadwell: Oh!

John P Hamilton Amazing, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Do you know, so it probably means that cutting is fairly obvious, do you know?

Roy Fowler: For time, yes, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I think it's difficult. I found Chekhov, when I did all the Chekhov plays, I found Chekhov difficult to cut, over the fact, that a line which seems nonsense in the first act, it develops into something that is of vital importance...

Roy Fowler: A resonance, absolutely!

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...in the last act. And therefore, you continually find yourself thinking, "This could go", and then thinking, "it can't, it's got to go back". These were really difficult, I think, to cut. Arthur Miller's, *A View from the Bridge*, which I cut, he didn't alter anything, because I had to cut that down. He didn't alter anything, he accepted everything. I think it's interesting, I enjoy doing - I enjoy the exercise of trying to keep the essence of the play.

Roy Fowler: What do you have to say there about the morality of cutting someone else's work to fit within a commercial time segment?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, I mean, people like the excellent Chekhov wrote when television didn't exist, and films didn't exist. Therefore, they wrote what they felt was necessary for their play, didn't they? But I'm absolutely convinced that if they were here today and had to write a play for television...

Roy Fowler: They would do it!

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...that they would automatically cut it! They would cut it themselves! I don't think there's any question about that at all. And therefore, as I say, I really do try, when I'm directing, I really do try and put to the public what the author had wanted them to know. I may be awfully wrong? I remember once, a notice being written about me, which I was upset about at the time, in which it said - the interviewer had asked me who I did programmes for, what type of person did I aim my programmes for? And I said, "For myself." And I really didn't mean this, when it was printed it looked so arrogant, you know, "Joan Kemp-Welch directs programmes for herself." But in point of fact, who else is your yardstick? If you're doing a play - let us say this room - do I direct it for you? Do I direct for John? Do I direct it for Daphne? You're all three different personalities. I think the only thing you can do, is to do, in a sort of sense, what you yourself feel is the right way to do it. Giving - you know - in other words, you do it for yourself, because the only person who can say whether I think this is right or wrong, is yourself. Wouldn't you agree?

John P Hamilton Absolutely! I totally agree. I did every television programme, whether it was an outside broadcast or a play, or anything, for me - directed for myself!

Daphne Shadwell: And me... always

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes exactly!

John P Hamilton And I got very upset if I was interfered with!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I mean, I think you can only do it for yourself, can't you?

Daphne Shadwell: Yes, you're right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And if you're wrong, everybody switches off and you know you're wrong!

Daphne Shadwell: Yes, yes.

John P Hamilton That's right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: If, on the other hand, people turn on, you hope that you were somewhere near...

Daphne Shadwell: Getting it right!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Getting it right! I always remember reading in the paper about a show that was done on television and they said it had a "very poor rating" - there was only thirteen million who watched it, or something. And then it said, "At the same time, it should be remembered that - " (I think it was the thing that had been done at the Haymarket, and was then done as a television show) " - if this play, in order to accommodate these people, it would have to play at the Haymarket for twenty four years, to full houses, including the matinees!"

[Laughter]

Joan Kemp-Welch: And you suddenly then realised, and you can't do because who are you doing it for? Are you doing it for somebody in Wapping, or are you doing it for somebody who is living in a castle, or who do you do it for?

John P Hamilton Absolutely.

Joan Kemp-Welch: So, I think you have to do it for yourself, really.

Roy Fowler: OK, well now, we seem, in large measure, to have done with theatre and with - as of that time - and your career as an actress. Someone came to you and said, "Commercial television is coming up." Had you done any BBC television as an actress, or as a director?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well as an actress, as I say, the one time I told you, at the Alexandria Palace when the cameras didn't move and they had two eyes and [chuckles] you had to move up to the camera. Your face was painted bright yellow, that's all I remember about it.

Roy Fowler: That was pre-war, I guess, wasn't it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh I'm sure it was pre-war...

Roy Fowler: Yes...

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...years before pre-war. In fact I'll tell you when it was, it was...

John P Hamilton 1937 onwards.

Joan Kemp-Welch: 1936.

Roy Fowler: Right. Very early days.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because it was when I was - because, my first husband and I got married in 1936.

Roy Fowler: Do you recall what it was that you did? Was it a play or some kind of snippet?

Joan Kemp-Welch: It was a play about - it was a play, which had hospital nurses in it, because I was a hospital nurse, that's all I remember.

[Laughter]

John P Hamilton With a yellow face!

Roy Fowler: Was it - I wonder - was it the experimental Baird system? Which is why you had to move to it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I think it was. I suppose it was.

John P Hamilton Yes it was, yes, because they didn't get any Emitrons 'till '37.

Roy Fowler: Well, around '36...

Joan Kemp-Welch: I got a medal from the Wilkie Baird!

Roy Fowler: ...they were on the air side by side alternately, weren't they?

John P Hamilton Oh...yes.

Roy Fowler: Experimentally...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, you got a medal - I got a medal from the Wilkie Baird people - I don't know why...

Roy Fowler: Not Wilkie Baird, [chuckles] John Logie Baird!

John P Hamilton Logie Baird.

Roy Fowler: Wilkie Baird was someone else, yet again!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh...

Daphne Shadwell: Wilkie Baird was the Scottish comedian...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, I don't know, I don't know.

[Laughter]

Joan Kemp-Welch: I've got it at home somewhere, if I opened and looked at it. It said, "For services" or something...

Daphne Shadwell: "to the new industry..."

Joan Kemp-Welch: I got one award for services...[indecipherable].

Roy Fowler: For services rendered, we're back to the casting couch again!

Daphne Shadwell: [Laughing]. The casting couch, yes!

Joan Kemp-Welch: It's the casting couch medal! Having the strength to refuse the casting couch!

Roy Fowler: Right, we're getting ribald and facetious. So, just that one experience of television, and no clearer, obviously - well, I say obviously - but it would seem to me to be the Baird system which, for a while, ran alternately with the EMI electronic system. But the Baird system was fixed, it was an intermediate film process.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, Barry K. Barnes was in it, I remember.

John P Hamilton Another Hull man.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I wonder if it could have been The Ascent of F6 again? The Auden and Isherwood.

Roy Fowler: Well, was not that lot a little later? I don't know. I mean I'd have to look it up.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't know.

Roy Fowler: I would have thought that was very late thirties, having to do with the Spanish War, but anyway, we won't speculate on that, because we don't know. How did the approach from Rediffusion come about?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Do you know, I don't know. Except that I think when - John would know more about the working of this than I would. You see, when they started commercial television, they had nobody. There were only the BBC people who knew anything about television, nobody else whatsoever. And therefore, it was the - I was going to say rebels - from the BBC who wanted a freer approach to television. I think this was it, wasn't it?

