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Q: Could you tell us about your background?

DR: Oh fucking hell, that's a big question. I could take you through my family history, I could take you through. . .

Q: Let's start with your family history.

DR: Okay I'll see if I can do it, my family history. I was born in Leeds in 1944 at the end of the Second World War. I have no memory of it, only stories of my mother keeping me under a table at night in case the bombs dropped. My father was a gunner in the flying fortresses over France and was I think very disturbed by that experience, because it was an exceedingly dangerous job because they got shot out of the skies. My mother described how he'd come home from the war in the middle of the night and smashed furniture up, which probably runs in the family. When he did come back he was having a relationship with my mother's next door neighbour, so she left him when I was about one. So she left him and I think she lived with my grandparents then as a home help looking after old people. It must've been the very beginning of the NHS. So they were separated for about three years in my early childhood. Then she agreed to go back with him as long as he left Leeds, so we moved to Bristol when I was I think five. I started school in Bristol. Mom got fed up with him again and she ran off with a lodger, Alec. He was an iron molder. The classic family story was she did a bunk without telling him anything about it. So the day the furniture van arrived to take all the stuff out of the house my father was ill, so she had to run up the street to tell the driver not to come and collect the furniture. Later she rearranged it and she did a bunk, came to Stourbridge where Alec had just got a job in a foundry. The day he arrived, he got the sack from the job. I don't know why, probably they changed their mind about

employment, whatever; I can't remember that bit of the story. So seven and I didn't really have a father. I never really accepted Alec as my father although in effect he was really, he was effectively my father. But I always called him Alec. As a matter of fact, they asked me to call him daddy and all those things, but I resolutely refused to do that. So my memory of that year was growing up in a family where I was divorced, there was a kind of shame about my name was different to my father's name, step father. So there was a memory of that, because there was a lot of opprobrium around those sort of things in the '50s, which you wouldn't even think about these days, no big deal anymore. So I kind of had a troubled early childhood and then my sister died in my early teens, and that was very traumatic. I think I had the equivalent of a nervous breakdown around then and I was really shaken by that. We never talked about it. In fact, the day after she died my mother laid out knives and forks for Freda as if she was there. Never talked about it, nothing was said. So that was a traumatic era. I went to what was called a technical school. I failed the 11 plus, didn't go to the grammar school, like all of us failed. My sisters failed as well, yet they've all gone on to be interesting people. So I failed the 11 plus, went to this technical, ? Hospital School, which was a very old school in Scarbury. I learned things like woodwork and metalwork and stuff, which were probably the most useful things I learned. Primarily interested in science – I did chemistry, biology, maths. I got past to London University, Queen Mary College, me and John Hughes. We were the first two kids from that school to go to university. That was the beginning of the period when kids from poorer backgrounds were actually getting into university, it was the beginning of that era. Because my parents' income was pretty shit I got a full grant, I lived in luxury in London. Bought a car with me book allowance. Hated it, I really felt out of place there. It was very middle class and I was completely out of my depth. The stuff that they'd all done on chemistry just completely didn't make any connection with the stuff that I was doing, so I fell out place, felt all stupid, and gave up really. I was up before the dean every year for not doing very much. Stuck with it for three years, had a good time, got drunk with my friends, and left without a degree. I got a job in a bank for a year as a bank clerk, which I hated, loathed and detested. Then I got a job in an early computer data processing department for Brookhouse Engineering, which I was really good at. I was really good at that, a year on I was a systems analyst. Then I moved to Alcan Booth Industries, got a job there as a programmer. Then that year it was Alcan Booth Kits Green you know, and it got took over by Alcan. Alcan had already got a computer department, so

we became redundant. I spent a year before they actually sacked me or made me redundant, just learning songs. I had a songbook in me desk, I pulled it out and learned a song, put it back. I learned about 50 songs in a year. At the end of it the redundancy money I got allowed me and Pam, Graham and Chris to go to India, so we went to India for over a year. In that same period I started getting involved with the Grey Cock Folk Club, that was about 1968 or '69. Chris and me were walking around Broom and we saw a poster, Grey Cock Folk Club, so I gave that a go. I'd gotten interested in the folk revival as it was at that point in time, but not in the kind of way we've got folk music now but like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Pete Seeger, all that. At that point in time it seemed very exciting and radical and political and challenging, and it kind of welded well with where I was at that point. It was a very exciting time, post '68. I wasn't particularly aware of '68, I wasn't political at university. It got arrested at university but that was just for jumping in the fountain at Trafalgar Square on bonfire night and throwing bangers at me mate. But I didn't do anything political at all. That's when I started to get a sense of politics, I think. The guy at work who I worked with, he was a Communist and we'd have these challenging conversations and I learned a lot from him. He was into Eric Fromm and the hippy style of politics. That was really good and I learned a lot. It was a very exciting period I think for me. Getting involved with the folk club, Chris and I saw this poster and thought we'd go along. It was not the most stimulating of evenings. I think it was Charles Parker, Roy Palmer, Doug Miller, Eileen Whiting, all of these kind of elderly performers singing ballads one after another with no accompaniment. But there was something about it which I thought was really fucking interesting. It just caught me. We both thought, shit ya, we've gotta definitely go back there again. Then we went some of the nights and it was younger people doing music and accompaniment, and political songs were being done and all the rest of it. So I found that really exciting. Charles Parker ran a series of classes on political culture at the BMI, Birmingham Midland Institute. I remember going along the first time and Charlie said, right, I want you to come back and sing a song next week. I thought, fucking hell, I don't sing, I'm not singing. Chris had been in choirs and stuff like that so I learned Radcliffe Highway, which is a kind of street ballad from the 1800s. I think Chris did Geordie or something like that. So we sang these at the next session and I got accolades of praise. Chris got slated because she sang in a kind of operative way, which is completely not acceptable to the ethos of the, well fair enough, that's the way it was. So I come on really ? and Chris was . . . But it was also that way then of criticising

things. It was pretty ruthless dialectical full on in your face stuff which came from the critics' group, all that unforgiving way of criticising, which I think is not a good way of getting people to do it. It's alright if you come out of it alright, but if you don't come out of it alright it destroys you. I think we were infected with that in the early days when we picked up that style. It was not a good way to work. So I got involved with the Grey Cock, I was the chairman after about a year or year and a half. Then we went to India. I came back. Pam could give you better timings, but it must've been about '73, early '70s. Banner was just about to emerge. Rhoma and Charlie had been talking about why don't we put the radio ballad of the miners, which we called Collier Laddie, why don't we do that? So we decided to stage that. I remember thinking at the time, I couldn't see the point of all this actuality stuff and everything, how the fuck to I do this actuality? So anyway we did that and I remember it felt like about 20 of us on the stage, a lot of singers from the Grey Cock Folk Club, Rhoma who brought drama background. We did the first performance at the BMI and invited a load of miners that Charlie had interviewed for the radio ballads, I think many from South Wales. They really loved it. I still remember this one guy said it was like looking at your life down a telescope or a long tube, I can't remember what the word was now, but just like looking back on your life, sort of the idea of giving you a reflection of your life in what you do. It really struck me at the time. So I ended up touring that. This was pre-Banner, this was still the Grey Cock Folk Club or probably Birmingham Folk Centre. We performed it in the mining communities, again mainly in South Wales as I remember, but other people would remember better than me. I remember playing at the miners' gala in South Wales. We had our music stands and there was a gale and blew over all the music. Some people had to improvise what they were doing, which was probably a really good lesson really – don't rely on. . . So a classic old miner of the coal fields came up to us afterwards, Ben Davis, and he said, Shakespeare was smiling on you today. So it went down really well and it took us into a whole lot of places; we traveled around. That was kind of a year later, this must've been '74, we called ourselves Banner Theatre. That was the beginning of what was to come really. Little did we know how such small beginnings would turn into such a dramatic story line really. That's the early days.

Q: Prior to Collier Laddie, when you were at the Grey Cock Folk Club and before you went to Turkey, did you ever take part in mini plays, skits, sketches at all?

DR: Ya we did. I missed the early stuff, which Pam would be able to tell you about. But they did *Of One Blood*, which was an antiracist production. They also did *The Making of the Midland*, which was a kind of take on EP Thompson's *The Making of the Working Class* but it was looking at industry and growth of industry in the Midlands. My classic memory of that was going to a performance of it, and I just got involved really. I was in the audience and they did a performance, then Ewan did a critique afterwards. There must've been an audience there, so it must've been a critique in full sway with the audience. But Ewan went around and asked what people thought of it. He asked me what I thought and I said, oh it's brilliant. He said, what's it about? I said, I don't really know. He said, how many times have you seen it? I said, three times. He said, you've seen it three times and you don't know what it's about? I says, ya. So then a big ? around the clarity of the production and it wasn't communicating properly, and ripped it to pieces. I believe Pam was told at this time they should sack the instrumentalists and get some new musicians in. That was the level of the brutality of the fucking critique. So that kind of was my introduction. I got involved just after I'd done the classes with Charlie and he got me singing. They dragged me into the next production, which I think had been created by Roy Palmer, who did a production, wrote a show which was called *The Funny Rigs of Good and Tender Hearted Masters*. It was based in the 1820s or '30s in Kidderminster when there was a Kidderminster carpet weavers' strike. It was about this strike and the particular role of a priest, a revolutionary lefty priest, who kind of led a lot of the strikes and stuff like that. I sang the *Handloom Weaver* song and a traditional song. I was quite ? that I had a fairly central role in this production, given that I'd only just sung for the first time.

Q: Was it the first time you'd sung in public?

DR: I'm not sure, I can't remember. I don't know whether I'd sung some songs at the Grey Cock before then. We had a ten week Charlie's class and I went to it, Chris went to it, Don Perrygrove, Brill Shreeve and a few other people who I've forgotten now. But at the end of the ten weeks we put on MacColl's moving play, which was, I can't remember what it's called now. It's a kind of anti-capitalist moving play basically. I remember doing that in Small Heath Park. Ochee's writing was in it and probably Eileen as well. Don Perrygrove, who

played Captain Slasher with the babbie, some kids in the parks started poking him with apples all the way through the show. He turned around and said, you fucking do that again and I'll kill you. So that was good. So from the beginning there was an ethos of get out there and do things. So we did the moving play in the park, which was a very interesting experience. I think that kind of approach to what we were doing is quite important – you get out there and do it. It's a very different approach to the theatre types that we were never really part of. I think I felt that all the way through Banner, is we've never really been part of the theatre thing. The whole folk club ethos is very different, it's like the stage is almost not there in a folk club. You could be sitting in the audience one minute and sitting on the stage the next, and the floor singer/performer relationship is very kind of integral to that. There's an anathema about no microphones, no technology, it's the Irish session thing where musicians were in a circle. That kind of ethos I think has really been important to what Banner does; it's breaking down a lot of the fourth wall stuff in terms of theatre. So it was therefore not a surprise in a way when one of the first things, I mean in the early '70s there was a bit of a divide. I can't quite remember exactly how it worked out, but the folk club, all the people in the folk club, some of them were interested in doing something political like the political theatre, and others were not. There was a kind of strong divide – some people did not want to get involved in anything political. I have a real memory of a sense of that at the time. So some people just didn't want to get involved in that. The first stuff we did was very political. You remember, this is the early '70s and this was when building workers had been on strike in 1972, Saltley Gate had just happened, miners' strike, big battles. The building workers, it was a very scary and quite contentious issue at that point in time, because the building workers were being done under conspiracy laws which were hundreds of years old, but they were going to lock people up for a lot of time. It was a divide. Maybe I shouldn't overplay that, but that's how it felt to me. So that was the political atmosphere at that point in time. It was quite intense and some of us were just getting involved in that kind of politics for the first time. I hadn't been political in my teenage years really, so it was only through work and through Charlie that I started to get politicised. Then came along the strike.