John P Hamilton Yes, Joan.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because everything was very cast iron and restricted. And they wanted this approach to television, and they - in order to get them, they had these few experts, of which John was one, [David Bwoso?] was another, wasn't he? [Michael Westmore] was another and [Stephen McCormack].

John P Hamilton Yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And they, in six weeks, they advertised that they were going to start the commercial television, and they advertised for anybody who was interested to become cameramen or sound men or floor managers, or whatever it was, to apply.

Roy Fowler: So you responded to an ad, did you?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No!

Roy Fowler: No?

Joan Kemp-Welch: They then went round, inviting people who were directors, to ask them if they would come. Now, I had two shows on, which were very successful one was Desire under The Elms at The Embassy and the other was ['Weeklo'?] at The Watergate which was a very big success. And they came to me and said, "Would you like to train as a television director?" And so I said, "Yes" immediately - anything for something new! And we all trained together, didn't we John?

John P Hamilton Yes, at the Viking Studios in St Mary Abbots.

Joan Kemp-Welch: That's right...

Roy Fowler: Did you have a set?

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and we had people of all sorts, didn't we? We had people who were floor painters, and house painters who wanted to be cameramen, and all these people - i was fascinating, from different jobs. We all trained together and then had sort of, specialised classes

according to what we were going to be, do you know? But we had a general training together, didn't we?

John P Hamilton Yes, yes, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: That was, perhaps, the reason why Rediffusion was so closely knit, that we'd all started from nothing in television, do you know? And we had six weeks, did we have? Three months?

John P Hamilton Well, it was about eight and a half weeks altogether, to the deadline of September 22nd...

Joan Kemp-Welch: That was right...

John P Hamilton From the course opening, it was a hell of a push.

Joan Kemp-Welch: That was right. And I remember so clearly that big meeting at Wembley, with Lloyd getting up on those blue steps...

John P Hamilton Yeah...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because I worshipped Lloyd.

John P Hamilton Studio one...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Getting up on those blue steps and saying, "It doesn't matter, the wires may be out of the walls, but we shall open". And we did!

Roy Fowler: Let's identify Lloyd.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Hmm?

Roy Fowler: Let's identify Lloyd.

John P Hamilton Lloyd Williams.

Roy Fowler: Lloyd Williams?

John P Hamilton Lloyd Williams, the first director of production...

Roy Fowler: For the tape...

John P Hamilton And the man without whom it wouldn't have happened.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And he was the person, to my mind, who created commercial television, without any doubt.

Roy Fowler: Out of curiosity, did you come an absolute virgin to this? Did you have a set and had you watched BBC, or were you totally a neophyte, where television was concerned?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh no, I think we had television...

Roy Fowler: You had a set? Right.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, oh I'm sure we had television.

Roy Fowler: Right. Well, fine! Let's then hear from you, and I won't interrupt, your memories of training and your first assignments, and getting on the air.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, it's very nice of you to be bothered, it really is.

Roy Fowler: [In Cockney accent]: No bother, Lady, no bother!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, I don't know, you're a lovely sympathetic person to talk to.

Roy Fowler: pish-tash!?

John P Hamilton This is the start, this is what it's all about...

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Chuckles]. Well, it's a help to see something like that, I'll be able to - when I started, to look out these things. I just gave up because I couldn't, anything that happened, you know, in the far past, I had lots of vivid memories of, but certainly no coherent...

Roy Fowler: No record?

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...record, so...

Roy Fowler: Well, then, how did the training period go, did you take to it like a duck to water?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, well, you know, directing on television is not that different from directing in the theatre, is it? You know, I mean rehearsals are much the same. It's a different technical background, the lighting is different and the fact that the camera is - the movements of the camera are as important really as the movements of the artists, aren't they? And you have got to weld them together, so it becomes a more - it becomes an interesting problem, didn't you find that, John?

John P Hamilton I did, indeed, yes. I think we all did.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, it becomes - I must say, it used to be very hard work. I reckoned it took, Peter and I thought seventy-six or eighty hours to plan a programme.

Roy Fowler: Yes. I'm curious how in that training period, I mean, obviously, you had a great deal to build on - what was new to you? What was fresh, what was exciting to you suddenly

about television? I mean television, in those days, is very rudimentary. If you talk - your interest, you say, on the stage was, to a very large extent, in lighting, and television lighting in those days was, I mean, quiz show stuff, wasn't it? It was just blasting everything on.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well yes, but you see, basically, lighting...

Daphne Shadwell: No...it was...

John P Hamilton It was fairly sophisticated.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh yes, I would say it was very sophisticated.

Roy Fowler: Would you?

Joan Kemp-Welch: In fact, I don't think...

John P Hamilton Well largely because Rediffusion had had the opportunity to convert film studios to television purposes. They'd had enough time, they'd had since Christmas Eve of the year before, 1954...

Daphne Shadwell: Yes.

John P Hamilton ...to convert Wembley studios, they had virtually nine months. And the expertise came in people like [Bob Gray]...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes!

John P Hamilton ...from BBC television!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Who, I must say, was the best lighting man that there has ever been! Nobody's ever come up to him.

John P Hamilton [Chuckles] Yes, who knew what he was doing and, therefore - and with advanced, very up to date cameras...

Joan Kemp-Welch: And then we had designers like [Michael Yates] who was absolutely superb.

John P Hamilton See, when the training courses over and the operations started, everybody had the best of everything.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

John P Hamilton They certainly had the best of sound equipment, they spent a fortune on microphones and things which had never been used before, anywhere in the world, except in Germany, and so on.

Roy Fowler: Well then, should I think that this is no great watershed in your career, but just a continuation, a new departure...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well it was a watershed in the fact that I then - you know - when I became a television director. I mean, say for instance, for the first six months, I was up at six o'clock every morning and down at the studios at eight, and I did two or three programmes a day and then did all the business side of it.

Roy Fowler: But in terms of the technique, or the expertise, or the craft, or whatever, it's just a logical extension of what you had done before? Would that be fair or not?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I think I had an enormous advantage, over the fact that I had a knowledge, a really very good knowledge of lighting. I was absolutely, my knowledge was woefully lacking in sound and I absolutely depended on sound people. I learnt a lot but I still would be - on sound. Actors presented no problem, it was merely an extension of what I'd done with actors. So, I think I was lucky in the fact of - again, as far as scenery was concerned, you see, because I had so often designed scenery in the theatre, moved it myself, built sets myself, you know, handled them. I was then in a position to know what people on the floor could and couldn't do. This was an enormous help, because I never asked them to do something that was impossible or something I myself couldn't do. And if they said they couldn't do it, I would very often go down and show them how to, and that's - you know. In the same way, in the theatre, as a woman director, I was jolly hated, because they hated having women in the theatre, and they used to play tricks on you. For instance, if you asked for floats, if you said that, "I want more floats", they wouldn't move them and they would say, "Is that better?" Because, if you look at lights, they get brighter anyway, so you can't tell that they've taken out one, so they used to test you like that, you see. And then if you would say, "I want them jumped, please!" If they jump them, you can tell them, and so they couldn't, you know, you've caught them out! Or, I knew all the different colours by the numbers and the names, so that if I said I wanted a fifty-one, and they put in a fifty-three, I would know it wasn't a fifty-one. I think you had to know your job.

Roy Fowler: But who is 'they', the stagehands?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, stagehands and...

Roy Fowler: Or the electricians?

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...electricians.

John P Hamilton Electricians, yeah.

Joan Kemp-Welch: But the second they...

Roy Fowler: But these, what was the problem for them? Was it the old 'macho bit'?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I suppose it was...

John P Hamilton Well, yes, they resented women.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...it was amazing how, the second they knew that you knew the job, there was no problem at all.

Roy Fowler: The fact is, they were pig ignorant sons of bitches, is it not?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't know...

Roy Fowler: They were stupid and uneducated and really rather vicious people, by and large?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't think it was being uneducated...

John P Hamilton Not entirely, no.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't think it was being uneducated...

John P Hamilton Bloody-minded.

Roy Fowler: Well, same thing...

John P Hamilton 'Till they found you out.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I found the difficulty really was, not quite knowing how to deal with a woman, I think that is the thing. And I will tell you a very quick story. And that is, that when I was working at the Alhambra, when I went to do the Wilson-Barrett Company at the Alhambra which we took over, and it was the professional staff that did all the big pantomimes and everything like that. And there was a man called [Jimmy Cullum] who was the manager of the theatre, you know, in charge of all the staff and the lighting and everything. And he had said that he would never work with a woman, he would never work with a woman. And I always remember my first time when we set up, (and you set up after the show that finished on a Saturday night). And everybody had a half hour break and then you worked through until four o'clock the next morning, so everybody was pretty tired, as you could imagine. And the first Saturday I did it, Jimmy, obviously, was going to have no 'truck' with me at all and [chuckling] he used every single swear word out of the book that he could use. It was the "bloody so-and so" and the "pissing something else" and "let down your fucking lines" and all this went on, you see, again and again! And "where are the sodding so and so's?" Obviously aimed at me, do you see? And I waited until about three o'clock in the morning and I thought now, I've got to cope with this somehow, because it can't go on forever. So I went down in the stalls and I said, "Mr [Cullum]?" He came and said, "What the bloody hell do you want?" And I said, "I'm jolly tired of you, fuck off, will you!" And he was my friend for life! [Laughs]. And after that, Jimmy was such a good friend to me, I was so sad when he died. And you know, in Glasgow, no women are allowed into the pubs, and when the stage staff used to go and have a drink, Jimmy would take me, put me on a coat, hide me behind a pillar, where the barman couldn't see me, and pass me drinks! Dear Jimmy! But I mean, it was that sort of 'aggro' that you had to fight, a bit.

Roy Fowler: Hmm. And that was different when you came into television, do you think, or not?

Joan Kemp-Welch: You were still a curiosity, weren't you?

John P Hamilton Yes, although, oddly enough, in Rediffusion we had a surprising number of women directors.

Joan Kemp-Welch: We had - well no, we had [Titania Levum], Daphne...

John P Hamilton Yes...[Pru Nesbitt...]

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and myself, [Pru Nesbitt]...

John P Hamilton Um... [Bimbi] after a very short time...[Bimbi Harris].

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

John P Hamilton Hazel Wilkinson?

Joan Kemp-Welch: They were all later, weren't they?

John P Hamilton [Helen Brown], well within the first year.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, when we actually started.

John P Hamilton An amazing number of women.

Roy Fowler: And they were all paid the same, were they?

John P Hamilton Oh yes, yeah.

Roy Fowler: Ah hmm.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, it was - and now, of course, television has got as many women as men.

John P Hamilton Oh yes, yes. A monstrous regiment, you see it on credits all the time. Some say...

Joan Kemp-Welch: But I must say, particularly in America when I was working there, people used to ask me out and say, "What's it like to be a woman in a man's world?" expecting you to be terribly... I never knew what women's lib was. I asked Peter one day and said, "What is women's lib?" honestly. He said, "Are you mad?" [Chuckling] I hadn't a clue as to what it was all about. But I have never found beyond the, as I say, the little tricks to see what I was like, I have never had any problem at all. And I mean, if it did happen, like the night with [Jimmy Cullen], it was quickly downed and I had so many good friends. And I was very touched, because I happened to be in Aberdeen two years ago, I had gone up - nothing to do with the theatre at all - but I was up

in Aberdeen, and I was going to go to the theatre, you know, had rung up to say I was coming into the theatre. And the man who had been the electrician at the theatre when I was there, somebody rang him up and told him I was coming to the theatre, and he travelled half a day to come to the theatre to see me. And, you know, that was a touching relationship with somebody who worked... And they have been, haven't they? All along, when we have reunions it's the stagehands that remember you.

Roy Fowler: OK. Are there any memories at all of the training period that you feel worth retelling?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Of the ?

Roy Fowler: Of the training period, your indoctrination at Viking Studio?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, I think we were so...

John P Hamilton You were beginning to be sorted into drama, light ent. and so on, although you started in women's programmes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, we had...

John P Hamilton And, in fact, did a lot of light entertainment in the first year?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes indeed. I had a lot of lectures from [Michael Westmore]...

John P Hamilton Yes?

Joan Kemp-Welch: And [Steven McCormack]. It's so sad about them.

Roy Fowler: Well, how so sad? The fact that they never went on to any...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well it's...

John P Hamilton No. They... [indecipherable].

Joan Kemp-Welch: I always think it's a very cruel thing, you see, that these pioneers, who are always people with imagination and enthusiasm, that are going to build great things, they nearly all are taken over by the business. And we saw this wonderful man [Lloyd Williams] who - his energy and imagination founded commercial television, and he ended - was eventually pushed out - and he ended, mending radio sets somewhere, didn't he?

John P Hamilton Yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Another man, [Steven McCormack], was given virtually nothing to do and was pushed out and pushed out, and he slightly went off his nut, didn't he?

John P Hamilton Yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Michael Westmore] who was another one, and he did go off his nut.