Q: What strike?

DR: Well the building workers' strike, which was then followed by the campaign to get those building workers out of jail. We picked up a show which had been rewritten by Columbine Theatre Company in London, which was a split off from the critics group. It's a long story and would take forever to describe all that. But anyway, Columbine political theatre group in London, people like Sandra Kerr and I don't know who was in it.

Q: Faulkner?

DR: John Faulkner, the political wing of the singers club splitting away from Ewan and Peggy quite deliberately, nicking all the equipment. A lot of real bad vibes around that massive political split. They'd written a show about the building workers, so we picked it up and rewrote it a little bit, put some new songs in and changed some of the lyrics, and worked with the building workers' union, UCATT. Ken Barlow, the regional secretary, loved what we did. He said, "This is my kind of theatre – working class theatre." We ended up performing, I remember we did the show with Inti Illimani I think in the Pacific Hall. I remember doing the show for the campaign to get them out of nick at Pacific Hall when some of the Shrewsbury 23 were on the platform and I think Des Warren's wife was on the platform, and we did the show in that context. So again it's that kind of very flexible format you're able to fit into a political situation rather than a fixed show, where you could not have done that with.

Q: What was the show called?

DR: It was called Shrewsbury Picket Show or Shrewsbury 24, I can't remember exactly.

Q: It could be the Shrewsbury 3 as well.

DR: It became the Shrewsbury 3 because they didn't lock them all up in the end, they locked up three of them. Des Warren, Ricky Tomlinson and somebody else.

Q: In what way was it flexible?

DR: It was kind of in your face stuff, it wasn't like a proper play with acting and a stage set. It was like a Banner show. It's down there on the floor, you can do it in a way which a more formal production would've been quite difficult to do. We ended up doing the songs at demos and rallies. I remember going to a lot of building workers meetings and talking about what we were doing. So that relationship then became a very close relationship with UCATT which lasted for a good while. In the late '70s we were doing stuff on housing, the housing show, and at that point in time it was the attack on the direct workers department in Samuel. We were singing around building sites, actually singing on the building site, doing bits of performance on building sites. I remember there was a big strike meeting in Samuel when people were deciding whether they were going to go on strike or not; we sang some songs at that. Then some moved to one side if they weren't going to go on strike and some moved to the other if they were, highly right in the middle of the struggle at that time we were. So with Collier Laddie we were doing this stuff, and I think we did Viva Chile at the same time because there were the Chilean refugees coming over after the Chilean coup, maybe a little bit later, I can't remember the exact year. But we met with them. All this time the Grey Cock Folk Club was still going on. We'd heard about Victor Jara, we'd heard about this political singer songwriter who'd been murdered by the junta, electrocuted and tortured in the big stadium in Santiago. So we heard the story about the heroic political singer songwriter, and I didn't know anything about Chile until then. Then when they came over we obviously made contact with the, so we got to know people like Apolo and Sadi and Jeanette. We had an immediate bond to them because they have a very similar attitude to music. Charlie's line, and I'm not totally sure how much Ewan would have the same line, but Charlie's line was that folk music was the music of the working class, pop music was degenerate fucking sleaze music which was contaminated by capitalism. That was the ethos, going back to the purity of folk music, which I've got some problems with now obviously. But that kind of ethos lended itself very much towards having an affinity with the Chileans, because the Chileans at that time as I remember it – and again you need to check this out with Apolo – was that they had fought to establish their own traditions in music in the face of American pop music, which was the dominant cultural form. They fought to say, we have our own music, we don't want this, this is imperious music, we've got our own music going back to Andean indigenous music but also to the Spanish and the other forms intermingled in Chilean music. I remember we organised a festival at Norton Hall in Saltley which was a



combination of Chilean and our music. So early on we made those kind of connections, and they were really important connections that have carried through to this day. In the same way that the links we made with the mining communities have lasted for 30 fucking years, we still have those links.

Q: How have those links carried through?