John P Hamilton Yes, he was confined.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And Cecil McGivern, who I worked with, who came from the BBC, didn't he?

John P Hamilton Yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And the firm wanted to get rid of him and so Granada gave him an office and three secretaries and no work to do for a year, and he committed suicide. These are tragedies that occurred and, for the most part, for the really imaginative people, weren't they?

John P Hamilton Yes, they were.

Joan Kemp-Welch: I mean, Cyril Bennett throws himself out of a window. It's a very stressful life, I think. Yes, I know it was probably because of his wife, but it is the stress that you're living under as well, isn't it? And it's terribly stressful, because you're never - you work morning, noon and night, don't you?

John P Hamilton We certainly did in the early days.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, really...

John P Hamilton You certainly did, just to look at your book of credits there - doing at least four or five shows a day - they're all, perhaps, only ten minutes or whatever, but they all have to be planned, they were all entirely different, and they were all live! That's the stressful bit.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, and the big shows you worked. As I said, Peter and I used to work seventy hours, eighty hours, and very often I couldn't work late at night, but I used to go to bed and get up at three in the morning and work straight through the next day. And Peter used to, very often, used to work until four in the morning, and we used to pass ourselves on the stairs at night! So you really are working that hard, you know, and it's quite a lot of hard work, isn't it?

Roy Fowler: Well let's try and get a sense of time. You've done your training period and nothing particularly strikes you from those six or eight weeks at Viking, right?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well yes, nothing particularly excited me because it was all exciting.

Roy Fowler: Good, OK. And, now what? The station is about to go on the air. What is your first assignment?

Joan Kemp-Welch: The very first programme! How to make a frame of flowers.

Roy Fowler: You took the station on the air, did you?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I took the first one on the first...

John P Hamilton Well, the first one on the first full day.

Joan Kemp-Welch: The first one on the first full day. There was the big party the night before.

Roy Fowler: The Blast , right, OK, that John screwed up, as I remember!

John P Hamilton No I didn't at all, no, no, no. Nothing to do with me!

Joan Kemp-Welch: You did, you were on the 'party']one, weren't you, doing the sound?

John P Hamilton No, no, no, [David Law] did sound on the Mayfair show. I didn't, I wasn't operational, I ran between the Guildhall where Michael Roberts did sound, to the Guildhall where David did sound. In between came various ATV bits in Wood Green, like the variety show that night. But I was around. There was a terrible thunderstorm. But the first programme that went out live the following day...

Roy Fowler: Friday September 3rd, was that 1955?

John P Hamilton The 23rd of September '55...yes.

Roy Fowler: September 23, 1955.

Joan Kemp-Welch: 'How to make a frame of flowers' [David Wattice] stood behind me, and I couldn't remember what it was when I had to say, "Fade camera one", and he said it for me!

Roy Fowler: This extract is from TV Times, I think I ought to read this, so that's it's on the record. It says, "eleven" which was what, a.m? Eleven a.m.?

John P Hamilton Eleven a.m., yeah, yeah.

Roy Fowler: I didn't know the station went on the air that early.

John P Hamilton The station went on the air - yes, yes, for the first few days.

Joan Kemp-Welch: We had a big birthday party at my mother's afterwards.

Roy Fowler: It says, " Hands about the House the programme giving advice on how to do practical tasks, the sort [laughs] usually left to husbands! Such as wallpapering, simple repairs, etc. today [Elsa Court] shows how to make..."

John P Hamilton One of these DIY programmes, you see! They pioneered it.

Roy Fowler: "Today [Elsa Court] shows how to make a frame for flowers." Right, so - what? - from here on, you are doing [stip] shows, are you? Short programmes...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: My mother had no idea...

John P Hamilton Women's programmes that covered everything, really.

Roy Fowler: Yes, right, household hints, things like that?

John P Hamilton Yes.

Roy Fowler: Well, we won't go through the entire list of TV Times obviously, but...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, East Lynne was fun doing...

John P Hamilton That was a Peter Moffat show, that.

Roy Fowler: When did you segue into drama?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Um, I did musicals for ages.

John P Hamilton It's quite a long light entertainment story.

Roy Fowler: Oh really? OK well...

John P Hamilton ...including Joan's first award for light entertainment.

Roy Fowler: OK, let's do that. Tell us how it all developed, you know, the interesting points of development, rather than the minutia of individual and easily forgotten programmes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: It's all much, Street Car Called Desire , that was - these are all plays [looking through book].

John P Hamilton Was this your first one, Joan? Television Playhouse, The Blood is Strong , in May of the second year?

[End of Tape 3, Side 5] [Tape 3, Side 6]

Roy Fowler: You were saying that one thing leads to another?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes it does, you see, one thing in one's life leads to another. And, I was very upset at doing women's programmes, because I thought, you know, I'd fought against - I'd fought to be accepted in the theatre and now I'm back again, you know, in women's programmes. But I was given a lot of shocking programmes to do, as well as lots of others, which are in that book. And I suddenly realised, in doing programmes for Sainsbury's and different things, how very beautiful vegetables and flowers looked in close-up. I became fascinated with this and loved

doing the programmes, because of showing this, they made such lovely patterns and looked so beautiful on the screen. And after that, it so happened, although I'm really jumping, there was a redundancy...

John P Hamilton In 1956, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and I was told that - all the women were given notice. That I was - in order to work my notice, until I got another job - they said I could work in, looking after people's problems, whatever it was that I did.

John P Hamilton I'd forgotten that, yes. You became Auntie Joan, didn't you? Yes, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And...[laughs]...yes, became Auntie Joan. And this, again, brought a thing, because all the people that I helped were my slaves for the rest of my time in Rediffusion! They couldn't wait to help me in return. And a director had done a pop programme, of pop records, and it hadn't been successful because it was mostly - people in those days mimed to their records - and as I was doing nothing, they said, "There are another six to do, would you like to do them?" And I said, "What do you want me to do?" And they said, "Couldn't care less, because the programmes coming off." So I thought, "Lovely!" And got some people I knew who had been chorus people in the business, I got six of them and asked them to come and do a programme and thought, "Oh, let's dance the records." And I got them as dancers, and because we had no scenery, couldn't afford any scenery, I thought, "Oh well, I'll use big close-ups of flowers and onions and let them dance against that." And then I thought it would be fun to play a few tricks. And these six at the end of the year, were big, big stars, they packed the Albert Hall from floor to ceiling! And the programme became famous, didn't it John?

John P Hamilton It did, it did!