DR: With the Chilean community I think as I said that kind of connection we made, making those connections we involved ourselves by doing a show about Chile. We put on a production which was about the coup and what had gone on. It was a passionate thing we believed, good strong anti-imperialist politics and stuff like that. So we put a show together about that, and that kind of I think gave us a credibility with that community. We were involved politically as well so we were trying to find them accommodation, trying to help them with their issues, immigration. So we got involved in their struggles, it wasn't just a hands-off we'll get your story and put it on. We were culturally and politically involved. I think Sadi must've sang at the Grey Cock, did he? Then we became friends and then it becomes a kind of political cultural friendship. If you're political, that comrade thing is really important – it's not just friends, they're comrades as well as friends. So that kind link lived on. Paulo is a very good friend and comrade now based on many years of solidarity. So with the mining community, little did we know those first links were really important, that the very first connections with. . . I've still got very strong memories of performing Collier Laddie in Kent to the Kent miners, packed hall, the older miners coughing with pneumoconiosis in the back of the hall. Katherine was a baby then, and rehearsing the show with Katherine on me back in a sling, because we didn't have any babysitters and Katherine got dragged around the coal fields with us. And later Keith, with the miners strike. From there in the mining communities we then did the show about the Butler of Saltley Gate, which was about the miners' strike of '72. I was in India when that happened so I missed the fucking thing, which is a pain in the ass, but there you go. I read about it in the Times of India when I was over there, thinking, shit why am I not over there? So we did a show on that based on interviews that I think Charlie and some of the critics group had done, and Don Perigrove. That must've been about '74 or '75; it was the first major documentary that we did ourselves rather than agitprop kind of show, which Viva Chile was. I remember then

thinking, what the fuck are we doing with this actuality stuff, it's so laborious. I remember we had to listen to all of the actuality recordings, and Charlie had this system of each person, you'd categorise police violence, oral power, women's struggle, blah blah. You'd have all these columns and you'd have to tick each bit of the actuality on the tape according to what they were talking about. It was me, Rhoma, Charlie, Don Perrygrove and Chris spent the best part of the summer listening to all this stuff. Don Perrygrove got so pissed off he went and never came back. Me, Chris and Rhoma carried on, and we just sort of wrote the show. I hadn't done any writing before in me life. That's when I wrote Saltley Gate, which pisses me off. I did it last night at the fucking club and people said, oh it's a great song. I said, that's the fucking first song I wrote, why is that so precious? I'm a better songwriter than I was then, but anyway. It was interesting that that kind of show again re-established links with the miners. We're talking '74, '75. In '84 of course when the big miners' strike came out, we started off singing on the street doing fundraising in the centre of town, busking. We got quite involved with miners' support group, so we were politically involved and then added that. That was the same time when me and Chris were half being shoved out of the Banner Theatre and we were half having a year off, depending on how you want to look at it. We just decided to have a year off, and the strike's in full flow. So me, Dave Dale and Kevin . . . Anyway so me, Kevin and Dave formed a little trio and we wrote songs about the strike as it happened, as stuff was going on, and we became more and more integrally involved with the strike. We organised the big mass busk in the centre of town for the miners, about 20 of us singing songs on the street. We collected 500 quid a day. I was separated from Chris at this time but my memory was going down there with Keith and Katherine and we'd come back with this big sack of coins and they'd have to count them all out into piles. I did busking because I was hard up then and you'd be lucky if you'd come home with a tenner after two or three hours. But we were picking up 500 quid, quite a lot of money. Then we started getting into signing at miners' welfares, singing on picket lines; going on a picket line in the morning, hearing a story, writing a song in the afternoon and performing it at a social in the evening. We were integrally involved in that strike that for me is the classic culture as a weapon or culture as a central element in the struggle. In order to do that you need a lot of time, you need a lot of energy, and you need to be young enough to be able to have the energy to do it. I can remember being at social clubs and standing on tables so they could hear us, because we didn't have a PA system, and just

really fucking massively involved with that struggle. Then through that we got to work with the Stokies, the miners' wives in Stoke on Trent, but also Keresley with the miners' wives there, getting them to do their own stuff and sing songs. Women particularly got culture, they really got it. There were miners who used to sing and did political stuff, but the women really got it and really treasured it, the power of culture. That whole year we got really closely involved with different mining communities and singing songs at clubs and picket lines and outside scabs' houses. It was a massively important formative political event, and this is 10 years after Banner had been formed, still the early days in a way.

Q: What do you mean the women got it – in what way did it manifest?

DR: They were the ones who organised those socials, they were the ones who started to sing and learn stuff, and do it collectively. I can't remember ever seeing a bunch of men getting together and singing. I mean they sang on demos and rallies but I don't remember, whereas the women did. I don't know why. I think women were absolutely central to the strike. As everybody says, they couldn't have gone on for as long as they did if it hadn't been for all the women, for sure. Crucial role. I suppose women are more attuned to the cultural dimension than men are. A lot of really important women involved in that song and cultural movement, and out of that later evolved into the project we did after the strike with the miners' wives, getting them to put their own show on, which they were passionately involved in. There were lots of contradictions around that and problems and issues but at the end of the day that got them performing. Until recently they were still doing it.

Q: Was that Nice Girls?

DR: No it was, oh wait maybe it was. I can't remember what they called it.

Q: It was Nice Girls, at the Old Vic in Stoke. Is that the show you're talking about?

DR: No, the one that Anna did. Anna worked with that community as a facilitator to get them to put the show on. I can't remember what it was called, but they toured that. For me the extent to which they got it was like when Brenda is dying of cancer now, they wanted us

to go up there. The women sang Saltley Gate around her bed. So that to me is like a real recognition of the cultural role, when it becomes that important. A number of times I had miners say, I remember a guy saying, somebody nicked his car and he said the thing that really pissed him off was he lost his Hear We Go tape which he'd been playing for 20 years. He was more upset about the tape than the fucking car.

Q: Did you give him a new one?

DR: I must've done, ya. So I think that being embedded with the community is what Banner has done at its best. We haven't always been able to do that, but that particular relationship was really important. Still bump into ex miners saying how important that was to them, and remembering those interventions that we made. So very, very powerful connection.

Q: You've revived Saltley gate, haven't you?

DR: We've done it loads of times. Me and Dave did a version of it in the '90s which must've been '92. Me and Dave did a version of the Saltley Gate show, just the two of us, then we must've done it ten years later when Aiden was in it. Was he in the '92 one? Okay '92 when Aiden was in it. Was it just the three of us performing it then? Really? Fucking hell, I thought he was playing on it. Oh maybe he had his stuff extra on the CD, ya okay. Then we revived it again when you did the video and interviews which we did for the 2004. . . Burning Issues was in 2004 for the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with me, Jilah and was it Dave? Me, Fred and Jilah did. She came in back around the coalfields, what was left of it. Then me and Dave put together the Saltley Gate reunion a couple of years ago for the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Saltley Gate. So a rich network of connections really through all that, really rich network, for me the most important work we've done really. If I had more energy we'd be doing more of that now, but I haven't got the fucking energy for it.

Q: What community would you do it with?

DR: I don't know. If you see what Sean is doing, he gets embedded with the communities. He's in there with his camera, he gets to know them all, he lives the life of it. But you need a

fuck of a lot of energy and time and youthfulness to do that. I think that's when you get the most powerful connections really and you create the best stuff. I'm a bit older now and I haven't got quite the energy that I had then that you need in order to sustain that. Now it's a more kind of peripheral relationship. We still have that relationship, we still get embedded in the struggle and get to know, like in the NHS at the moment. You get a network of people that you talk to and you get a sense of what's going on, but it's not the same as being in there and on it. Also '84 was a year of full on struggle. It wasn't, you're going to want to support people in their workplace because blah blah blah, they were continually in a battle, in a war, so you were lending your skills in that war.

Q: What was going on?

DR: '84 in the strike. Every day there's a picket and there's a demo. You're totally involved in it, it takes over your life.

Q: Is there any more you'd like to say about the shows we already mentioned, or should we move on to The Race Show? Do you remember The Race Show?

DR: Ya I do. We did several versions of it.

Q: What prompted it?

DR: I can't remember, the rise of the national front, racist environment. My memory was me and Chris trying to write it in a tent on a holiday with Katherine screaming her head off at 3 o'clock in the morning or whatever it was. We put one version of it together, I think it was mainly me and Chris that wrote it. I can tell you who was involved but I can't tell you the process of who was first. There was somebody Macintosh, black Asian woman, Hermin Macintosh. There was also George Gordon. There was the wider Banner group, which would've been me, Chris, probably Joy, Bob Etheridge, Doreen, Charlie. I can't remember why, but the first version wasn't good enough. Jazz of course was in it.

Q: The website said it was originally developed as the great scapegoat of Birmingham Polytech students union. Does that ring a bell?

DR: I don't remember anything about that.

Q: Okay so you developed a script that you think is not good enough. Why not?

DR: I can't remember. I remember there were some problems with it, so that became stage one and then we went away and reworked it and that became stage 2. I'm sure Chris would have a better memory of what it was. The final lineup with George Gordon and . . . was probably the most powerful formation of it. I think the central reason for doing it was talking to Joshi. Joshi was head of Indian Workers Association after Jalls ? – really good, nice, left-wing, radical. He had a little shop in Selly Oak on ? which was full of Chinese memorabilia and General Mao's little book and all that kind of stuff. That's where I met a lot of people. So talking to him he was saying, you should do a show about Britain's involvement in India and Africa and Caribbean, looking at imperialism, which we hadn't really looked at. We'd kind of touched on it with Viva Chile but this was much more substantial. We had to start doing research on it, and Joshi was a continual source of critique and information. He was into cultural as well, he got that. So that started our very strong connections with the political Asian community; it started from there, that kind of involvement. We did a whole section on the IWA, Indian Workers Association being very much involved in the strikes that were going on at that point in time in the foundry industry, which was predominately Asian workers involved, strikes against colour bars that were going on in factories in the black country where Asian workers had to have separate toilets and awful conditions. There was a colour bar strike, some kind of a strike in the TNG where the TNG supported the white workers against the Asian workers. Again I can't remember the details of it, but that kind of racism was rampant then. We incorporated a lot of that. We did interviews with Asian shop stewards about how they organised in the foundry industry and had some really big, effective strikes. So that was crucially important; that was a central element. Now whether we did the first version of the show without that and Joshi ??, I can't remember. But maybe. Why I've forgotten, I don't know; ask Chris. But that was the process that we went through. I remember there were issues like I think interviewing

racists and making the decision we weren't going to use that because you gave a platform to their racist ideas even if you take a piece out of it. I remember that was one of the issues. I remember big, Jazz I always remember when he did some of the lines of Indian revolutionaries he really projected that out: I tell you, it is the English we must kill, they are the infidels. That was a really important show. That period when the national front were organising we were a very significant force on the streets, little anti-? stuff and how George Gordon used to carry a big truncheon around with him in case we ever got attacked. We did talk about what would happen if we got attacked. That was an important show, and then there was the women's show, which I think was probably written by me, Chris and Rhoma. I couldn't tell you when, mid '70s.

Q: The first women's show was called Women Guide, and that was quite early on in '75. According to the website, that was written by Rhoma, Chris and yourself and Charlie. So that was mixed, it had men and women in it. Then the women decided they wanted to do a show.

DR: That was quite a bit later, I think.

Q: What about street theatre at the time? Was the ? 3 a short show as well?

DR: I can't remember how long it was, probably about 40 minutes.

Q: There was ? of the Century.

DR: That was street theatre, wasn't it?

Q: Do you remember how that went, what it involved?