Joan Kemp-Welch: And when it came off at the end of six weeks, all the newspapers wrote and said, "Why take off one of the best programmes?" We didn't even know anybody had watched it! So we were doing it for our own fun. And because we couldn't afford a rehearsal room, we had to rehearse in an office, which wasn't any bigger than this. So, because we hadn't got any room sideways, we used to go up, so everybody did leaps and jumps, things like that. And because I hadn't got any width, I decided that I would put three cameras on it at the same time and have one doing a mid shot, one a close-up and one a long shot of the same thing. Put all three cameras output together, so that it looked as though there were, what? Three threes are nine - nine couples dancing instead of three! And the racks, of course, loved doing this, and I had wonderful sound people who helped me edit the records down to one minute twenty...

Roy Fowler: What was the name of the...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: And so we played all sorts of tricks!

John P Hamilton It was the famous, "Cool for Cats!"

Roy Fowler: "Cool for Cats" right.

John P Hamilton The forerunner of [indecipherable].

Joan Kemp-Welch: And it only became famous because of all the tricks that the - and the racks were wonderful. You know they put up sometimes five outputs in at the same time for me! [Chuckles]. And it was really fun, you know, we would have somebody in the hand and people dancing on the hand and people diving into fishponds and - which we did by - you know, I realised that size is completely comparative on a television set. So that you can have a big close-up of a stamp, which will fill the screen, and then you can put people in front of it! And with the designers, they discovered that if you had something white and you put a person in it, the person goes behind the white and in front of the black lines. So you could have a design painted in white, black and grey and you could dance people in it and they looked as if they were dancing in a three dimensional thing, if you see what I mean? And then, also, that you could tip people upside down, so you could have somebody standing (like this) and you could put the camera upside down and you could make them jump. And you could have another camera on a fish-tank and the camera who was doing the man, he just had to stand still, the camera just moved him, the camera moved and it looked as if he was gliding through the fish-tank. So we had such fun playing all these tricks!

John P Hamilton Yes, we could do a hell of a lot with black and white cameras, some things you can't do with colour cameras. Like inverting the picture...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

John P Hamilton ...you can't invert with a colour camera. The reverse lines you can, but you can't invert them.

Joan Kemp-Welch: No. So we had the colour on the one and inverted the black and white on t'other.

John P Hamilton But those were days when "Cats" was twice weekly, Joan, wasn't it? Twice weekly live? You did it on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes...yes.

John P Hamilton At sixteen minutes past seven, a fifteen minute - a twelve minute slot?

Joan Kemp-Welch: That's right. And then there was the time, I remember, when Lloyd put another programme in as well.

John P Hamilton Yeah...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Somebody talks about it there - we had to do the one programme and then switch within three minutes and turn onto "Cool for Cats" with all the tricks! But the cast were wonderful, that I had and they really became, they really became famous.

John P Hamilton And it made "Cats"

Joan Kemp-Welch: Dougie Squires is now one of the biggest producers of musicals in Europe.

John P Hamilton Indeed. And it made Kent of course, in vision]didn't it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, yes.

John P Hamilton He was a sports commentator, but that programme you put him into and that put his face on the screen.

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Roy Allen] became a great dancer in Europe.

John P Hamilton Indeed. And little Mavis...and [Barbara Ferris]...

Joan Kemp-Welch: I don't know what happened to Mavis, because she married somebody who was a very successful writer, didn't she?

John P Hamilton Yes, I think she did, yes. And [Malcolm...Malcolm Clare]...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

John P Hamilton And Roy...[Roy Hullen ?].

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, Roy was one of the first six, he was one of the first six.

John P Hamilton And they were both coloured as well, I mean Mavis was South African coloured and that was unusual.

Roy Fowler: Yes, yes.

John P Hamilton That was unusual on television.

Roy Fowler: Very adventurous.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I remember the great outcry of letters, because of Roy being black, dancing with a white girl.

Roy Fowler: Protesting? They protested, did they?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, oh indeed. And I did a play on television which, again, was O'Neill's All God's Chillun . Which [Pat Sands] played the girl in and a Jamaican actor - can't remember what his name was - Record...?

John P Hamilton Record, Roy Record - Lloyd Record!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Lloyd Record.

John P Hamilton Lloyd Record, yes, he was a good actor, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: He was the black actor. And I remember I got terrible letters. I remember one postcard, which said, "Nigger lovers like you should be whipped out of the country!" Over doing the Eugene O'Neill play.

Roy Fowler: Back to Louisiana! Right...

Joan Kemp-Welch: They take life so seriously don't they, people who watch television?

John P Hamilton You'd also done, Joan, reminding you, a very long run of outside broadcasts from Hammersmith Palais, with the [Lou Crader] orchestra?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes...the [Lou Crader]...

John P Hamilton "Palais Party" which incorporated the "find the singer contest" didn't it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yep.

John P Hamilton And all sorts of jolly things like that - an in-built quiz within a musical show, which was a great novelty.

Roy Fowler: Was there anything particularly special about those, innovative or fighting problems?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, um...

John P Hamilton [laughing] It was only a little programme!

Joan Kemp-Welch: I know it sounds, I know it sounds - yes, he used to time everything with his watch...

John P Hamilton He'd get it wrong, usually.

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Laughing]. And he got married and timed it with his watch! I always remembered being asked to the wedding and watching him timing it with a watch! But the - I know this sounds stupid to say so, but really and truly I haven't had any big problems in my life. I've taken a lot of wrong turnings, when looking back with hindsight, it could have been better if I'd done something else. But those were my mistakes. But everybody else, I've really had such help and co-operation. Which isn't said to impress at all, it just is that I have been terribly lucky, with people like John, who helped me, you see, because I knew nothing about sound at all, nothing. I don't to this day.

Roy Fowler: Well let's try and trace development...

John P Hamilton The drama came in the second year.

Roy Fowler: Yes I mean, it's the innovation and the challenges, that I think we should concentrate on. I mean, it would seem to me that it was self evident, given your theatrical background, that you should have been thrown into drama at the very beginning? But, are you...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, as I say, that's why I was disappointed.

Roy Fowler: Yes. I mean what was their theory? When I say 'they', the management, or whoever it was?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because I was a woman.

Roy Fowler: It was that?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes! Yes, yes.

Roy Fowler: Rather than this was not regarded, still as a training period?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes.

John P Hamilton Well, you were very, very - Joan, don't forget you won your first award in this period. I mean you were very, very good at light entertainment, which is why, I think, probably the management, or certainly Lloyd wanted to keep you with it.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, um. No...

John P Hamilton So you did only the one play in May of '56...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes that's right, I did it and hated doing it, it was one of the few things I hated doing. I did it with - I'm trying to think - the man who afterwards came out when I did ['Laudis?']...[Norman Marshall].