DR: It was about the cuts, the Healy cuts and all that stuff. I don't remember hardly anything apart from doing it on the street now and again. Then there was Dr. Healy's Case Book, which came a bit later, which we did with NUPE. We were beginning to establish some kind of reputation in the trade union movement by then, so we got some money from

NUPE. We interviews home helpers, care workers, porters, ambulance drivers, school dinner ladies. Remind me who was in it.

Q: I really don't know, it's not listed.

DR: I can't remember if it was a main show with everybody. It must have been pre professionalisation of Banner.

Q: You mentioned not being convinced by actuality in the beginning. When and how did your opinion of actuality change?

DR: I think in the process of writing Saltley Gate I began to realise, ya this is some very powerful stuff here. I couldn't tell you at which point the light went on and I went, oh ya, actuality, but it was a process of evolution. Certainly by the time we were doing Saltley Gate I realised how powerful that was, no doubt about it. But I couldn't tell you when.

Q: Do you remember your first interviews?

DR: I remember going out with Charlie very early on, probably for one of his radio programs I would think. I remember he was interviewing these Irish guys who both had broad Dublin accents despite the fact they'd been in this country for 30 odd years. I can remember him just getting really loud to do the interview, talking about putting yourself in an inferior position to the interviewee, kind of respect for the interviewee, that kind of approach. Just talking about the ways of interviewing people – listening, not interrupting, but also having a bit of a debate sometimes, which we did. So those are the first ones that I can remember. Then with the building workers we were going out with tape recorders interviewing, because we didn't use cameras then, just microphones and little cassette recorders basically. At that point in time we weren't intending to play them back, so it was very much getting the words really that we could use as source material, either for people to speak or for ideas for songs and things like that. I can't remember interviewing any for the women's show. Did we interview anybody? I don't fucking know, maybe we did. But Dr. Healy we



definitely did. I remember going out and interviewing NUPE officials. By the time we got to Dr. Healy we got a process underway of going out and getting those stories.

Q: How did you learn how to do it?

DR: Just by doing it really. We didn't have any training sessions or anything like that, and just went out and did it.

Q: What did you do with the stuff once it was on tape?

DR: Got it transcribed then worked off the transcripts. This was the BBC method, because the BBC method obviously they've got resources so everything was transcribed. It was before computers, so you'd have multiple copies typed on the typewriter. I think for a while before Charlie got sacked from the BBC we were able to get stuff typed up there. We didn't have any money so people must have volunteered to do it and I must have done it myself as well. Then typing on those kind of sheets that you use on a Gestetner and you could run off and all that stuff. That's all I remember about that. I can't remember very much about how we did it. But I don't remember any formal training session. You learn by doing it. It wasn't so important then to get pristine interviews, because you weren't thinking of them as being audio that you used in a show, you thought of them as source. So there wasn't as much emphasis on good quality, although having said that, we did also go out with a ? and I remember spending a lot of time buying a good microphone to go with it. For some reason we must've got some recordings which we thought were important to get right. But it wasn't really until, when did we start using audio recordings in shows? We used them in the miners' strike. Did we use them before that? Steel.

Q: Did you use them before you used videos?

DR: Ya we did. In the Reign of ? we had audio and people would continually say, oh we couldn't hear it, we couldn't understand what the audio was because you can't see people and you don't know what they're saying. It's true, so there was a big problem with audio. Without the visual dimension, it's hard to understand what people are saying. Ewan said

quite a large percentage of communication is through the visual, even though it's just the words you're listening to.

## **Part 2 of interview**

Q: Could you take us through how a show was created in the early days?

DR: To be honest, the process has evolved over many years so it's hard to say what I started off with. I remember when we did Saltley Gate the thing that struck me at the time was I was surprised Charlie didn't have more of a kind of ethos or an approach. I thought with the radio ballads and all that you'd have a way of doing it, kind of which makes me think that the central force in the radio ballads, like I've always said, was actually Ewan really. Charlie did a lot of the stuff and there's a lot of defense around Charlie because Ewan did his arrogant thing about, I was the centre of it, and all that. But I think he was in a lot of ways really, to be honest about it. So I was surprised when we did it that Charlie didn't have a kind of aesthetic analysis. I remember going through, as I said before, we went through the tapes ruthlessly looking for oral power, statements that were important, analyses that really needed listening to, well said things, all of that. We did all that. We went through it, we marked it up, we marked the transcripts, we marked these bloody horrible sheets with ticks. All that we did, and then we sort of extracted a shape from it. I can tell you how we do it now. I can't remember whether we did that then because I can't remember anymore, but the process I would imagine would be we'd sit around and say, okay what do we want to say from this? The process I do now is, who's the audience, what do we want to say to that audience, what do they know already, what don't they know, and what do we want to change in that audience? That's the kind of rationale around it. I suppose we would've done something like that. So my memory of it would be sitting around for ages saying, okay well it's got to be a focus on the victory of the massive dynamic of all those forces coming together, about the organisation, about the role of the NUN leadership, all those things. And I guess we would've come up with a rough shape. Okay, we need something about the early organisation, what would be the best way of handling that? Is it through a song or is it through a piece of actuality? We had this section called oral power, which is when people said something powerful. You wanted to try and include that working-class, vernacular,