John P Hamilton [Normal Marshall] yes, who was then Head of Drama, who was the first Head of Drama?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, and I hated the play and just wiped it out of my memory.

John P Hamilton John Laurie, Renee Houston, it was a Scottish play, obviously, yeah?

Joan Kemp-Welch: But I think...

John P Hamilton [David McCallan].

Roy Fowler: Oh, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: But I think I was blessed by God with probably an outsize slice of imagination and a very much vision imagination. I've always been able to picture things and I

think I've always been filled with, sort of, new ideas and new pictures. That comes very easily to me and, therefore, that was all a help in television because there were a lot of things that I did for the first time. For instance, the first time for a play that cameras in the studio were ever taken outside. I spent about a month imploring the powers that be to let me try it, because I thought it would be so exciting to do the exteriors with television cameras, and did the first one.

Roy Fowler: What was that?

Joan Kemp-Welch: It poured with rain all day!

John P Hamilton 'Somersault'?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, that was God and Tony Lockwood .]

John P Hamilton Ah right, yes.]

Joan Kemp-Welch: The first ever time, and they said that you must do it and finish at the right time, no matter what. And I said, "It doesn't matter what happens, I'll do it!" And we went out and I woke up in the middle of the night and it was pouring with rain! And it poured! And when I got down onto the site at eight o'clock, it was in Rickmansworth, in a farm, by the side of a canal. All the cameras were there, holding cameras, holding umbrellas over their cameras, and the lighting person was trying to light it up, to make it not look so dark, and we did it and we finished it. Then it became commonplace, didn't it? This was before - not filming - we took the actual studio cameras out.

Roy Fowler: Hmm. And it was still live? Because, after all, tape was now available, but er...

John P Hamilton Oh no, no...not yet.

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, no.

Roy Fowler: Are you sure?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, this was recorded. You had tele-recording.

John P Hamilton You had tele-recording.

Roy Fowler: What year was this?

John P Hamilton '58.

Roy Fowler: Well I mean, there were tape machines, they were the...

John P Hamilton Not in Rediffusion there weren't!

Roy Fowler: How extraordinary!

John P Hamilton No, we didn't get videotape until 1959, the year I started directing.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, we were behind, weren't we?

Roy Fowler: Well, they've existed since...

John P Hamilton As Joan said earlier, we weren't allowed to edit, so you did a show as live and the fact that it was taped was incidental.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Because I always remember with Gala when we had all those hilarious mistakes, when we did Gala with Callas and Iturbi and Gobbi and...

John P Hamilton Oh, right, yes, yes...

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and Markova, and all the things that went wrong - that I spent hours going backwards and forwards on those tapes trying to, sort of, put in something else to cover a mistake.

Roy Fowler: I do think we should try to establish some kind of order, if it's possible, now. Again, I'm talking in terms of development rather than chronology. So, you've been doing these 'strip' shows like Cool for Cats and stuff, and they were a great success, and then there were light entertainment shows, and John says you got an award instantly for that. What is your motivation now, what is guiding you here? Is it just a job? Is it doing a show as it comes along, or do you have somewhat - a more defined approach to things? Are you leading up to anything, is what I'm asking?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, I really haven't. I think I have - if I have been given a job I think I've just done it, I've gone ahead and done it. I've thought about it and I've imagined it and I've done it. There have been certain things, which I have wanted to do and have gone to the management and said, "I'd love to do this, would you consider doing this?" And nearly always I have been lucky and they have said, "Yes, do go ahead and try and do it." But I have never had a peak I was working toward, if that's what you mean.

Roy Fowler: I see. OK, well then, we're in this developmental period of Rediffusion and commercial television in this country. There is an admixture, is there not, of on the one hand, keeping the station going, making some money, but also having, not pretensions, but they do have to set their sights reasonably high on occasions to satisfy the IBA as it then was? Or the ITA?

Joan Kemp-Welch: I think, with Rediffusion the standard was tremendously high.

John P Hamilton Absolutely.

Joan Kemp-Welch: All the time, it really was all the time. Looking through the...

John P Hamilton In parallel with this, I mean... 'This Week' started almost at the beginning of time, so I mean, from the feature point of view, there was that kind of programme, with Peter Hunt and so on, in charge. Cyril Bennett in the features department. In drama there was some very, very big stuff. Joan wasn't doing it, then, but [Cyril Coke] and [Cyril Butcher] and people like that were, and there were some enormously big plays done.

Roy Fowler: Was it a...?

John P Hamilton And don't forget we were also sustaining Granada as well, because we were the first weekday company in, we were the only one. There was ATV at the weekends and ABC partially in Birmingham and the north, yeah? In Didsbury, in Manchester, then in the weekends in the north. But until Granada came in, in 1958, we were sustaining the entire network.

Roy Fowler: Right. So are you emulating the BBC or is...?

John P Hamilton We were better than, with fewer people.

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, we were doing - you see, really and truly, if you [pause] looking down at the plays, [pause] they are, none of them, [pause] all the artists playing... I remember, for instance, 1962, we did Electra in Greek, we did The Lover - Pinter's 'The Lover' - Midsummer Night's Dream, The Three Sisters, Princess Alexandra's Wedding, Design for Living, Present Laughter, Blithe Spirit, The Vortex, a pantomime - Richard Whittington Esquire, Les Malentendu by Camus. Um... A View from the Bridge, A Pain in the Neck, A Cold Heart, Lady Windermere's Fan. So you see, they're all pretty solid...

Roy Fowler: Yes. How do we get to that period? Now, we're still here...the stations barely on the air, one year or two years. I'm curious how you got into drama? We haven't established that.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well it is, reading down to you actually what happened now, quickly. '55 - this is '55 to '57, after the first programme for commercial television, I did sixty-six magazine programmes, for women, I did eight school programmes and I did ten outside broadcasts. Then in '58 - '57, as well as that, I did 'Cool for Cats' and a hundred editions. Then in '58 I went on with 'Cool for Cats' doing another ninety-six editions. Then I did a musical with Dickie Valentine, a big musical series...

John in background: Free and Easy .

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...of which there were eight editions. That's the Free and Easy series, which I had all the big pop stars in. Then I did a very big Christmas Eve show, which was an hour and a half show. Then I did a sort of drama with music in it, called Rush Hour which was stories - you saw people in a train and then you lunged into a couple and you did a story about them. And I did twenty- six editions of that. Then I did the 1959 Show, which was a very big musical, wasn't it?

John P Hamilton With me! In the [???] studio.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes. And that was three editions of the 1959 Show' wasn't it? Which brought Jaques Brel over to England.