powerful speech; you want to make sure that's in somewhere. Charlie had a section called oral power, I remember that. So I would've thought you start playing around with a shape, you come up with a shape, and then somebody gets drafted to go and write a song about that, so a song comes up. Then you look at the actuality that might snuggle nicely around that song or intersect a verse, or what might just be said with a really strong statement by someone from the NUN. That's kind of the way it starts to work, then you come up with a rough shape. Then you kick it around and say, I don't know if that works or you missed this out, so go back to the drawing board. At that stage we were playing a lot more with ideas of how are you going to carry the idea of the growing violence of the dispute. It was early days of Banner and we were doing street theatre and we were doing commedia dell'arte. The first thing I did was a ? play so we were using commedia dell'arte ideas, comic Marx brothers over the top comedy kind of stuff. We did a workshop with some guy who was some expert on commedia stuff, so we were using those kind of techniques. One of the things that Saltley Gate was, we started off with the picketing quite peaceful and leisurely. So we thought, okay it's like a game, a cricket match. So you have a commentary on the cricket match, so and so is bowling a gentle over down on the blah blah, and then it gets a little bit more up. It then moved into being a football match and then by the end it's a American football full on, that kind of stuff. So we were using some dramatic techniques to develop. Rhoma must have been really important in that as well. In Collier Laddie she got us to do some dancing, which I thought, fuck I'm not going to do dancing, but she got us to do some kind of movement which would've resembled dancing in some way. So it's banging those forms together and to be honest it was very much in the early days I didn't feel there was any great leadership. As I said, Charlie didn't come in with a kind of, this is how you should do it. I think if I was bringing someone in now I want to say, well this is how we do it, this is the technique. I'd be nervous about people coming in not knowing what they're doing and think they know everything and come bowling in and fuck it all up and get it wrong, but we didn't. So we did it by doing it and very much learning on the foot. But of course we'd had years of listening to folk songs, we'd had some years of seeing the Festival of Fools, ? in London and we'd heard the radio ballads. So we were influenced by what we'd listened to and we had a shared ethos and a shared catalogue of material. So we didn't have to have battles about what kind of music we played or wrote. Again it's that kind of thing, I don't think there's any preciousness about, oh it has to be an original creation, or anything like

that. Saltley Gate is based on a Jacobite tune; we didn't think there was any problem with doing that. Some of the tunes we just made up but others we nicked from elsewhere. We did workshops with Ewan and Peggy on song writing and stuff, so we were learning from them as well. They were critiquing the pre-Banner productions, so we were learning from them. So there was a process of coming in, not like you go on a course and learn it, it was just sort of dropping on you from different places like pigeon shit really. But it certainly wasn't sit down and here's a lesson and learning it that way, it was very informal. But we had the freedom to experiment, which I think was really important. We were all quite young then and quite a community. We had the camps and the folk club, so it was a community of people as well. We had performers and nobody was getting paid so it didn't really matter anyway. So that's the process. It's very much a process of sling all the stuff in, take a look at it and go, oh that don't quite work, maybe try doing that. That doesn't work, throw it away, put something else in there. It's kind of a process of evolution, evolving out of a mess, out of rough clay, partly moulded and then gradually being moulded, just a process. But I think increasingly it becomes, okay what are you trying to say in this? What is this song trying to say, what is its function? You've got five verses, what's that verse saying? What is the central idea in that verse? Okay how does the first line contribute to that? How does the first line connect to the second line, to the third and the fourth? What are the key words in it? Increasingly as we got better it's a process of constructive criticism. Central to song writing for me is getting feedback from people. However painful that is, that process of listening to people saying, well okay maybe it works or it doesn't work, then going back and if need be throwing the whole fucking thing out and starting again; that's what you sometimes have to do. A collaborative process where at the best is where we collaborate. A lot of times you're stuck on your own working on it, but the best times are when we've been able to work together. I've worked through the night with Charlie with a bottle of whiskey, sitting there looking at slides trying to put them in the right order – try that one, that don't work, that might work. So it's that kind of grappling and arguing and debating and discussing and trying it out and throwing it out. Obviously, Charlie brought masses of knowledge into it but I wasn't aware of how he brought it in. Did Chris say anything about this? It's a good question really. I really did feel he didn't bring a lot to the table.

Q: You referred to shape – what does shape mean in the context of a song or show?

DR: It's like building blocks. Okay take NHS, okay so the more you research into the NHS you find the more entangled it gets. The initial thought is, okay the NHS is under attack, probably what the people know, they probably don't know very much, they probably just get on the news it's just not got enough money and it needs more money and there's an increasing demand all the time and it's a limitless amount of money around and the country can't afford to pay for it, so tough shit, that's the way it is. But then you start to read and discuss and listen and record people and you begin to realise the whole NHS has been under attack for a lot of years. You begin to realise there's a whole nexus of private companies already got their tentacles deeply imbedded in the NHS. So it's not what it appears to be. It's not a democratic health service. There's no democracy in it. It's a figurehead, it's a nametag with a mishmash of stuff going on underneath. You might start off and think, let's just talk about the positive things that people get out of the NHS, and now it's under attack and we need to defend it. Well then you start thinking, ya but it's already a mess, it's already been mortally wounded by what new Labour and the rest of them have done. So you start thinking, well how do you bring that element into it? So you might think, okay it's in blocks. Let's start with history of the NHS, how it started in 1948. Or you might start with what was before 1948, stories of people like my parents having their tonsils out on the kitchen table, all those kind of stories. Then you think, okay you want something then about how important the NHS has been in people's lives. Maybe you've got patient interviews or early users. Then you talk about the Tory plans, going back to Thatcher, about how we can destroy the NHS. So you start to develop a shape. So that's one shape, which is really a series of blocks. You always end on resistance, don't you? So you look at that and you try a song out and you say, how does that song fit in or not? It's a process of evolution. You're looking at it and you're thinking about it, you go away and come back again. In Banner we write songs and there's ways of using those songs even if they don't fit in the original formation that you've come up with. So you might throw all that out but you still will use that song, or you might use a song that's been written before and bring that in. Then you kind of say, well this is what I've got, what do you think? Then people will say this and that and then you go, okay, and you go away after you've had a deep depression about people not coming back and saying it's the best thing you've ever done. You go back and feel depressed and then you think, oh fuck ya, I'd better rewrite it. Then you go back and chip away at it again. The difference between

doing a sculpture is with a sculpture once you've started to chip out Charles Parker or whoever it is, you can't easily say, oh fuck it I'll do a bus instead or whatever; you're kind of stuck with it. But with a show it's more fluid and you can just throw things out and then start again. You know the things you've got to say and your understanding of the things you've got to say just gets deeper. You've got to get your teeth into it before you can really fucking write the thing. You can't do it from an outside position, you've got to get into it. It's like you write a song and then you think, it's a bit too sweet or it needs to be fucking angry. Or you do an interview. I read in the Ten Ways to Privatised the NHS, this book by a guy we're going to interview, and it makes you fucking angry. I'm thinking, we haven't got any anger in here, we need some fucking anger in here. Then you're thinking, watching the pain that Joyce has been through when she pushes the buzzer for someone to come and they don't come for half an hour and she pisses herself. It's degrading and it's horrible, but at the same time you know that that person that you are asking to come is doing something else and hasn't got the time to do it. It's not that they're callous. Then you start thinking, well that needs to be in it as well. The pain is really important as well, the pain of the workers suffering. Then you want to find out why, what is the cause of that pain. I don't just mean the disease but I mean why are people not able to do what they want to do to support people who are ill? Then you get into the usual, it's always the same show really – capitalism and the ways in which capitalism fucks everything up. So every show is really about capitalism. So it's how you kind of weave that together in such a way that at the end of it people who've come to see the show go, yes that's right. I was really choked when the show we did in fucking bloody for the teachers, student teachers. One of them said, I'm transformed, I was an ex-Tory. Another one said, oh I'm going to get out and campaign for Corbin. You think, well that's what you want to be able to achieve, isn't it? You want to make people angry enough and believe as a way forward that they get involved. It's a debate we've had about the government gets in. I think if Corbin gets in he's gonna get mashed. The banks will be ? on the pound, blah blah. So it's only the beginning of where we go. I don't think you can ever change power by election, they won't allow it. They'll do what they did in Greece and they'll do what they're doing in Chile and all the rest of it. So it's kind of being able to offer hope and being able to encourage action, and finding that action among the working class and finding ways of bringing that out, dragging it, finding it and putting that into the show. If I have a criticism of Sea, he gets that gut stuff from people but

there's not a lot of analysis about how you move forward. We get that by interviewing the doctors who've studied this, so I don't have a problem about going to the academics or the intellectuals who've had the time and the luxury of being able to analyze what's going on. People actually involved in a struggle very often just know that it's wrong but they don't know the detail of the dirty that's gone on. Some of them do but a lot don't. So it's finding that, which you're adding to the story. You're going to people, you're getting their stories. You're finding the pain the anger, the hope, all of those things in those interviews and you come back and you deal with it, process it, and you go back to them and you've added something. What you've added to it is an attempt to make sense of what's going on and to make sense of a way out of it. So you're not just kind of reflecting, it's not just a straightforward reflection of the stories that you get out there. You're reflecting and in some way it's like mirrors, you're kind of focusing something out of that mirror which is a clear indication of what's going on. Am I just saying the same thing over and over again?

Q: No you're not. I wish there were an approach that could describe what you've just told us about. Oh wait, there is, it's ? model that Don Bouzek brought into the company, that idea that you start from where people are at and create links within the group and with the outside forces, and then you add information and with that information comes new consciousness which leads to action.

DR: Ya, in the ideal world the show and tell would be that it's really hard to get the fucking time to do that and have the time to respond to it. But I have thought that working people we've interviewed, being able to go back to them and say, look this is where we're going, what do you think? Do you think these are the main things we should be focusing on? Have we missed anything out? So I think that kind of dialogue is essential but not always available, because we're always doing things at such a pace and under such pressure.

Q: When you say your critique of what Sean does in ReelNews is just present an aspect of the struggle and not give the analysis, isn't the call for action what the thing itself is? Isn't the struggle itself its own call to action?

DR: I kind of reflect on it because when you get stuff that's near to what you do you reflect on it and think, can I learn anything from it or is there something we do that's different to that? It's really important stuff that he's doing so I'm not saying that there's anything wrong with it. But what I'm saying is we do something else. Something else we do is we, because we're not in there with the struggle kind of grabbing the story like working class journalism. We're actually trying to go back and reflect on it and come out with an analysis using that material as part of the process of getting that story. You're actually working with their words and things that they say but you're structuring it in such a way that you've added something to it. Frequently that comes from other sources, it doesn't always just come from the words of the workers. The workers will give you the stuff that is immediately connecting to their lives in their workplace but they haven't necessarily got the time or the space to understand all the interconnectivities, dirty deals and manipulations that have been going on behind the scenes for so many years. All the stuff with the coal industry, it's like you argue for nationalisation and stuff like that. As we know, the coal board was a nationalised institution and it was a lethal piece of work. BBC is a fucking nationalised entity. So on the one hand people say, save or BBC, but on the other hand it's not ours. It's more complicated than it appears to be. What you see is different to the reality of what things are, because there's that obfuscation going on all the time.

[ end ]