John P Hamilton Yeah. Tommy Steele and Phil Anchor and - oh, everybody worth mentioning.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And then in '59 we did Summer Song which was a multiple live broadcast, coming from all parts of the country, linked into the studio and out again. I had camera units in Scotland, well I mean - all the different editions for different ones.

John P Hamilton Joan, London, Lancashire, in the New Forest, Hampshire...

Joan Kemp-Welch: At the seaside at Anglia, on a boat on the Thames and somewhere else. And we did this live, this came live, no matter what the weather.

John P Hamilton It was hell, I tell you!

Joan Kemp-Welch: And that was quite exciting, wasn't it?

John P Hamilton The technical planning was fantastic on that, wonderful!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, it really was. We went from doing a programme on the Tyne in Newcastle and then, as somebody threw a tin can into the river, we cut into the studio, where somebody dropped a jam jar in a tub of water, so that the ripples in the Tyne were matched by the close-up of the ripples in the tub, in the studio. And while that was - the ripples were the thing - with a stick on the outside which couldn't be seen, we roughed it up and cut down to Anglia, where two dancers rushed out of the sea and started to dance on the sand. And this was live, and so we cued them from the studio into the Anglia, so that it was everybody having to be on the spot. And then, after the Anglia one - I'm trying to think of where we went. We went to a boat on the Thames, where everybody was singing and dancing and coming down the Thames, and it poured with rain and all the company put up umbrellas and were very funny, very funny over that.

John P Hamilton Well planned.

Joan Kemp-Welch: We did about five things a time - we did about four of these. Then I did Gala which had Iturbi, Markova, Gobbi, the Royal Philharmonic, Fistoulari, Malcolm Sargent, and Maria Callas on.

John P Hamilton Not a bad little cast?

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Laughs] No! That was one which had a lot of disasters on it!

Roy Fowler: Such as? You mean, just getting it on, just staging it?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Oh, the disasters were... Number one: Fistoulari, we started off with Ravel's Bolero with a famous Russian dancer, who had come over from Russia, who was dancing. And

Fistoulari was conducting the Philharmonic, and he had been asked that at the end of the number - we had a live audience - he was not to leave the rostrum while the audience applauded. Because after they had finished applauding on a cue, Iturbi was going to come down and take his place at the grand piano. Fistoulari was to get up and greet him and they were to bow to the camera and then Iturbi was to go to the piano and Fistoulari was to go back, and he was to go to conduct, a Liszt and then a Chopin. So Fistoulari, they finished to great applause, with the Russian dancer, Fistoulari leaves the rostrum. So, we press the bell, "Bring the bugger back, bring him back!" So eventually Fistoulari came back, he'd been so accustomed to leaving on applause, you see, that he didn't stay. He came back with Iturbi, they both came back, Iturbi slightly flustered, and Iturbi wouldn't rehearse because he said he "Never rehearsed for anything." So, they came back together. They'd been told which camera to take their bow on, but they bowed to the other one, so I got a great shot of their bottoms, and then hastily cut to that camera, whereupon they turned round and bowed to the other camera and I got their bottoms again! Then they sat down and Fistoulari went (like that) to Iturbi and Iturbi went (like that) to Fistoulari, so he counted up and one started with the Chopin and the other started with the Liszt! And then they bowed to each other again and made little noises, and they then actually got the number right but then the camera got stuck going halfway round the piano! Otherwise, that went off all right! Then, we had a compere who was announcing to the audience who the people were and he said "Gaubi" one minute and "Gobby" the next, which didn't go down too well! And the dear man had said that he wanted to - for his aria, he was doing an aria from Otello wasn't it? I've forgotten what it was. Anyway, he wanted to come on, he wanted to wear a cloak and he wanted to be first seen like that, and then he was going to throw the cloak aside and sing a song. So, he'd been told where to stand and he'd been told where he came to for the camera to get him, (it was fixed like that) you see. So, great applause at the end of the Iturbi thing and they now changed conductors and we now had Malcolm Sargent, you see, to conduct the orchestra. So, because, when his name was announced, "We're now going to have Signor Gobbi singing the..." (this thing), there was enormous applause and - no I'm wrong, it wasn't Malcolm Sargent, it was dear old Fistoulari, the maestro again. He had been told not to wait for the applause, but to strike up, you see. I mean, when the applause came, he struck up. And Tito Gobbi had been told that directly the orchestra struck up, he would stride to the centre of the stage and start his song. So, when he gets this enormous applause at the sound of his name, dear Fistoulari does nothing, because he thinks the applause - he should have his applause. So Signor Gobbi is standing there going 'hah'... 'hah'...with his nails, you see - polishing his nails on his arm. And the cameraman doesn't know what to do, because - and I am screaming, "Tell Fistoulari to start the orchestra!" you see. And so the cameraman switches onto Gobbi polishing his nails [laughing] and then Fistoulari starts the orchestra - I have to cry with laughing, telling this story - starts the orchestra, so Gobbi goes "humph... Ahhhh" [ie starts singing] (like that), and strides on. It couldn't be anything more ridiculous! Well then we went moderately all right, until we got to Markova, dancing. And Markova had been told at the end of her dancing with her partner, she always leapt on his shoulders, great thing, she leapt on his shoulders and she was there, you see. And I said to her, "You must not do that because the camera can't hold you and the gentleman, your shoulders" I can't remember who he was now. "So, would you mind taking a call - curtesy call (like that) for you, as normal." "Oh yes" she said. Come the show, up she leaps onto the dancer's shoulder...

Daphne Shadwell: Anton Dolin.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Anton Dolin, that's right, how clever of you, Daphne! And she leaps onto his shoulders, so I get a thing of her with her crossed legs around Anton Dolin's head!

[Laughter].

Joan Kemp-Welch: I cannot tell you...! And it was so bad, it was so bad, and the audience were given strawberry cream teas, I remember. [Laughing]. And [John Mack] came round to see me, and I looked at him and he looked at me and he said, "Let's go and get drunk!" And we went out and got drunk, [John Mack] and I. I never had a strawberry cream tea or anything! [Laughs].

[Laughter]

Joan Kemp-Welch: And it took me about four hours, because I took shots of the compere saying things and whenever one of these terrible mistakes happened, we cut to him. I'm trying to remember who it was - somebody who died - a very famous man who did sound things for the BBC.

Daphne Shadwell: Not Huw Weldon?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No...anyway, it's gone. But it was terribly funny! The only person who behaved herself was Callas, do you remember?

Daphne Shadwell: Oh, Maria Callas.

Joan Kemp-Welch: She came down the day after, to do her thing, which we were going to cut in at the bottom, and she behaved like an angel, didn't she? She behaved absolutely like an angel. She did everything that was asked of her, no problem, nothing.

Daphne Shadwell: True professional.

Joan Kemp-Welch: True professional. So, funny things happened in television.

John P Hamilton Wonderful, you don't have fun like that these days!

Roy Fowler: That brings us then to - where are we? My Fair Lady is listed for '58, was that a remote from um...?

Joan Kemp-Welch: It was called Gala , the programme...

John P Hamilton Yes. We had problems with the copyright on that, Joan, didn't we...in the end? [Greg Chapels]...despite all the preliminaries there's a piece in here...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well, way before that...

John P Hamilton The billing is in here. Dirk Bogarde introduced it, didn't he? And as soon as the show was out of the way, they released the use of the records.

Joan Kemp-Welch: [Looking at book]. Well there you are, there it is Gala , you see?

John P Hamilton The one you've just been talking about, yes...

Joan Kemp-Welch: That is where it was, it was Gala . This is more or less chronological.

John P Hamilton Who was the compere, then?

Joan Kemp-Welch: And then that was with Vic Oliver. Vic Oliver and I can't remember who played the woman, that was Cilla...

John P Hamilton That's Avis Landon.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Then it was The Woman of no Importance with Athene Seyler and Grif Jones. Um, which - and then this was The Wild . And then somewhere there is, somewhere in this little lot, comes The Birthday Party which shot Harold Pinter to fame.

John P Hamilton Yes indeed.

Joan Kemp-Welch: That was - this is all the Pinter bits, this is all the Pinter. What comes then?

John P Hamilton Some Somerset Maugham's in between.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, Somerset, whole series of Somerset Maugham's.

John P Hamilton 'Woman of no Importance.'

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, that was the one to these. [Looking at book] Mother never had any idea of putting things together.

John P Hamilton Oh right, hmm.

Joan Kemp-Welch: And this was Pinter's next play, Night School . There's a picture of the studio for you.

John P Hamilton Studio 5, yes.

Joan Kemp-Welch: That's - this is all Pinter's second play. Um, yes, this was nothing...

John P Hamilton [Chuckling] Producer, [Franky???)

Joan Kemp-Welch: Then The Two Bouquets that was lovely, that was a musical, wasn't it? Do you remember? [George Benson]...

John P Hamilton Oh yes!

Joan Kemp-Welch: This was a lovely, an old fashioned Victorian musical. And then came Lourdes .

John P Hamilton And then Lourdes , an epic.

Joan Kemp-Welch: Then came Lourdes which - that really was, I'd love to see that again, properly. That was one of the wonderful designs of Lourdes . But, John, how marvellous that was.

John P Hamilton Old Yatsey, who refuses to talk to us in this project!

Joan Kemp-Welch: That was twenty foot high, that cross. And he was a circus boy that played the Christ and he was marvellous. And he came down...

John P Hamilton He had to hang upside down, didn't he?

Joan Kemp-Welch: When he was brought down off the cross, I remember he had - after fifteen minutes, he had perfect control. And I remember, do you? - No, well you probably wouldn't. But again, we couldn't edit the VTR and when we handed the - when the man handed the sponge on the sword to him, it fell off, the Christ, and we had to go back to the beginning, and there wasn't time. Because you know how strict they were on time. There wasn't time, so we couldn't get him down off the cross for a rest, and he had to go right through the whole thing again, with all the dancing at the Pharisees and he was up there for twenty minutes, hanging. And he hung on his hands, and the little tiny bit that is on the cross - he had a tiny bit of wood there - otherwise he hung like that for twenty minutes, it was remarkable.

John P Hamilton Incredible.

Roy Fowler: Right, we'll pause

Joan Kemp-Welch: And as I say, that was the long shot and Vic did that back from a close-up of his face on the cross, right back to see the whole cross. It was a marvellous...

Daphne Shadwell: There's a famous quote about Joan Kemp-Welch and her directions on Lourdes , isn't there? I can't remember it particularly, but it was...

John P Hamilton But you can't remember it? But it is famous!

Daphne Shadwell: No. Joan you probably know that you're famous, some of the [Tanya Leven] famous sayings, and your famous for saying about on Lourdes , did you know that?

Joan Kemp-Welch: No?

Daphne Shadwell: Yes, it's gone the rounds of everybody, about Joan in the middle of this intense, intense play and, "Tell Christ if he's got to hang there, would he please not fidget!" I

can't remember what it was exactly, but there's a marvellous quotation about you in the middle of directing and shouting out, do you remember?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Well no, I don't remember me shouting out something, I do remember the, the boy, I can't remember what his name was now, the circus boy, the Italian circus boy, being told that he had to pay double income tax! And I got the whole board in the room watching and he was just doing the thing with the thorns, where they were, you know, mocking him and he said, "You've crucified me once, you've crucified me twice! I've got to pay double income tax, I won't go on!" he shouted.

[Laughter].

Joan Kemp-Welch: And the board were all horrified and shocked and I had to go down and pacify him!

Daphne Shadwell: There was something you said, Joan, it's quite famous, about you and things, "Tell Christ do to" something or other. You know, it was something a technical direction, but very funny, very funny!

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, I'm sure it was one of my awful gaffs. This was a time when we had a frozen...this is not for your tape.

Roy Fowler: No, I think we should pause now, because all this is, I mean the credits are very important and we're not doing them justice. So I think we'll - right...

Joan Kemp-Welch: No, I was only just saying that this was fun, we had a deep [Break in recording] and nobody could use anything, everything froze. And I asked if I could have the cameras to go out into the park and photograph the snow...

John P Hamilton 1961.

Joan Kemp-Welch: ...and we spent the whole day photographing all the different patterns the snow made on the leaves, it had frozen overnight and the snow was lumping onto everything...

Daphne Shadwell: Ohhh...

Joan Kemp-Welch: Do you remember? And then they let me put it out, with nothing except, I think it was Grieg's Concerto or something like that, just the music only, and the sound. And that programme got hundreds of letters that came in after it.

Daphne Shadwell: Oh, lovely...

John P Hamilton For Hear and Now ? 1961, during the actor's strike?

Joan Kemp-Welch: Yes, that's right, that's right.

Roy Fowler: Shall we break?

John P Hamilton It was a terrible winter, that year.

Roy Fowler: Well, we'll stop the tape here.

[Tape Ends.]

Joan Kemp-Welch

Actress

Stage Director

Television Director

1920s-1940s - Stage Actress and Director

1950s-1960s - Commercial Television Director (Associated Rediffusion)